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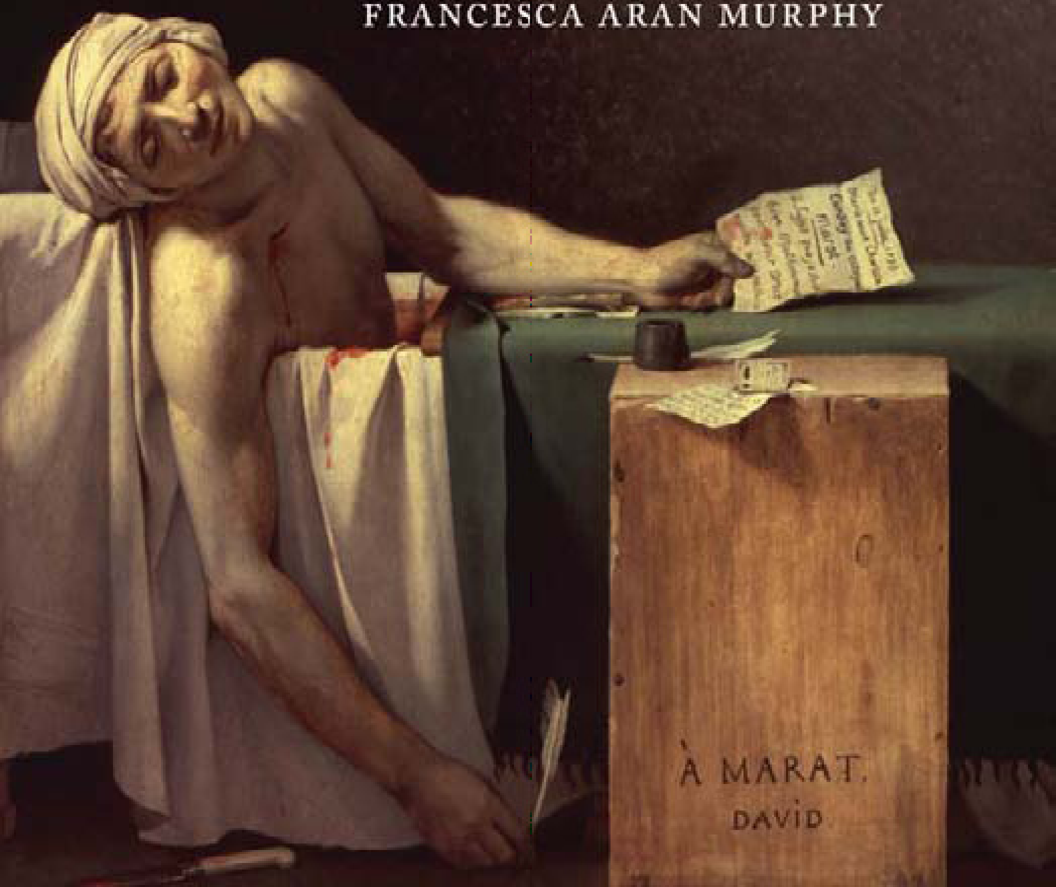
God is Not a Story

Realism Revisited

FRANCESCA ARAN MURPHY



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To John Sterrett

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1

Introduction: Spectacle

1. *God is Not a Story*

An architect once told me that his colleagues habitually avoid certain shapes because they are more difficult to draw in a computer. Computer design is slanted toward the use of angular lines. An academic theologian can sympathize with the predicament. In the effort to conform Christian imagination to Christian doctrine, the curves and ovals which we glimpse in the divine realm are often bent into right-angles. Narrative theology intends to do something indispensable—to make theology less conceptual and more imaginative, that is, less theoretical and abstract, and more biblical. It seems to recognize Newman's injunction that Christian assent is 'real' and imaginative before it is 'notional' or conceptual.[1] Narrative theology is so called because it wants to use the biblical stories themselves, not a computer generated metaphysics, to speak of Christian faith and the Christian God. This seems a counter-weight to our twenty-first-century world, in which the abstract geometries of virtual reality seem to condition not only the media of Christian preaching and teaching, but the message.

Many Christians have come to consider that the fullest and most immediate way of speaking about the Triune mystery is, as a brilliant young theologian puts it, '*to tell the story of God*'.[2] Narrative theologians are those who do so methodically and systematically. This seems to us to entail that God *is* a story. Why should describing the relations between God and humanity as a 'story' implicate one in *equating* God with a story? It does so because the driving force of narrative theology, the method itself, slides into the place of content or subject matter. That is the thesis of this book, and this introductory chapter gives the argument *in nuce*.

[1] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 31, 59, 76, 87, 108–14, and 122.

[2] David Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 29.

Narrative theology originally saw itself as picking up where the practice of meditating on scriptural *types* had left off, after the seventeenth century. The first narrative theologians admired this imaginative practice because it leads one to Scripture, and leaves one there. What they dislike about much modern theology, conversely, is that it offers a metaphysical substitute for Scripture. One could 'think well' in Rahner's 'categories', George Lindbeck avers, 'while remaining Biblically illiterate'; conversely, 'narrative and typological interpretations enabled the Bible to speak with its own voice'. Biblical revelation is not our invention, but comes to us, and when a theology leads us away from Scripture, into some 'deeper' conceptuality, it not only 'translates the scriptural message into an alien idiom', as Lindbeck puts it, but literally loses the biblical touch, or drifts away from the sense of being touched by another which one can receive in hearing the Bible. For the Patristics, like Irenaeus, and for twentieth-century theologians who returned to the early Christian sources, like Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, or Hans Urs von Balthasar, the biblical 'types' and images matter because they express what the biblical revelation is as a whole: the existential reality of God's encounter with human beings. Revelation is where reality is most inescapably real. George Lindbeck construes the significance of biblical typology somewhat differently. For Lindbeck, it's not so much the substantial *content* which the colourful types convey that matters, but rather typology as a *method* of reading the Bible. 'In the early days,' he says, 'it was not a different canon but a distinctive method of reading which differentiated the church from the synagogue. . . . a certain way of reading Scripture (viz. as a Christ-centered narrationally and typologically unified whole in conformity to a Trinitarian rule of faith) was constitutive of the Christian canon and has . . . an authority inseparable from that of the Bible itself.'[3] Biblical types or images can be imagined as a set of icons or pictures possessing a redoubtable reality quotient, but they can also be conceived as *picturings*. For narrative theology, Scripture is, not a picture, but a picturing, the rule-governed process by which reality is construed.

Narrative theologians use visual metaphors to construct a story of God and humanity. Stories come in many genres, such as epic, tragic, or comic. The story told by narrative theology belongs to the genre of melodrama. 'God's story' is a melodrama. The word melodrama conjures up the image of a corsetted heroine crying out to be unhanded from a caped villain named Oswald. But, 'Movies begin as Victorian theater.'[4] Nineteenth-century

[3] George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in a Post-Liberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (London: SCM Press, 2002), pp. 211–12 and 204.

[4] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 93.

melodrama had the idea of movies before the requisite photographic equipment was invented. The technologies which served the popular stage included 'machinery... designed to move the action along at top speed, by an elaborate device of stage grooves enabling one scene to succeed another by the opening of the shutter-like screens, so that the action proceeded by a series of... "dissolves." '[5] In the 1820s, audiences of French melodrama were treated to sunsets, shipwrecks, and erupting Mount Etnas. Melodrama did not just happen to use exciting spectacle: it differs from 'classical theatre' in that pictures replace the 'word'. Melodrama 'transform[s] the stage into plastic tableau, the arena for represented visual meanings'.[6]

Aristotle felt that the heart of a drama is not its language: 'the poet', he said, 'must be more the poet of his stories or Plots than of his verses'.[7] But Hegel seems to us nearer the mark in observing that drama 'is the highest stage of poetry and of art generally', because 'speech alone is the element worthy of the expression of spirit'.[8] The reason he gives is that language is the vehicle of contemplative thought. As Louise Cowan puts it,

> The tragic hero suffers not in silence but in the most opulent and expressive language the world has known. From these cries arising in the center of the soul, the secret dwelling place of language—in a darkness corresponding to the [tragic] abyss—bursts the poetry that raises human suffering to the level of contemplation and, to a stunned and gratified audience, conveys the liberation of tragic joy.[9]

Aristotle ascribed six features to drama: plot (*muthos*); the depiction of moral character; verbal expression; quality of mind; scenery, *ophthis*, that is spectacle, the costumes and stage-equipment; and music (for the choral odes).[10] The total ensemble was deemed to drive the audience to 'pity and terror'. But 'the terrifying stage appearance of the Furies in Aeschylus' *Choephoroe* and *Eumenides* that caused women to give birth prematurely is not an example of the kind of terror Aristotle means'.[11] What triumphed in nineteenth-century melodrama and achieved the height of its potential in cinema is *ophthis* or visual spectacle. In this respect, the *Oresteia* has a curious counterpart in *Jaws*: 'When Dreyfus first sees the full size of the shark, his

[5] Robertson Davies, *The Mirror of Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 18.

[6] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 46–7.

[7] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b28–33.

[8] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. II, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 1158.

[9] Louise Cowan, 'Introduction: The Tragic Abyss', in Glenn Arbery ed., *The Tragic Abyss* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), p. 18.

[10] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a1–15.

[11] Robert S. Dupree, 'Aristotle and the Tragic Bias', in Glenn Arbery (ed.), *The Tragic Abyss* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), p. 33.

face goes blank...he backs away. This would be one of Spielberg's first awe-and-revelation scenes.' The scene in *Jaws* was 'effortless storytelling and turned the film into an epic. At *Jaws*' first previews, a man ran from the cinema. Spielberg thought he hated the film but in fact he was scared.'[12] When the audience experiences Dreyfus' terror at the size of the monster with which he must grapple, the film has delivered its desired effect.

Susan Neiman's *Evil in Modern Thought* contends that a key motivation to modern philosophy has been 'the problem of evil'.[13] The melodramatic maximalization of the visual aims at unveiling an ethical enigma: not just 'What cloud envelopes Coelina's birth?' or 'How has Eliza been led into bigamy?' but, through the disclosure of the agent of these villainous designs, 'the triumph of virtue' in a world darkened by 'no shadow' of 'moral ambiguity'.[14] Such a message is adapted to a visual medium because of the clarity of *looking*. Melodrama lives on in movies—the villain still wears a cape, but his name is Darth Vader. I shall claim that narrative theology is movie-like. One thinks of counter-examples, from the films of Robert Bresson, who said he tried '"to suppress what people call plot"', to the New Wave cinema of the 1960s. But the sequels to New Wave were hugely popular 'B-movies' like *Jaws* and *Star Wars*, each of whose directors was 'a master storyteller' and 'a graceful reinvigorator of closed romantic realism'.[15] So, taking a leaf from cinema theorist Noël Carroll, I shall refer, not to *films* or to cinema, but to 'movies', productions of 'what might be called Hollywood International'.[16] 'Most Hollywood films' aspire to the movie version of melodrama, that is, to 'closed romantic realism', called 'closed because these films...create worlds that do not acknowledge that they are being watched and the actors behave as if the camera isn't there'.[17] I do not say narrative theology is *cinematic*, I say it is movieish.

The presence of Christ to us in narrative theology is like that of a screen actor to a movie-viewer. The screened 'self' is both product of a collective imagination and delivered to one. This analogy undermines personality, or so I shall argue in the second chapter. In Chapter 3, on arguments for the existence of God, I try to show that the manner in which narrative theologies invite us to intuit the existence of God is like the way a director edits out whatever distracts our attention from the film's driving questions. Such

[12] Mark Cousins, *The Story of Film* (London: Pavilion, 2004), p. 382.

[13] Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 6.

[14] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 43.

[15] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, pp. 251 and 381.

[16] Noël Carroll, 'The Power of Movies', *Daedalus* 114/4 (1985), 79–103, p. 81.

[17] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, p. 67.

defective arguments exacerbate the problem of evil: our fourth chapter will tease out the way in which this produces a melodramatic perspective on the relation between God and vulnerable humanity.

2. Two Types of Narrative Theology: Story Barthianism and Grammatical Thomism

In keeping with the emphasis on due process in Western political and academic culture, recent interpretation of ancient and modern theologians has tended to foreground their method rather than the assertions which they make. That is, it has selected one factor amongst a favoured theologian's positive affirmations, and presented this not only as a counter-cultural criterion against which political practices can be assessed but as the authentic theological method. Since he suffered much in his lifetime, the posthumous reputation of Henri de Lubac presents a striking example of this. In the period around the Second World War, Henri de Lubac composed a trilogy, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (1944), contending that atheism cannot be fully humanist, *Surnaturel* (1946), about the natural human desire to see the supernatural God, and *The Discovery of God* (1956), which draws on human desire so as to defend the existence of God. And yet, contemporary responses to de Lubac, both positive and negative, take the 'natural desire' as a proposal for how to practise theology, rather than as a paradoxical affirmation about what human beings are. Some even view the 'de Lubacian method' as one which rules out argument for God's existence.[18] Or again, positive and negative descriptions of Joseph Ratzinger's thought explore his 'Augustinian' methodology, rather than what he has to say about God and human beings. One can even find narratological accounts of the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Bernard Lonergan has affirmed that, 'When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature. When culture is conceived empirically, theology is known to be an ongoing process, and then one writes on its method.'[19] If that is the case, then our theological culture is thoroughly empirical. So, when I speak of the focus of narrative theologians on the *methods* of Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas, I do not intend to claim that either of these two thinkers had an especially methodological outlook. What I shall call 'story Barthianism' and 'grammatical Thomism' are ways of

[18] Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 14–15.

[19] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), p. xi.

thinking about Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas in which method becomes the very content of their theology.

In the expressions 'story Barthianism' and 'grammatical Thomism', 'Barthianism' and 'Thomism' refer to *principles* which narrative theologians have considered these writers to yield, not to historical figures or texts. Our typology relates to certain types of Barthian*ism* and Thom*ism*, not Barth and Thomas. Although I may be compelled to compare the 'isms' with the texts of the Swiss Calvinist and the medieval Dominican, I shall do so as little as possible, or only so as to show how content has been expended for method. My aim is not to show that narrative theologies are in or out of line with Thomas' or Barth's writings but that, far from bending theology back to the shape of biblical revelation, they intensify the angular rationalism to which contemporary theology is culturally prone. This book is less interested in their kinship to Thomas or Barth than in the analogy between their conception of divine life and revelation as a process of understanding, and the life of movies.

Nicholas Lash remarks that, 'critical scrutiny of the tales that we inhabit, while drawing its criteria from the narratives themselves, first focuses on the ethos, way of life, or project which is shaped and generated by the tale'.[20] Many Thomists of the last generation would agree: the primary manifestation of Christian theology is the Christian way of life—Christians *doing the story*. Christians don't originally believe a set of propositions, they inhabit a peculiarly biblical narrative world. For the grammatical Thomist, 'all human action is speech, including the speech-acts themselves'.[21] Pure-blooded historical readers of Thomas Aquinas can debate whether these opinions can be found in the *Summa Theologiae* or whether Ludwig Wittgenstein was the Dominican's most astute commentator. But some of our contemporaries have extracted a few principles from Thomas' method and developed them into something new, a 'grammatical Thomism'.

The 'family resemblance' amongst members of the Yale School of post-liberal theology, such as Hans Frei (1922–88), George Lindbeck, and David Kelsey, comes back to their shared interest in Karl Barth. Lindbeck christened their project as 'post-liberal' in order to call attention to their mutual rejection of the efforts of liberal theologians to find common ground with extra-Christian rationality. For post-liberalism, 'the *biblical* narratives provide the framework within which Christians understand the world' without 'assuming some

[20] Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 7.

[21] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 99.

universally acceptable standard of rationality'.[22] Such a means of parting the ways with theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Bultmann has its roots in Barth's own disavowal of liberalism. Historical scholars may point to differences between the work of the Yale School and the rounded doctrine of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. But my claim is that some methodological principles found in Barth's texts have taken on a life of their own within Barth*ian* story-theology.

3. What is Narrative Theology?

David Ford may have coined the phrase 'God's story'. In *Barth and God's Story*, he describes how, from the second edition of the Romans *Commentary* onwards, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection are used by Barth to dis-join Christian revelation from human 'religion'. The God of the crucifixion and resurrection narratives is 'no longer someone that Christians can assume they have in common with other people'. The consequence is that 'God is to be described only through that story': the knock-on effects of Barth's reading of Romans are spelled out at some length in his *Church Dogmatics*.[23]

There was something broadly similar in the orientations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Catholic neo-scholasticism, Calvinist orthodoxy of the same period, and nineteenth-century Protestant liberalism. All of them took the first stage of theology as philosophical, as an apologetic which is intended to speak the same language or share the same ground with non-Christians. It is as if, for these apologetic theologies, Christians shared some living space with non-believers, but their territory also goes much further. Barth is rejecting this when he affirms that the biblical story covers *all* of the ground and the *only* ground on which our faith in Jesus Christ rests. George Lindbeck's proposal that 'it is the religion instantiated in Scripture which defines being, truth, goodness and beauty' is a Barthian one, because it wants to make us acknowledge that 'being, truth, goodness and beauty' are not general ideas understood in the same way by Christians and non-Christians alike. Because they are understood in different ways by the two groups of people, being, truth, goodness, and beauty are taken to be different objects. In Lindbeck's theology, 'the text . . . absorbs the world, rather than the world the text' because the text is conceived as the tissue of *revelation*. To affirm with

[22] William Placher, 'Postliberal Theology', in David Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, vol. II (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), p. 117.

[23] David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Frankfurt, Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1985), p. 21.

Lindbeck that 'Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the Scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories'[24] is to deny, with Barth, that one could have one foot on the 'common ground' of natural metaphysics and one foot in revelation: both feet in or both feet out! The desire of early modern Christians for 'elaborate apologetics sprang from rejecting the overarching story, for now the biblical stories had to be fitted into *other* frameworks of meaning'.[25] Thus, in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (1974), Hans Frei created an historical apologia for story Barthianism. He invited us to believe that, once upon a pre-modern time, the question of whether the Bible is 'true' 'never arose', because what the world was, and the story the Bible tells, simply coincided.[26] It was only from the seventeenth century onwards, with apologists for the historical truth of the Gospels, like John Locke, that Christians attempted to align the biblical narrative with a wider frame—to show that evidences external to the Scripture correlate with the text. Narrative theology contends that we make the biblical story less, and not more, believable by attempting to prove that it conforms to some other reality, such as that described by historians or biological scientists.

If we find it theologically repugnant to describe the world in extra-biblical categories, it will be still more so to speak of God in extra-curricular fashion. Richard Bauckham remarks that 'Greek philosophy... typically defined divine nature by means of a series of metaphysical attributes.'[27] Catholic neo-scholasticism, Protestant orthodoxy, and liberal Protestantism used the tools of philosophical theology in speaking about God and about the Trinity. For example, they drew on notions such as simplicity or transcendence or immateriality—they used metaphysics, and somehow brought this metaphysic to bear on the Christian God. This can make it look as if the biblical characterizations are larded in as an after-thought. A well-known neo-Thomist was heard to remark that he had finished his book on God and now he needed only to put in some scriptural quotations. That is what Barth suspected the moderns, Protestant and Catholic, were up to, and this is why he decided to develop a doctrine of God extrapolated from biblical revelation alone. If we want to know 'who God is', the right response comes, not from philosophical metaphysics but rather, Barth says, from Scripture, and '"in the form of narrating a story or series of stories"'.[28]

[24] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), p. 118.

[25] Ibid., p. 52, my italics.

[26] Placher, 'Postliberal Theology', pp. 117–18.

[27] Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (London: Paternoster Press, 1998), p. 8.

[28] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 152.

It is important to this method that the scriptural revelation is not something other than God but an elementary articulation of God's being. Barth observes that, 'If we really want to understand revelation in terms of its subject, i.e., God, then the first thing we have to realise is that this subject, God, the revealer, is identical with His act in revelation and also identical with its effect.'[29] One consequence of this is that one cannot speak of God *metaphysically*. What we must aim at, instead, is *description*. The methodological principle at work here is that, on the one hand, all knowledge of God is through Christ, and, on the other, in Christ, God reveals *Himself*; Christ is the 'science' or knowledge of God, revealed.

From the seventeenth century on, Calvinist exponents of Protestant orthodoxy and early modern scholastics, such as Leibniz, had their apologetic work cut out for them by men who attributed the problem of evil to the character of God as exposited by Christian believers. For the French ex-Calvinist Pierre Bayle, a God who '*predestines*' men to damnation is not a good God. How could God predestine some to salvation and others to damnation? Bayle himself considered that 'Manichaeism' was the 'most reasonable' hypothesis for a philosopher who observed the admixture of good and evil in our world.[30] Wanting to retort that the problems of predestination and eternal damnation are beyond our ken, Calvinists developed the doctrine of the *decretum absolutum* or *decretum generale*—God's ultimate ruling, which is incomprehensible to us.

Karl Barth disapproved of this Calvinist manoeuvre. He saw it as insinuating that, back behind the God described by Scripture, there is an impenetrable reservoir of darkness, out of which loom apparently arbitrary decrees. For some, the ejection of the concealed *decretum absolutum* is at the heart of Barth's theology of revelation. As Barth would have it, turning the Calvinist theology inside-out, *Christ*, the revelation and exposition of God to humanity, *is* the *decretum absolutum*. Jesus Christ is 'the type of all election'[31]—that is, he *is* predestination. There is no God back behind this revelation of God in Christ, no done-deals or secret decrees. It is in and through Christ, eternally elected by the Father, that 'God moves toward the world'. 'In the strict sense,' therefore, 'only He can be understood and described as "elected" (and "rejected"). All others are so in him, and not as individuals.' But, if we 'would know who God is, and what is the meaning and purpose of His Election . . . we must look only upon and to the name of Jesus Christ' in whom all others are 'enclosed': He is 'God's decree' 'all-inclusively'. The Father's election of Christ is a free choice of love, involving his entire being:

[29] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2nd edn., trans. G. W. Bromley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), p. 296.

[30] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 19.

[31] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, p. 74.

this means that 'the choice actually made must be regarded as a *decretum absolutum*'. There is no God back behind the revealed God, 'no such thing as Godhead in itself. Godhead is always the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ . . . There is no such thing as a *decretum absolutum*. There is no such thing as a will of God apart from the will of Jesus Christ.'[32] In developing this thesis, 'Barth "actualizes" the doctrine of God; . . . he achieves a radical integration of *Deus in se* and *Deus revelatus*; . . . there is nothing to be known of God "above," "behind," or "beyond" revelation.'[33] Christ and revelation are made to coincide so as to rule out a concealed divine will to save and to damn. One motive for making Jesus Christ the sole and entire revelation of God is to rule out a 'God behind God' and thus to exclude the idea that God is 'merely a tyrant living by his whims'.[34] The answer to the theodicial dilemma produced by dual predestination is divine transparency.

4. Some Hints at an Historical Context for Narrative Theology

Narrative theologians object to the practice of trying to ground the truth of theology in a 'world' outside itself, in, for instance, some historical or scientific case. When the historical truth of Scripture was defended by biblical inerrantists against historical criticism, says Lindbeck, 'the narrative meaning collapsed into the factual and disappeared'.[35] It is easy to get tangled up in spatial metaphors like 'biblical world' or 'common ground', and forget that there are not actually two separate worlds or territories, that of scientists or historians, and that belonging to the Bible. Nor do Barthians think there are. The 'worlds' to which they refer are mental paradigms or methods of construing and categorizing evidence, as, for instance, those pertaining to history and to theology. Their objection to the correlation of Scripture with factual evidence is that it is methodologically unsound, a theological category error, to put history and theology in the same epistemic or methodological 'space'. Likewise, when Denys Turner objects to the criticisms of evolutionism by contemporary creationists on the grounds that the latter 'are . . . playing the *same* game'[36] as their atheist foes, his disapproval does not relate to faults

[32] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2: *The Doctrine of God*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, J. C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, Harold Knight, and R. A. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), pp. 26, 43, 54, 95, 100, and 115.

[33] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, p. 137.

[34] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, p. 25.

[35] Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, p. 209.

[36] Denys Turner, *Faith Seeking* (London: SCM Press, 2002), p. 8.

in whatever evidence the creationists may have to display, but to their playing theology by an empirical, scientific *method*. The overlapping of different methods is dissonant, to grammatical Thomist ears, because, just as different games have different rules, so different methods are different rationalities. Although a *Barth*ian follows Barth and a *Thom*ist Thomas, one point of commonality between these two types of narrative theology is the degree of significance accorded to method. Both tend to equate the question of whether theology should use the same methodological criteria as non-theological disciplines like history and physical science with that of whether theology links up with the referents of these disciplines, such as historical facts and physical objects.

It is no good gesturing toward a general preference for method in narrative theologies: one has to refer this back to the specific, founding texts which generated and disseminated this impulse, such as David Burrell's *Aquinas, God and Action* or Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*. One may shed a little light on a text by contextualizing it. Situating the text and the author need not be reductionist ('he comes from *there*, and that explains it'), especially if one's purpose is not to compare one text with another, but both with the exigencies of theology. Reminding ourselves of which issues and which movements were uppermost when narrative theologies came to birth is intended to help us understand them better, not to prove anything about the value of their conclusions.

Lindbeck tells us that his early interest in philosophy and theology was 'prompted by reading Gilson and Maritain', spreading to 'doctoral work in medieval philosophy and theology'.[37] One of Lindbeck's earliest articles was a review of Étienne Gilson's big book on Duns Scotus, defending Scotus against the existential Thomist's strictures.[38] If the Barthians were reading not only Barth but also the medievals, it does not presume too much to propose that Protestant and Catholic narrative theology has a shared intellectual context. If, in the seventeenth century, when irenicism was not high amongst the theological virtues, Calvinist orthodoxy and baroque scholasticism ran along parallel lines, it is unlikely that, in the 1950s and 1960s, when grammatical Thomism and story Barthianism were conceived, there was no inter-Christian cross-fertilization. Some of their common ground was laid out within Thomism. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were Thomists of many stripes: strictly philosophical Thomists, neo-Thomists, like Maritain, existential or Gilsonian Thomists, whose influence was beginning to wane, and transcendental Thomists, at that time in the

[37] Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, p. 4.

[38] George A. Lindbeck, 'A Great Scotist Study', *The Review of Metaphysics* 7/2/26 (1953), 422–35.

ascendant. There were also, as Lindbeck notes in an article-length version of his doctoral thesis, proponents of a Thomas who had 'affinities with Neo-Platonism which have previously largely been ignored'.[39] Moreover, with the relaxation of Thomist orthodoxy amongst Catholics after the Second Vatican Council, Augustinianism came out of the closet. Where might one situate the elders of the narrative tribes amongst these schools?

It is easier to locate the historical links between Barth's own method and the practice of story Barthians than to refer grammatical Thomism to '*the*' method practised by Saint Thomas. It is clear that Barth's own theological epistemology includes an assertion that all knowledge of God comes through faith. It is less obvious what Thomas' method was: as a theological methodologist, he has been presented as everything from an evidentialist to a fideist. Whereas, as a modern, Barth was self-conscious about his theological method, the pre-Cartesian Dominican was not. He may have used different methods in his opuscules, his Bible commentaries, his commentaries on Aristotle, and his *Summa Theologiae*. Although the title may seem to make the content plain, it was a subject of some controversy in the early twentieth century whether the *Summa Theologiae* is, throughout, a work of *theology*. Étienne Gilson argued that the philosophical portions of the *Summa* like the 'Five Ways' excel as *philosophy* because the author drew on biblical, revealed insights to illuminate philosophical problems. Gilson called the metaphysics of the *Summa* 'Christian philosophy'. Strictly philosophical Thomists would not have this. Fernand van Steenbergen contended that the latter term is 'meaningless'; a philosophy cannot be 'Christian', only 'true or false'.[40] The issue was not just one of method, but also of content. Gilson claimed that, by dint of divine revelation, something new comes about in human history, a new grasp of the reality of existence. By telling Moses that his name is 'I am', Gilson argued, God's own self-revelation gave a new turn to the philosophical understanding of the world common to Christian reflection. One should not bandy the word existence or *esse* about lightly: as one existential Thomist noted, in a riposte to Lindbeck's précis of his doctoral thesis, it is 'not precisely the existence of the existent' which judgement affirms, but simply 'the *existent*'.[41] The claim which Gilson

39 George A. Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas', *Franciscan Studies* 17 (1957), 1–22 (Part I), and 107–25 (Part III), p. 116.

40 Fernand van Steenbergen, 'La II Journée D'études de la Société Thomiste et la Notion de "Philosophie Chrétienne" ', *Revue Neo-Scholastique de Philosophie* 35 (1933), 539–54, pp. 446–7. I give a longer account of the 'Christian Philosophy Debate' including the question of the *newness* of Christian revelation in *Art and Intellect in the Philosophy of Étienne Gilson* (Columbia, Mo.: Missouri University Press, 2004), ch. 6, 'Christian Philosophy'.

41 Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, 'Existence and Esse', *New Scholasticism* 50 (1976), 20–45, p. 26.

made for Christian philosophy was that, where philosophy has regarded itself as not just *distinct* from revealed theology but as a wholly *different* enterprise, it has drifted away from particular existents, and into essentialism. Since Lindbeck's thesis is intended to show that Gilson's 'essentialist–existentialist dichotomy is not a useful category of historical interpretation for those who are not Thomists',[42] and that schemas other than that of the existential judgement are superior, one may take it that he was not of the Gilsonian school.

Jacques Maritain was not enthusiastic about Gilson's idea of 'Christian philosophy' as a deployment, by a philosopher, of biblical type scenes, like that of God's giving his name to Moses. He tended to consider that making revealed faith this intrinsic to reason deprived the Christian's philosophy of its rational foundations. He also differed from Gilson in claiming that a metaphysician can have an *intuition* of existence. As against this, Lindbeck notes that the idea of an intuition of existence has no basis in Thomas' texts. David Burrell also disavows the notion of a 'superior insight or . . . intuition of being'. Like Lindbeck, he sees no point in Thomists 'crediting' Thomas '(and themselves) with an insight into the very act of existence which he nowhere claims nor confesses'.[43]

A condition of a philosophy being *true* is that it is reasonable, and speaks to reason. The possession of a rational method was central to neo-Thomism. The realist elements in it are counter-balanced by a stress on epistemology. Rationality is viewed as a condition of referring to the real. Alongside the school of 'critical realism' of which Maritain was the greatest exponent, there emerged forms of 'transcendental Thomism', in the writings of men like André Hayen, Joseph Maréchal, Bernard Lonergan, and Karl Rahner. The critical realists had aimed to respond to Kant: the transcendental Thomists sought to engage Kant on his own ground, by making rationality, in Kantian terms, the 'transcendental condition' of knowledge, the criterion of being or reality. Although the torch-bearer of transcendental Thomism in Europe was Rahner, the man who set the agenda for North American Thomists in the 1960s was Bernard Lonergan. In *Insight*, Lonergan had described being as 'the objective of the pure desire to know', relocating this property of reality as a 'notion' within 'the immanent, dynamic orientation of cognitional process. It must be the detached and unrestricted desire to desire as operative in cognitional process.' For Lonergan, then, the grounding 'presuppositions' of

[42] Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence', p. 107.

[43] Ibid., p. 19; David Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 47 and 51.

a metaphysic are 'not a set of' ontological or existential 'propositions but the dynamic structure of the human mind'.[44]

Transcendental Thomism was rather too heavy a metaphysical burden for anyone who wanted to make a contribution to the analytic conversation amongst Anglo-Saxon philosophers in the late 1960s. But one could retain Lonergan's interest in dynamic process whilst replacing his transcendental metaphysics with 'grammar'. One could translate the one into the other by refining Lonergan's interest in the orientation of mental acts, their dynamic thrust, into a Wittgensteinian conception of human notions as something done or lived through. Lonergan's conviction that 'our primary concern is not the known but the knowing'[45] could become a reflection on the structure of thought as it emerges into language. There is at least one phrase in Lonergan's *Insight* with which every scholar who knows the period is familiar: '*Thoroughly understand what it is to understand*, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern opening upon all further developments of understanding.'[46] It is not far-fetched to imagine a transference of this desire to 'understand what it is to understand' into Burrell's programme for a Thomism which looks less to ontological 'relation' than to a dynamic 'relating' to reality, by human speakers. 'Could it be', he asks,

> that the discipline to discriminate manners of beings in the forms of our discourse will prepare the inquirer... to recognize traces of God? These manners of being will not be found within our discourse; no descriptive feature of our world can pretend to be a trace of the creator. But some may be found in the ways we relate discourse to the world. ... we cannot express this relation;... it were better called a relating than a relation. Yet we can become more aware of doing than relating, or... of living it. ... [L]ogic and grammar can assist in this coming-to-awareness... This awareness has come to be called (since Kant) a critical or transcendental attitude: it consists of becoming aware of how things as we know them bear traces of the manner in which we know them. ... All of these represent ways of relating oneself to oneself and the world. The awareness can finally be exploited to acknowledge an unknown which bears no traces at all of our manners of knowing.[47]

Building on the features of Maritain's 'critical realism' which are developed systematically within Lonergan's transcendental Thomism, and thinning the element of contentual realism further, the next generation, the grammatical Thomists, affirmed that Thomas' discussion of how to name God is

[44] Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1957), pp. 348, 354, and 508.

[45] Ibid., p. xviii. [46] Ibid., p. xxxviii, my italics.

[47] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 53.

a 'meta-linguistic'[48] exercise, concerned not with naming *God* but with *naming* God. Before he began to meditate *The Nature of Doctrine* in the late 1970s, Lindbeck had undergone 'ten years of teaching medieval thought at Yale (mostly in the philosophy department)'. He remarks that this book's 'grammatical or regulative understanding of doctrine has patristic roots retrieved with the help of' the transcendental Thomist, and 'Canadian Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan'.[49] An observation concerning Lindbeck's idea of doctrines applies equally well to a grammatical Thomist's idea of the meaning of propositions about God: if '*they are in some sense assertive, their referents are words*, like sentences in a grammar book describing grammatical forms'.[50] Although story Barthianism may owe more of its method to Barth than grammatical Thomism does to Thomas, neither would have been possible without transcendental Thomism.

The very expression *narrative* theology sounds like a method which could engage in dialogue with the deepened sense of human persons as *historical* beings which has been with us since the early nineteenth century. A 'plot' seems analogous to a history—Aristotle treats the two in the same chapter of his *Poetics*. But in relation to the Church, the Trinity, and even eschatology we will find that narrative theology draws back from engagement with the temporality of human events. This strikes us as one of the clearest areas of cross-over from Thomism to narrative theology. Despite its trenchant belief in the referential character of truth, mid-twentieth-century Thomism was not well-placed to defend the historicity of Scripture. Some might put this down to the Aristotelian element in Thomism. In matters of history, highly Aristotelian Thomisms have been inclined to prefer the 'truth of reality' to the 'reality of truth'.[51] Aristotle regarded tragedy as more philosophical than history,[52] because, whereas the historian deals in arbitrary contingencies, things which really did happen, the craft of the tragic poet turns such contingencies into 'calculable, intelligible possibilities'. Aristotle's definition of the art does not fit those tragedies in which mortals are seized by daemonical powers operating in a way that matches no probability calculus. Michelle Gellrich asks how it can be, 'if tragedy' really 'is distinguished from history by virtue of its elimination of the indeterminately contingent', that many

[48] Ibid., p. 12. [49] Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, pp. 4 and 197–8.

[50] Jay Wesley Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*', *Religious Studies* 33 (1997), 33–53, p. 40. For a defence of this assertion about grammatical Thomism, see below, Chapter 2, section 2.

[51] Xavier Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, 2nd edn., trans. Thomas B. Fowler (Washington: University Press of America, 1981), p. 45. Zubiri does not invent the distinction in relation to Aristotelico-Thomism.

[52] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451b5–10.

such plays present suffering 'arising from forces irrationally and unpredictably bearing in on humans from outside their intelligible universe?'[53] The world of Greek tragedy is logicality itself by comparison with the even stranger world of scriptural history, in which factual event and the mysterious power of God combine forces. Thomists could have learned to live with history by developing the thesis that the most creative moments of Western philosophy have been those in which, aligning itself with Christian revelation, it has drawn on God's historical, revelatory acts—but, aside from existential Thomists like Frederick Wilhelmsen, they largely chose not to take Gilson's suggestion seriously. An allergy to history is the main legacy of Thomism to narrative theologies—including that of Robert Jenson.

5. Robert Jenson: Story Thomism

Lindbeck prefers to treat typology as a reading practice, a skill in noting correlations between images, or as a method for constructing the canonical Scriptures, over seeing types as forms in which reality is present. He comments that, when the Christians put together their Bible, the 'writings which proved profitable in actual use among the people were the ones which were included in the canon'.[54] As Lindbeck understands it, verbal meaning is more immediately linked to *use* than to correspondence. He argues that, 'the proper way to determine what "God" signifies . . . is by examining how the word operates within a religion and thereby shapes reality and experience rather than by first establishing its propositional or experiential meaning and reinterpreting or reformulating its uses accordingly'.[55] Thus the contents of the Christian doctrines, such as the material set out in the Nicene Creed, are not primarily realities taken to 'correspond' to the words of the Creed, but rules to be followed. For the narrativist, the Creed does not primarily define what or who God is, but gives Christians rules to follow in how to synthesize and practise the Christian faith. Lindbeck defines narrative theology as a 'rule theory' which bases Christian doctrine neither in experience nor in the reference of its propositions to God:

> [Rule theory] . . . does not locate the abiding and doctrinally significant aspect of religion in propositionally formulated truths, much less in inner experiences, but in the story it tells and in the grammar that informs the way the story is told and used. . . . a religion . . . is . . . a categorial framework within which one has certain kinds of

[53] Michelle Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory: The Problem of Conflict since Aristotle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 115.

[54] Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, p. 205.

[55] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 114.

experiences and makes certain kinds of affirmations. In the case of Christianity, the framework is supplied by the biblical narratives interrelated in specific ways (e.g., by Christ as center).[56]

For a 'rule-theory' of doctrine, exhibitions of doctrine like the Nicene Creed do 'not make first-order claims' about reality, but, are, rather, 'second-order discourse about language (like grammatical rules) which govern what can and cannot be said, but do not themselves make positive assertions'.[57]

Our common-sense intuitions about reality become ingrained in the way we speak. The soundest aspect of the ordinary-language philosophy of the 1950s was its attention to how we use words. Conversely, the most recondite aspect of 'cultural-linguistic' theology is the way it overrides what words like 'creed' and 'doctrine' mean in the vernacular. Since Lindbeck's 'move requires abandoning the assertive quality of doctrines', '[d]octrines *are*, strictly speaking, *talk about talk*'. One philosopher complains that,

rule theory... seems to deny what almost everyone assumes the Creed and Definition—and the doctrines therein—are: claims about God and Christ. This definition of *doctrines*... doesn't capture what nearly everyone *means* by the word. ... this view of the authority of the Creed... has to deny what its formulators explicitly believed they were doing. ... The bishops seem to have been under the impression that they *were* making *positive assertions* about God in their credal formulations. ... Lindbeck applies the mantra that *use governs meaning*... selectively... For surely one of the *functions*, one of the *uses* to which we put language is to assent to belief in certain propositions, notions or perceived truths. Why does *this* use not govern meaning as well?... what if one of the *uses* of language is to make reference to things that are extra-linguistic?[58]

Many narrative theologians would argue that the use of the metaphor of 'story' in their theology does not automatically imply that God *is* a story. They would say that the metaphor of 'story' relates to the methodology, the means of approaching the subject of theology, not the content itself—*God*. They believe that it's only a few over-the-top theologians like Robert Jenson who take the method so literally as to identify God with a story. However, we are apt to use language to speak *about* things, to make 'first-order' affirmations. Even when we speak of the weather, we want to affirm something real, and our use of language has a metaphysical or substantive trajectory, although what we say is nothing very metaphysical, or substantive. The metaphysical impulse

[56] Ibid., p. 80.

[57] Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*', p. 35, citing Lindbeck, p. 19, on the Nicene Creed.

[58] Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*', pp. 40 and 47–8.

of language fulfils its natural desire to touch reality in the supernatural revelation of reality to us by Scripture. When this primary ordering is inverted into 'talk about talk', the 'first-order' or referential use of language does not disappear: rather, swallowing its own tail, the 'God' to which we long to refer becomes the story itself. 'God's reality', the narrativist Ronald Thiemann says, 'is *intrinsically* related to Christian belief and practice, if Christian beliefs are true.'[59]

Some narrative theologians are offended by Jenson's affirmation that 'God's nature . . . is the plot of his history.'[60] Admirers of Hans Frei such as George Hunsinger have argued that Jenson is no Barthian, but a Hegelian.[61] It is sometimes proposed that the great difference between *post*-liberal, Barthian theology and liberal theology is that the former retrieved the Three-Personed God from marginalization at the hands of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who deposited the Trinity in an appendix to *The Christian Faith*. A century before Barth wrote his *Commentary* on Romans, Hegel had lodged the same complaint against Schleiermacher. For the German Romantic, Christianity is the 'consummate religion': 'This absolute religion', he says, 'is the *revelatory* [*offenbar*] religion . . . it is also called the *revealed* religion—which means . . . that it is revealed by God, that God has given himself for human beings to know what he is.' Christianity is characterized, above all other religions, by the idea of the '*Deus Revelatus*, or the self-revelatory God'.[62] As Cyril O'Regan notes, Hegel 'takes it as evident that the fact that God is disclosed is not accidental to God's definition' but 'is central to it':

For Hegel, the *Deus Revelatus* is narratively enacted and, as such, is constrained by properties endemic to all narratives. . . . He also suggests that the *Deus Revelatus* submits to a trinitarian construal. In doing so, Hegel brings the theologoumenon of the Trinity to the center of theology in a way unparalleled in modern Protestant thought. . . . Narrative articulation is made subject to trinitarian form, and trinitarian articulation is narrative articulation. It is . . . because of the narrative constitution of the Hegelian Trinity that . . . it differs crucially from the classical view.[63]

[59] Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 81.

[60] Robert W. Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p. 171.

[61] George Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: A Review Essay', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55/2 (2002), 161–200, p. 175.

[62] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. III: *The Consummate Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, J. M. Stewart and H. S. Harris (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 252.

[63] Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return In Modernity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 66–7, 45, and 21.

If Jenson's thought proves on close inspection to be more redolent of Hegel than of Thomas Aquinas or Karl Barth, then why call it 'story Thomism'? The reason is that Jenson's own thought does not emerge from systematic use of German Romantic philosophical theology, but from a synthesis of the principles at work in grammatical Thomism and story Barthianism. An introductory sketch of his thought looks somewhat like the Wittgensteinian 'duck-rabbit', since one must constantly turn 'from the one hand' (to the grammar) 'to the other' (to the *Deus ipse narrativus*). From the 1960s, one of Jenson's concerns has been the public meaning of Christian language, and the question of how we identify a name for God. Like the grammatical Thomists, he draws on Wittgenstein and on Austin's notion of performatives to fill out the first question; with the Barthians, he affirms that we get our name for God from God. By the late 1960s, the American Thomist schools had begun to interpret Aquinas' idea of 'God talk' as referring, not to a *real* analogy of creaturely and divine things, but to the *logic* of our language for God. Jenson assumes, with the grammatical Thomists, that the *meaning* of our language about God is a function of its use. He wants to appropriate both the idea that, for Thomas Aquinas, the primary aspect of *analogical* 'God-talk' is that it refines upon how we use language, *and* what he calls 'Thomas' insistence on the informative character of theological utterances'. Jenson is determined to avoid the Christian's 'retreat from speech in the public language, with any who may listen, to the safely private communication of sectarian language', 'the withdrawal from public responsibility for sense and nonsense'.[64] Grammatical Thomists and story Barthians have called Jenson to account for not seeing that the God he seeks is present in Thomas' own thought, but not for his interpretations of Thomas' idea of religious language or for his reading of Thomas' Five Ways as a reflection on how Christians talk about God.[65]

They would be unlikely to criticize him on those grounds. For what sustains Christian theological language with a grammatical Thomist like David Burrell is a primitive drive to know God. Thomas' 'philosophical grammar', Burrell says, is aimed at 'making explicit what a religious life implies'; such an 'activity can also be considered as a quest for God'; Thomas' purpose is 'to sketch some points of contact between grammar and a religious way of life'; 'knowing how to respect the grammatical difference which logic demands for discourse *in divinis*... requires the disciplines... associated with

[64] Robert W. Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For: The Sense of Theological Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 63, 97, and 9.

[65] George A. Lindbeck, 'Review Essay: Robert Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw In Ecumenical Theology*', *Pro Ecclesia* 3/2 (1994), 232–8; for Jenson on the 'Five Ways' see Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, pp. 66–71 and below, Chapters 3 and 5.

religious living and practice'.[66] This is an *Augustinian* reading of Thomas, one which places his 'procedure', not in proximity to Aristotle and thus regarding faith and reason as distinct, but rather, as Lindbeck puts it, 'closer . . . to that of the so-called "Augustinians" ',[67] and hence tending to assimilate faith and reason. Although one should hesitate on any grounds to call Jenson an Augustinian, he finds that

> theological utterance is a language activity justified by a certain character of human life: its directedness to a goal beyond it. . . . this language activity is not, for Thomas, merely descriptive of man's final goal. It is a language, a doctrine, that man must have in order to attain this goal. It is a language by whose use man is given his transcendence . . . There is . . . a hint here of a language activity other than . . . describing . . . an activity which is a doing . . . and in which what is creatively posited by the utterances is the final meaning of the life of the speaker.[68]

Building both on the notion of language found amongst Wittgensteinian Thomists and Yale postliberals as performative, something whose base line is praxis, and on Burrell's notion of linguistic activity as having a transcendental trajectory, Jenson sees that this entails that the warrant and foundation of our talk about God is *eschatological*. Quoting Thomas' statement that theology draws its faith-knowledge of God from 'the knowledge which God has *and the blessed*' Jenson affirms that:

> When and if we attain the fulfilment of our existence, that event will justify or falsify the articles of faith, and so all theological utterances. We can . . . say of theological language, . . . as it is used by Thomas, that it is eschatological, and in a double sense . . . : 1) it is a language by the speaking of which transcendence is posited; 2) its sentences are verified or falsified by the eschaton.[69]

Jenson exhibits his typical imaginative insight when he argues, with reference to Thomas' Five Ways, that, 'all our theological utterances, including those we can know by nature, are in their *use* a function of our yearning for the fulfilment of the biblical promises'.[70]

He shows equal biblical insight, in affirming that, if it is just our own human yearning for God that is at the basis of what we say about God, then the 'analogy-logic' at work in the grammatical Thomas Aquinas 'can only be labelled "epistemological works-righteousness" '.[71] If humanity's drive for God is at its base and foundation, if human language is intrinsically and

[66] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, pp. 6, 35, 67.
[67] Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence', p. 20.
[68] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, pp. 59–60.
[69] Ibid., p. 62, quoting Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I. q. 1, a. 2, his italics.
[70] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, p. 74.
[71] Ibid., pp. 93–4.

autonomously impelled God-ward, then human speech about God is, of course, a human work. Here the 'other hand' shows its claws. Jenson remarks that Karl Barth's '*Kirchliche Dogmatik* is an enormous attempt to interpret all reality by the fact of Christ',[72] and he finds this territorial footing in Barth's thought significant for his own theology. As in story Barthianism, so for Jenson, we can talk about God because God has first spoken, drawing us into his story. Jenson's own theology can be labelled 'story Thomist' because his epistemological method is Barthian and his narrative takes place in the preached-environment of the biblical story, and yet the content is the same set of questions as figure in grammatical Thomism. These questions, such as how we speak about God, reflect methodological concerns. The principle, 'God *is* a story' is set to work the moment one equates one's method of knowing God—such as Scripture—with God as such. As Gilson remarked, 'Whoever sticks a finger into the machinery of the Cartesian method must expect to be dragged along its whole course.'[73] The 'Cartesian' element in all narrative theologies is that method is their starting point. Or in other words, *Grammaticus begat Narrativus begat Deum narrativum.*

Barthian theology aims to build its metaphysics on biblical description. One feature of the content of Barth's theology can be added to take us from theology as description of God's self-revelation to theology as *narrative* description. This is Barth's replacement of the old metaphysical category of *substance*—unsuited to storytelling—with that of *time*. Citing Barth's positive assertion that, with God, 'Being does not include eternity but eternity includes being', Richard Roberts has argued that, for Barth, the 'category of time can be said to constitute a surrogate for "substance", as exploited in traditional theology'. As Roberts reads him, Barth's God is not *pure* being, but pure temporal 'duration'. His eternity is, as it were, not the negation of temporality but its absolutization.[74] Barth thus created what Ford calls a 'descriptive metaphysics in support of the overarching story'. And so, 'the stage is set for defining the Trinity in terms of relations discovered in the biblical narratives. . . . Barth looks to the relation between Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost as the expression of the relations within the Trinity.'[75]

[72] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I: *The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 21.

[73] Étienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauk (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 48.

[74] Richard Roberts, 'The Ideal and the Real in the Theology of Karl Barth', in Stephen Sykes and Derek Holmes (eds.), *New Studies In Theology*, vol. I (London: Duckworth, 1980), p. 166, citing Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1: *The Doctrine of God*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), p. 610.

[75] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, pp. 139 and 152.

Exegetes of the contents of Barth's theology are unlikely to agree on whether Jenson's 'storification' of the Triune God is built on the *Church Dogmatics*, or, conversely 'departs from Barth on one crucial issue, God's being in Time', drawing his interest in the 'future' from Pannenberg, Moltmann, and Carl Braaten.[76] Both in *God After God*, and in an early autobiographical essay, Jenson indicates that reading Barth both stimulated and frustrated his desire to '*narrate* the crisis in which God will be the End'. Whilst Barth had tried 'to find a way to keep hold of the proclamation's narrative content', nonetheless, 'in identifying eternity as Jesus' time, Barth retained too much of the traditional understanding of eternity; and the identification therefore constantly threatens to draw Christ off and back into a Calvinist place "before all time" '. Whether or not he promoted a renascent sense of divine temporality in Barth, there is a sense in which the *storification* of God is more important to Jenson than relating God to history. Simon Gathercole has argued that Jenson's Christology actually has an '*atemporal*' basis.[77] Cyril O'Regan observes that Hegel's attribution of 'process' to God does not necessarily

> reduce the divine to time and history, even if it is, in fact, crucial to Hegel's ontotheological proposal that the divine be seen in a much closer relation to time and history than traditionally conceived. What the positing of process does imply is that, at an infrastructural level, the divine is plot, story, or narrative with a beginning, middle, and end.[78]

This might be said of Jenson, too. The *new* element which Jenson adds to story Barthianism, the element making for the perfect theological movie, is the temporal art of music (and not only for the choral odes). Our sixth chapter describes how such a cinematic portrayal of God lends itself to a modalistic idea of the Trinity. Jenson is paralleled in his cinematization of the Trinity by one grammatical Thomist, Herbert McCabe. What is at stake is an essentialist or conceptualist idea of the three Persons, rather than an excessively historical perspective.

6. Why the Movie Parallel?

Some scholars, such as the redoubtable Paul Molnar, have criticized narrative theology on the grounds that it ought to have set itself a different objective to

[76] Christopher Wells, 'Aquinas and Jenson on Thinking about the Trinity', *Anglican Theological Review* 84/2 (2002), 345–82, pp. 354–5.

[77] Simon Gathercole, 'Pre-Existence, and the Freedom of the Son of God in Creation and Redemption: An Exposition in Dialogue with Robert Jenson', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7/1 (2005), 38–51, p. 47.

[78] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 30.

the ones it has, such as the creation of a genuinely God-centred theology.[79] It is difficult for a theology to be God-centred if, like movies, it presents 'the doing of an image, not the image of a doing'.[80] Our argument will be that narrative theology does not achieve its own most valuable aim of reinstating the imaginative and biblical basis of theology. It does not obey the curves of the narrative of salvation history. In order adequately to respond to the images of this revealed history, one needs to know or understand this image, but also to respond to it in love—because the mystery which the God-given image expresses is love. We will argue that, in place of such loving assent, narrative theologies offer a pre-verbal machination of the reality, providing the materials for an abstraction of essence, not for the concretization of an image. Since such cognitive acts do not set the perceiver free to love another as another, narrative theologies substitute a methodology for the personal love of God.

What is the purpose of drawing aesthetic perceptions into theology? What good does it serve when Barth, for instance, uses a theologian's aesthetic insight to notice that there is something *analogous* to space and time in the biblical God, or when he uses the image of the prodigal son's departure into a far country to reflect upon the procession and mission of the divine Son?[81] The images are an indispensable reminder to Christian theology that our God is, as Bauckham rightly says, not a metaphysical *what* but a *who*.[82] The authentically Christian function of imagination in theology is to remind us that God is three persons united in *love*. The Bible images are 'done' by a divine act of love. This is imaginative dynamite, and all great theologies have been captivated by the image of the divine as three *persons* united in love. If the movie parallel is accurate, we may be forced to concede that the story theologians do not make the biblical images an iconostasis of the personal and loving God.

We draw an extensive comparison between narrative theologies and movies in order to point up the way in which narrativism 'technologizes' our approach to the sacred images of Scripture. We are making 'technologizing' a metaphor for methodologizing. Russell Hittinger argues that, when it operates within a 'technology', a 'tool is no longer an instrument, but rather the measure of the humane world'. That is, he says,

[79] Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue With Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2002).

[80] Frederick D. Wilhelmsen and Jane Brett, *Telepolitics: The Politics of Neuronic Man* (Plattsburgh, NY: Tundra Books, 1972), p. 31.

[81] See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), ch. 14, 'Jesus Christ, The Lord as Servant', sect. 59: 'The Obedience of the Son of God'.

[82] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p. 8.

Modern technologies are not only 'labor saving' devices. A labor saving device, like an automated farm implement or a piston, replaces repetitive human acts. But most distinctive of contemporary technology is the replacement of the human act; or, of what the scholastic philosophers called the *actus humanus*. The machine reorganizes and to some extent supplants the world of human action, in the moral sense of the term.

As with our idea of the cinematization of theology, these objections to technology are 'not aimed at the tool per se' but rather at a 'cultural pattern in which tools are either deliberately designed to replace the human act or at least have the unintended effect of making the human act unnecessary or subordinate to the machine'.[83] It takes a 'human act' to respond to the contents of the biblical images. A methodology is a technique. What matters to method are the protocols, prescriptions and proscriptions which enable it to 'do the image'. The technique is abstracted from the 'image of a doing'. It is because the technology divests the human act of its human spontaneity and freedom that it is loveless. This human freedom is, we shall argue, analogous to the divine freedom. The human act is most fully itself in responding to the divine act in kind. Is it really like what we know of how human persons manifest themselves to one another to state, with some story Barthians, that, because *all* of God is revealed in Jesus Christ, that revelation is not the expression of a mystery? Is it comparable to how we know human persons to affirm with the grammatical Thomists that, because we do not know God's essence, God is essentially unknowable? Or are both propositions more akin to the objective auto-projection of a machine than the self-giving of a person? In the 1940s, Karl Barth challenged Hans Urs von Balthasar to make Catholic theology speak more existentially, that is, more Christocentrically. The last volumes of the *Theo-Logic*, written 30 years later, affirm that, 'if the self-giving of the Father to the Son, and of both to the Spirit corresponds . . . to God's intimate essence, this . . . can itself be . . . only love'.[84] The biblical 'image of a doing' expresses the divine love.

In much traditional theological aesthetics, as for instance, when Thomas Aquinas compares God to an architect, the *artist* functions as an analogy for the divine maker. With what sort of analogy to the divine maker does the artist as movie-director supply us? Or, what notion of God do we perceive when we consider divine revelation as analogous to the creativity that goes into movie-directing? Although subjective decisions go into the

[83] Russell Hittinger, 'Technology and the Demise of Liberalism', in *The First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in a Post-Christian World* (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2003), p. 251.

[84] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. II, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 136.

editing of film, nonetheless, the process of reproducing photographic images is one which eliminates the subjective eye of a human viewer. In photography and in the cinematic art, Bazin says, 'for the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man. ... All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence.'[85] If God creates like a camera captures reality, he does not do so as a person who loves, but like a machine, for 'Photography overcame subjectivity in a way undreamed of by painting, ... by *automatism*, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction.'[86]

Like a human painter or sculptor, the biblical God makes with his *hands*. The crucial difference between cinematography and the other visual arts is that the movie-director has no hands. 'Photographs are not *hand*-made; they are manufactured.' The 'material basis of the media of movies (as paint on a flat, delimited support is the material basis of the media of painting) is ... *a succession of automatic world projections*'.[87] If that is an appropriate analogy for the biblical God, then, when He speaks the world into creation, the words can hardly be said to flow from a free gift of love. It will follow that *language*, the basic media of narrative theology, has its own objective existence, detached from the making hands and voice of a personal Author. It may even follow that Story becomes the maker of God.

What happens here, via the process of collective imagination which movies replicate, is something like the divinization of thought process which goes on amongst the great nineteenth-century German Idealists. No-one who is interested in the *aesthetics* of theology can affect to have learned nothing from the Romantics, for it was Hegel who restored the ancient recognition that 'art' is as important to humanity as philosophy and religion, and that poetry is a form of knowledge. Bainard Cowan writes that Hegel's

> word *Verweilen*—tarrying, enduring, dwelling—contains much of what in Hegel's philosophy is congenial to art and the tragic. *Verweilen* is his word of choice for denoting process and experience as ineluctable dimensions of the truth. It hence implies ... the dynamization of the essential, a process with the making of the thinking subject as an active, even heroic, principle.[88]

We aim to include *both* the negative and the positive sides of that 'dynamization' of truth and reality in our comparison of movies and theatre, that is, to

[85] Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, p. 10.
[86] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 23. [87] Ibid., p. 72.
[88] Bainard Cowan, 'Tarrying with the Tragic: Hegel and his Critics', in Glenn Arbery ed., *The Tragic Abyss* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), pp. 41 and 44–5.

get at what Aristotle meant when he said that what the dramatist imitates 'are *actions*'.[89] If it was Hegel who reminded modern theologians to look for curves and ovals in theology, perhaps this imaginative thinker should be drawn into our theological conversation. Bearing in mind that 'it is too late to baptize Hegel',[90] I shall engage him in ecumenical dialogue in the final chapter. Whether secular or biblical, it is not imagination that matters, or the use of an 'imaginative method', but what it is given to imagination to see. What the imagination, or the heart, sees is love.

[89] Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theatre: A Study of Ten Plays. The Art of Drama in Changing Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 8.
[90] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 237.

2

The Church as Anonymous Celebrity

> There is no such thing as a novel by Charles Dickens 'but only something cut off from the vast and flowing stream of his personality.'
>
> G. K. Chesterton

1. Introduction: Who Makes the Church?

In Christian theology, the concept of the human person comes from the notion of divine personhood: Christians do not gather a notion of personhood from human beings, and then apply that to God, but, rather, build the notion of the significance of human persons from what our faith implies about the personhood of God. In the light of what the human being is called to become, what forms us as persons is 'beatitude', since the 'destiny of the human person is divinization, union with the Father through Christ'.[1] If one can readily imagine the Christian story without foregrounding the human tellers of the tales, such as the Gospel authors, that may indicate a weak notion of personhood in God. But if God's creative tri-personhood is central to one's theology, human personality and authorship will gather some reflective weight from that source.

The argument of this chapter is that narrative theologies have tended toward a monological rather than dialogical notion of the *person*, and thus of the Church. Paul's image of the Church as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5) is one example of a *dialogical* vision of the Church. Building on the nuptial imagery in the book of Revelation, the image of the Church as the perfect bride has been an *eschatological* type of the Church. Another dialogical image, which refers to the historical *origins* of the Church, pictures it as 'disembarking' from Christ as Noah and his family alighted from their ship. So we have, as one dialogue partner, Christ the ark, and as the other, his witnesses. Speaking of God's words to Noah's sons after their ark had put to

[1] Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1962), p. 14.

shore, Irenaeus of Lyons takes the emergence of the Church as a reiteration and fulfilment of the blessing of Japheth. 'Taught by' Christ, he says, and

witnesses of all His good works and of His teaching and of His passion and death and resurrection . . . were the apostles, who after <the descent of> the power of the Holy Spirit were sent by Him into the whole world and carried out the calling of the Gentiles . . . dispensing and administering to the faithful the Holy Spirit they had received from the Lord. . . . And by these dispositions they established the churches. By faith and charity and hope they realised the calling of the Gentiles . . . receiving them into the promise made to the patriarchs, that so, . . . the God of all would bring, through the resurrection from the dead, the life everlasting which He had promised, through Him who died and was raised, Jesus Christ . . . And they gave counsel, with the word of truth, to keep the body unstained unto resurrection . . . For so (they said) do the faithful keep when there abides constantly in them the Holy Spirit, who is given by Him in baptism . . . This is the fruit of the blessing of Japheth, in the calling of the Gentiles, revealed through the Church . . . [2]

A 'type' is an image which is instantiated in many different ways. If events which look divergent on a literal level act analogously, then Old Testament type scenes can be replayed in the New Testament, and in the contemporary Church. For all of them catch the reflection of Christ, whose action brings about the family resemblance. Irenaeus can thus see a type of liberation from the 'deadly turbulence' of sin in the rescue of the Jews from the Egyptians in Exodus: 'for in these things our affairs were being rehearsed, the Word of God . . . prefiguring what was to be . . . He has both caused to gush forth . . . a stream of water from a rock—and the rock is Himself—and given twelve springs—that is, the teaching of the twelve apostles'.[3] This is a dialogical image of the Church, because the picture brings us back to the 'twoness' of Christ the 'rock', on the one hand, and the 'twelve springs' on the other. The Church's proclamation springs from Christ's energetic sending. The Church is not a *single* actor, but an adventurous dialogue.

The basic type-scene of 'dialogue', concrete interchanges between Christ and his friends or opponents, generates a successor 'type': it gives us an image of meditating on Scripture as conversing with an author. When we meditate on Scripture, we do not just share Matthew or Paul's ideas, but listen to an author speaking. Just as, today, and despite the 'death of the author', books sometimes carry a photo of the writer on the dust-jacket, so the frontispiece to medieval Gospel manuscripts is a portrait of the author. In entering their Gospels, one enters a conversation with Luke or Mark. Medieval copies of

[2] Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. Joseph P. Smith, SJ (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952), pp. 21 and 41–2.

[3] Ibid., p. 46.

the book of Revelation often set a symbolic portrait of John on their front page, so as to dispel doubts about its canonical status and to set the Apocalypse squarely within the Church.[4]

Patristic and medieval types gather up common themes, as between Old and New Testament, or Scripture and Church. They also sometimes connect a biblical symbol with the cosmos, as when Irenaeus notes that, just as Scripture prescribes a seven-branched candlestick for the sanctuary, so there are seven heavens.[5] Remembering what we said about the integration of philosophy and revelation,[6] one could compare dialogical philosophy, like that of Buber and Rosenzweig, to such cosmological typology. Both take up scriptural themes and use them to explore universal human experiences. It is possible that their philosophical personalism, which has engaged humanists of many different persuasions, is 'nourished by a theological deposit, and, more specifically, a Christian and trinitarian deposit'.[7]

The Church Fathers also sometimes make a triangle, symbolizing a shared feature of the Old and the New Testaments, and the divine reality. Irenaeus connects up the Tree of Knowledge, the Cross, and the omnipresence of Christ. He writes that, by obeying

> unto death, hanging on the tree, He undid the old disobedience wrought in the tree. And because He is Himself the Word of God Almighty, who in His invisible form pervades us universally in the whole world, and encompasses both its length and breadth and height and depth . . . the Son of God was also crucified in these, imprinted in the form of a cross on the universe; for He had necessarily, in becoming visible, to bring to light the universality of His cross, in order to show openly through His visible form that activity of His: that it is He who makes bright the height, that is, what is in heaven, and holds the deep, which is in the bowels of the earth . . . calling in all the dispersed from all sides to the knowledge of the Father.[8]

Unless such biblical types form it, like seeds form plants, theology lets go of its own formative reality and becomes a conceptualist metaphysics using scriptural proof-texts. Hence, a Christian theological notion of the person as a 'dialogical creature', one created in and for dialogue, is dependent on

[4] Jonathan Alexander, 'The Last Things: Representing the Unrepresentable: The Medieval Tradition', in Frances Carey (ed.), *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come* (London: British Museum Press, 1999), p. 44.

[5] Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 9.

[6] See above, Chapter 1, section 4.

[7] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. III: *The Spirit of Truth*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 145.

[8] Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 34. The translator notes that 'to bring to light the universality of His cross' could be rendered more literally as 'to bring to light his cross-sharing with the universe'.

biblical types of the Trinity as persons in dialogue, such as can grow out of the Gospel scenes of baptism, transfiguration, and crucifixion. In this chapter, we will contrast this conversational image of the Church with the narrativist's idea of belonging to the Church as identifying in a single, text-based idea.

The idea of Christian community is central to grammatical Thomism and to story Barthianism, because they see the Church as brought about by believers sharing the same language. It is the contention that 'religions resemble languages' which generates the public spirit of Christianity, within narrative theology. When it was originally advanced, Lindbeck's Wittgensteinian postliberalism tied in with a feeling that 'the privatism and subjectivism that accompanies the neglect of communal doctrines leads to a weakening of the social groups that are the chief bulwarks against chaos'.[9] The idea is that the Church *is* a language. But treating the relations between God and human beings as a story may undermine their personal character, because the characters are secondary to the story. Unless the movie is eponymous to its protagonists, as with *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* or *Bonnie and Clyde*, we remember the names of its stars better than those of its characters. To conceive the Christian community as a language is to make it function as an anonymous or collective actor.

If being a Christian is inhabiting a narrative, then the question of *who* tells the story, who gives the words their meaning and reference, is circumvented. Behind this lies the old question of whether we understand a text through its internal form or by grasping the intentions animating that form. The debate about how much storytellers matter to stories, or of which takes priority, the language *game* or the *player*, is a philosophical or literary-critical one. We will mention the historical proximity of story Barthianism to formalism.

This chapter starts off by noting that narrative theology is right to wish to avoid foundationalism. The postliberal idea of the biblical story is slanted away from such 'foundations' as subjects, story-speakers or inventors. Our contention will be that narrativism collectivizes the source of revelation without escaping foundationalism. Its impersonal method leads story Barthianism into founding the Church in an idea. When Jenson claims that 'it is the Trinity as *community* that might be a personality', he forgets that God is not 'a personality' but *three* persons. Does this oversight follow from a monistic idea of community and of persons? His anti-foundationalism includes an antipathy to the Greek word 'being'. Rather than costuming God in that Hellenistic garb, theology must, he claims, take up the 'drastically personal' language of the Bible.[10] But, replacing 'being' with the pragmatic

[9] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 18 and 77.
[10] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, pp. 122, 207, and 222.

language of doing comes at the cost of making God reveal himself impersonally. Since it is not a personal gift, the resultant act of faith in the text's referents is impersonal and corporate.

We will discuss the occultation of the historical body and the person in story Barthianism in relation to the resurrection, the idea on which it founds the Church. A fat villain would be incongruous within the melodramatic universe. Melodrama conceives its entertaining effects by glancing away from each human person's moorings in a particular, given body. Just as it has a lean idea of the human person, so it has an angular view of God. If the Church is conceived as a collective idea, it is unlikely that God has been perceived as three persons united in love. This chapter will conclude by suggesting that the non-foundationalist aspiration in narrative theology is not best achieved by thinking of Christian language as self-legitimating. If human 'personal*ity*, ultimately, is communion with God in love',[11] it may be better to consider Scripture as composed by the Church in 'the spontaneous expression of its experience of the in-breaking of absolute love'.[12]

2. Non-Foundationalism

Early modern philosophers sought a *foundation* for metaphysical truth in an act of knowledge. An act of *knowledge*, like Descartes' *cogito*, is thought to yield certainty and thus to provide a foundation for a metaphysical system as a whole. The feature of foundationalism which is most dangerous to theology is this orientation to epistemology. For an epistemology is a description of the methods by which we know things, and it would be flying perilously in the face of reality either to dismiss evidence because it was discovered in the wrong way or to approve a result on the ground that the appropriate procedures were followed in discovering it. The theologies which have imitated philosophical foundationalism have sought to shore up the occurrence of divine revelation by pinpointing the method or epistemic mechanism through which it could occur.[13] Hans Frei puts the complaint like this: 'we have lived for almost three hundred years in an era in which an anthropologically oriented apologetic has tried to demonstrate that the notion of a unique divine revelation in Jesus Christ is one whose meaning and possibility are reflected in general human experience'. Story Barthians rightly consider

[11] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, p. 44.

[12] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. VII: *The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), p. 100.

[13] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 73.

that this procedure is damaging because it pins the revelation to a human operation. For, agnostics and atheists contend that ideas of a supernatural order are projections of human thinking. It is not we who are the creatures of the gods, they say, but the gods who are our creations. From Xenophanes to Feuerbach and thence to Freud, critics of religion have argued that the gods are constituted out of the way human beings are constituted and live. So it seems a damaging concession to base one's defence of Christianity on the claim that human beings *are* so constituted as to fit its 'revelation'. If one's foundation is a revelation-access point conveniently located in human psychology, one enables the Feuerbachian critic to equate the so-called 'revelation' with the mechanism. If we say God is revealed through imagination, for example, all we may be seen to be doing is deifying imagination. However much the believer may insist that experience, intuition, or any other epistemic operation is the bearer of revelation, the critic can turn this account against itself, arguing that worship offered to the 'God' of intuition, experience, imagination, and so on, is a backhanded way of paying respect to human creativity. Hence, Frei urges that we make 'a sharp distinction between the logical structure as well as the content of Christian belief, which it is the business of theologians to describe but not to explain or argue, and the totally different logic of *how one comes* to believe ... on which the theologian ... should ... not base the structure of his theology'.[14] Postliberals aim to give non-foundationalist accounts of the revelation which brings the Church into being—the resurrection.

So far so good: the first false step postliberalism makes is to conflate the sound principle that basing human knowledge of God on a feature of human epistemology is bad methodology with the (unproven) assumption that the evidence for God's actions is automatically contaminated upon entering a human mind. This could be a corollary of Barth's idea that linking our idea of the Christian God to a God known by natural reason debases God into the projection of human thinking which Feuerbach saw in him. No matter how profoundly the fallen human mind can distort what it knows, the subject of its knowledge is not itself alone; what it knows is not knowledge, but existent things. A second false step takes us back to where we started from. For, building theology on the methodological assumption that the human power to know God is necessarily regressive, retorsive or involuted is itself an epistemological manoeuvre. If we construct our theology on the conception that human thinking about God invariably boomerangs into humanity thinking about itself, our procedure will be based on an opinion

[14] Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William Placher (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 29–30.

about our powers of knowledge. The fact that it is a negative opinion does not render the gesture less self-reflexive.

The same point can be made positively. The primary foundationalist gesture is turning around and looking at the basis of one's belief or of one's thinking. Neither reasoning about things nor believing in things is foundationalist *per se*; foundationalism comes into it when one reasons upon reason, or believes in one's believing. Distinguishing medieval reasonableness from Cartesian foundationalism, David Schindler writes that where

> scholastic philosophy began with the most self-evident first principles as given, Descartes went a step further: he insisted on taking these, not merely as given and thus extrinsic to the self, coming from the outside, but as wholly internalized, as appropriated. Thus, he takes as his starting point only what he can fully master: namely, that which is least doubtable because most emptied of content, the purely formal identity of being and thinking.[15]

It's the backward glance to the 'appropriated' object of belief or reason which makes a foundationalist out of a reasoner or a believer. Thus, neither reasonableness about Christian truth, nor even fideism is automatically foundationalist. One can find a 'fideism of the fact', the faithful attention to the stark and bloody givenness of the incarnation and crucifixion, in great Protestant writers like Søren Kierkegaard. Blessed Humphrey Pritchard, the lay martyr who said on an Oxford scaffold, in 1589, 'Though I may not be able to tell you in words what it means to be Catholic, God knows my heart and he knows that I believe all that the Holy Roman Church believes, and that which I am unable to explain in words I am here to explain and attest with my blood', was a sound fideist of the particular fact. On the other hand, if one makes the self-reflective gesture of believing in one's believing, such fideism of faith has backstepped into foundationalism. We tend to see such foundationalist fideism in story Barthianism. Likewise, if one thinks that reasonableness *per se* is a methodological source of truth, one has a rationalistic foundationalism, characteristic of grammatical Thomism.

A theology which *knows* or simply *believes*, rather than being preoccupied with knowing that it knows, or believing it believes, assents to the truth and the beauty of scriptural revelation. The biblical authors articulated the history of Israel and the life of Christ in words, and a fully human assent to the Scriptures acknowledges the existential truth and beauty of the revelation by making an existential judgement that the particular existents to which it refers *are* real. Just as Scripture has a 'verbal voice', so the adequate human response to

[15] D. C. Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), pp. 155–6.

it is 'voiced'. If, as Augustine said, God 'can be thought about more truly than he can be talked about' and '*is* more truly than he can be thought about',[16] such marvelling in God's existence is the core of verbalized thought about God. Such an assent to its existential reality recognizes that what Scripture shows is a dense and mysterious *image*, not a transparent idea. Scripture gives us an image because it presents a history. An assent to Scripture cannot avoid foundationalism unless it grips the historicity of revelation. This chapter will argue that the narrativists do not attain the voiced existential judgement, image knowledge, or historicity. This is why they are in captivity to foundationalism.

We will question whether narrative theology attains the level of verbal judgement. With its accentuation of biblical description, narrative theology is more visual than verbal. The *impact* of the descriptive picture matters more to it than the contemplation of the word. Diderot, the eighteenth-century theorist of melodrama, credited the silent tableau with greater 'emotional charge' than anything a script-writer could unleash.[17] 'Talkies' took three decades to replace so-called 'silent' movies because audiences were magnetized by the simple pleasure of moving images.[18] The pleasure which we take in the moving image is *pre-conceptual.* Carroll remarks that, 'if the recognition of movie images is more analogous to a reflex than it is to a process like reading, then following a movie may turn out to be less taxing, less a matter of active effort, than reading'.[19]

We can compare this to Hans Frei's encomium for a pre-modern, inner-biblical world view. 'For Calvin,' he claims, 'we have reality only under a description or, since reality is identical with the sequential dealing of God with men, under the narrative depiction which renders it, and not directly or without temporal narrative sequence.' On Frei's account, we should not compare the Bible to a world outside it, nor even look *through* the Bible to a world beyond it. 'The reason' why it is impossible to step outside the narrative framework 'is', says Frei, 'obvious. We are, as interpreters as well as religious or moral persons, part of the same sequence. We are not independent observers of it from outside the temporal framework in which we have been cast. We have no more external vantage point for thought than for action.'[20] The metaphor of a 'vantage point' is a visual one.

[16] Augustine, *De Trinitate / The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, OP (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), VI.3.VII.

[17] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 65.

[18] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, p. 18.

[19] Carroll, 'The Power of Movies', p. 87.

[20] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 36.

What a theatregoer can see is limited by the view from her seat, and what a theatre actor can convey to an audience is restricted to what demonstrative use he can make of his bodily resources from a stage. Theatre lacks the means of transcending space and focusing visual attention which technologies give the cinema. The movie actor need not exaggerate a facial or vocal gesture to draw an audience's attention to it. In 1903, a film called *The Sick Kitten* opened a chasm between theatre and cinema with its innovative use of the close-up, used to display the administration of medicine.[21] Henceforth, editorial design directs the stream of images which engage the movie audience's gaze. The stage director's 'material' is the obstinately physical and limited bodies of his cast. The matter upon which the movie-maker works, conversely, is an infinitely cuttable and pasteable store of images. Whereas a theatre director is stuck 'with real actuality, which . . . forces him to remain bound by the laws of real space and real time', Vladimir Pudovkin argued, the 'film director . . . has as his material the finished, recorded celluloid. This material from which his final work is composed consists not of living men or real landscapes, not of real, actual stage-sets, but only of their images, recorded on separate strips that can be shortened, altered, and assembled according to his will. . . . by combining them in his selected sequence . . . the director builds up his own "filmic" time and "filmic" space.'[22]

Movie production thus emulates, not verbal *thought* but the action of the *senses*, or 'what goes on in the brain of a man when he decodes information and synthesizes into unity a sensorial field'. The 'electronic technology' of cinema 'extends' our '*senses by imitating them in the way in which they act*'. But, because it 'parodies' or 'imitates the nature of the human brain', the art of cinema entails that 'inside and outside blur and commence to lose their distinction'.[23] Or as Xavier Zubiri has it, 'In the reality of truth, which is sensing, we have the truth of reality, but not the true reality.'[24] Frei's pre-modern Calvinist inhabits a biblical multiplex, trapped in there because he can't *describe* his way out. Sensationalism, in both the vernacular and the philosophical senses of the term, did not originate with cinema: empiricist philosophers have always counted sensation as the source of our beliefs. One has continually to refresh the memory of a sensation to ensure its continuity, returning to the act which founds it. It was because eighteenth-century 'thinkers from Locke to Hume had maintained that belief must be constantly given new impetus

[21] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, p. 31.

[22] V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, trans. Ivor Montago, 2nd edn. (London: Vision Press, 1958), p. 89.

[23] Wilhelmsen and Brett, *Telepolitics*, p. 26.

[24] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 48.

by the force of present impressions' that the French revolutionaries instructed painters like Jacques Louis David to stage-direct pageants and festivals. By 'linking the memory of the great events of the Revolution to periodic spectacles, it was believed that those events could be saved from gradually lapsing into unbelief'.[25] Melodrama, and thus movies, began in revolutionary pantomime.[26]

A tragedy or a comedy gives us meaning encapsulated in images, posed for our contemplation as imaginative wholes. Whereas, what Frei seems to propose is a state prior to that in which we *find* meaning in given images: like cinema, narrative theology offers 'the doing of an image, not the image of a doing'.[27] Examples of 'doing an image' are playing a game, following a socially accepted procedure, or the public-figure's acting to a code. These gesture-makings are not susceptible to the existential judgement of truth or falsity. Lindbeck argues that the 'story used to structure all dimensions of existence is not primarily a set of propositions to be believed, but is rather a... set of skills that one employs in living one's life'.[28] The bedrock of theology is thus pictured as a *doing*. Back behind contemplation there is practice. And so we reach behind the *image* to its *doing*. Lindbeck intended to preserve the biblical image when he declared that the 'primary focus' of narrative theology 'is not on God's being in itself,... but on how life is to be lived and reality construed in the light of God's character as agent as this is depicted in the stories of Israel and Jesus'.[29] But the upshot is that the work of constructing the image takes the place of the image of God.

A second reason why narrative theologies remain foundationalist is that they do not resist the abstract conceptualism which most agree has dogged the path of theology since Descartes, or Duns Scotus, or at least, for a long time. The visuality of the narrative imagination hinders it from knowing the concrete, enfleshed beauty of divine revelation. In encouraging us not to look *within* the Gospel character of Jesus for his identity, Hans Frei suggests that we should look at him as we do at a statue: 'Reading a story,' he says,

> whether the Gospel story or any other, has been rightly compared to understanding a work of visual art, such as a piece of sculpture. We do not try to imagine the inside of it, but let our eyes wander over its surface and its mass, so that we may grasp its form, its proportions, and its balances. What it says is expressed in any and all of these

[25] Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 167.

[26] See below, Chapter 5, section 1.

[27] Wilhelmsen and Brett, *Telepolitics*, p. 31.

[28] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 35.

[29] Ibid., p. 121.

things, and only by grasping them do we grasp its 'meaning.' So also we grasp the identity of Jesus within his story.[30]

Making Gospel reading analogous to looking at a work of visual art is to liken it to a process in which we immediately achieve a clear and distinct idea. Picture recognition is a transparent intellectual process. Carroll attributes the transcultural popularity of movies to 'their exploitation of picture recognition', making them 'accessible to untutored audiences', who require no 'special training to deal with the basic images in movies, for the capacity to recognize what these images are about has evolved part and parcel with the viewer's capacity to recognize objects and events'.[31] Good movies have snappy scripts and 'contain long stretches without dialogue' because 'a world of sight is a world of immediate intelligibility'.[32] The story-Barthian David Kelsey ascribes a non-inferential immediacy to the way we perceive Christ's identity. 'The stories', he writes, 'are taken as having the logical force of an identity-description. They give, Barth says, a "picture" of Jesus. The picture is not inferred from the details of the stories. It is the story.'[33] Perhaps we see Jesus in black and white, for, Cavell suggests that 'black and white was the natural medium of visual drama', because it mirrors the cinematic clarity of vision and makes sense of a cast of type-cast characters, that is, characters who stand for concepts.[34] One can't adapt a *play* in its entirety into a movie, for only its 'scenic *essence*' transfers to film, leaving behind 'what is specifically theatrical' about it, 'the human, that is to say the verbal, priority given to their dramatic structure'.[35] Concomitantly, all that can be translated of the real salvation history into a visualized story is the external 'essence' of its characters. By making the flesh-and-blood Abraham, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ just as three-dimensionally present to history as Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, and John Wayne are to DVD watchers, it transforms actual, historical images into digitalized concepts.

One reason why foundationalisms put on a poor show within Christian theology is that they are neither very reasonable nor especially faithful, but, rather, as Ortega y Gasset says, with reference to certain of the Greek philosophers, self-willed:

[30] Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 87.

[31] Carroll, 'The Power of Movies', pp. 83–4.

[32] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 150.

[33] David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 45.

[34] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 89–90.

[35] André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 115 and 106, my italics added.

> in laying down as a condition of reality, before admitting it as such, that it should consist in an element of identity, Parmenides and the orthodox Greeks . . . revealed their colossal arbitrariness. . . . When we speak of reality—onto-logy—we are under obligation to be faithful at once to the conditions of the reality of which we are thinking and the conditions of the thought with which we 'manipulate' the reality.[36]

A non-foundationalist theology resists making affirmations about the content of our knowledge of God until after it arrives at the data of events. If knowledge of God is really taken not to be grounded in human psychology, our first step should be to consider what we know; the upshot may then be to consider the means by which this content had accrued to us. The resurrection is an *historical* event. So, a final reason for wanting to avoid the foundationalist act is that its cemented certainty is unaccommodating to historical movement and becoming: 'the orthodox thinker', Ortega says, 'in search of an object's being holds that he is searching for a fixed, static consistency, hence something that the entity *already* is'.[37]

3. The Hermeneutics of Story Barthianism

In order to understand the hermeneutics of story Barthianism, we need to recall the characteristic theories of meaning of the post-war years, when Lindbeck was studying medieval philosophy, and Frei was reading the New Critics. One could loosely imagine that from around 1920 to 1970 the prevailing approach to literary texts was the 'New Criticism'. In fact, the men and women associated with this 'movement' belonged to two separate generations of thinkers. A generation who came to adulthood during the First World War turned aside from the popular bias toward biographical criticism and from an academic tendency to treat literary works as expressions of historical or sociological movements. In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel had described each artistic genre as the articulation of a particular period in human history. The first generation of New Critics, like Allen Tate or John Crowe Ransom, stressed the 'given' text so as to prevent its being reduced to its historical context. They replaced such practices with a focus on particular images and symbols within poems and novels. These writers—and all of them were outstanding *writers* of poetry and novels—were solid Christians. For Tate, the significance of *particular* images in poetry rests on the particular, historical

[36] José Ortega y Gasset, 'History as a System', in *History as a System: and other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History*, trans. Helene Weyl (New York: Norton, 1941), p. 194.
[37] Ibid., p. 192.

fact of the incarnation.[38] These writers were consciously, even apologetically Christian: Caroline Gordon, who once lambasted Chesterton for confusing Dickens' novels with Charles Dickens,[39] also argued that the 'Christian element of the great nineteenth century novels is their architecture. Many of them are based on the primal plot: the Christian scheme of Redemption.'[40]

In the 1930s and after the Second World War, the defence of 'text-based' criticism diversifies: one can see it equally in Wimsatt and Beardsley's critique of what they called the 'intentional fallacy'; in essays originally published in F. R. Leavis' *Scrutiny*, like 'How Many Children had Lady Macbeth', and in L. C. Knights' other, enthralling treatments of the imagery of Shakespeare's plays; and in the writings of Cleanth Brooks and William Empson. There was nothing especially Christian about the second generation of New Critics. If they had a shared 'myth', it was an Aristotelian devotion to reason.

In an essay written around 1967, shortly before he published *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, Frei commented on the literary controversies of his time, remarking that he felt more at home with the 'newer critics' like Empson, Wimsatt, or Cleanth Brooks than he did with men like E. D. Hirsch who continued to defend the importance of authorial intention in understanding a novel or play. Frei added that,

> at least at times—and . . . this is true of the Gospels to the extent that they are narrative literature—valid interpretation (Hirsch to the contrary) does not depend on the difficult assumption of a necessary and traceable connection between the text and the author's intention or will. Normative interpretation is a matter of the structure of the narrative itself and seeing if the text *as given* has a genuine structure.[41]

One might suppose that a stress on authorial *intention*, held by a difficult to trace subject behind the text, tends to support 'subjectivism', because this subject is like an Olympian god, capable of jumping this way or that, or of being represented as having any number of different motives, all equally hard to legitimate. The personal intention behind the text seems like its pre-rational aspect, the structure of the text its hard-wired rationality. Somewhat as narrative or postliberal theology wanted to transcend liberalism, so the post-war 'newer critics' were keen to out-gun the 'subjectivism' which they saw as implicit in author-related criticism.

[38] Allen Tate, 'Religion and the Old South', in *On the Limits of Poetry: Selected Essays 1928–1948* (New York: Swallow Press, 1948), pp. 306–7 and 309–11.

[39] Caroline Gordon, *How to Read a Novel* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 13.

[40] Caroline Gordon, 'Some Readings and Misreadings', *Sewanee Review* 61 (1953), 384–407, p. 385.

[41] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 33.

This second, Cold War generation of 'New Critics' was writing when the fallout of the genocidal irrationalism of National Socialism was still felt, and in contestation with the political religion of Stalinism. Having lived through the 1930s, they had seen the rise of anti-rational political religions and they were out to defend *reason*. This gave their criticism an epistemic bias. The critics of the 1950s shared the project of the neo-Thomists of their time, the defence of meaning and rationality. So they accentuated textual *meaning*. As Wimsatt put it, in his six-point programme for expunging 'intentionalism': 'Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work. It is only because an artefact works that we infer the intention of an artificer. "A poem should not mean but be." A poem can *be* only through its *meaning*.'[42] Like their neo-Thomist contemporaries, these Aristotelian critics were interested largely in the *noetic* content of texts, the aspect which can be transmitted as knowledge. For Plato, existing or being real always takes second place to being knowable: for Plato, as Gilson says, 'truly *to be* means to be immaterial, immutable, necessary and intelligible'. Since he was working with a similar set of questions, 'what Plato called Idea', Aristotle called *form*, and he likewise saw form as having its best take on reality as a *mental* activity.[43] For Aristotle, one knows 'a form through the being to which it gives rise, and we know that being through its definition',[44] when that *definition* shapes our concepts of the essential structures of things. Definitions are thus in some way the heart of the matter: and definitions exist in our thinking, not in realities—a human being is not a walking definition of itself, nor a text an expanded self-exposition. It is in this sense that the 'newer new critics' were 'formalists': the primary concern of these professors was the form or structure which can be extracted from a literary text, and intelligibly communicated to students. The sceptical student's first question is often, 'how could we *know* that this text is about what you say?' The Aristotelian's answer is that what is universally transmissible (that is, communicable in the same way for all readers) in a text is the *meaning* of the words. What is foundational for this approach is the fact that everyone could perform the same act of understanding and definition with respect to *Macbeth*.

The insistence of Plato and Aristotle that human beings can go outside themselves and 'think *about* the universe' is important; without it, one is

[42] W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 4.

[43] Étienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 24.

[44] Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd edn. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), p. 47.

left with the 'self-contradictory' denial of the 'truth of communication between men about things which are reducible to no one of them'.[45] Behind this lies the conviction that even sensing is a '"touching"', a reaching into 'actual contact with "palpitating" things, i.e., real things'. Greek thinking is not *only* interested in the fact that things, or texts, can become actual in our minds; to do so, they must already be actual. Aristotle named such actuality *energeia*.[46]

Praiseworthy in itself, the defence of reason can generate a greater attention to the rational working of our minds than to the often illogical realities with which those methods must engage. Aristotle, the Chicago neo-Aristotelians, Jacques Maritain and his school were thinkers first, and *also* spontaneous realists. One only has to lean a little too heavily on the primary interest of philosophical neo-Thomism or of literary neo-Aristotelianism to make them one-sidedly epistemic. Once that happens we have lost what distinguishes formalism from rationalist foundationalism. One then considers verbal meaning from its point of entry into a thought process, rewinding the process of thought so as to make it start with an act of understanding, rather than from existent events. When translated into a theological content, related to Scripture and Church, this can engender two emphases: on the one hand, on the aesthetics of the texts, and, on the other, on their logical coherence.

Since its inception in the late eighteenth century, biblical criticism has posed two questions to Christian theology. In the first place, from Reimarus in the eighteenth century onwards, there is philological criticism of the Scriptures, resulting in, for instance, the document hypothesis, with respect to the Old Testament, and the 'Synoptic problem' with respect to the New. Such philological or textual criticism gives rise to questions about the historicity of the documents. One is as hard-placed today as Frei was forty years ago, to put one's finger on many scenes in the biblical books from Genesis to 2 Kings which scholars regard as corresponding to historical events, like battles or the making of treaties or the appointment of kings. If one takes the foundation of theology to be, not Scripture, but historical evidence, Noah's ark evidently goes under. One consequence of such critical assessments is aesthetic: no Japheth, no imaginative type linking the Noachic covenant to the mission to the Gentiles. It is not just that, once the more mythological aspects of the Old Testament are excised, the typologist has less to work with. Even that which is historically salvageable goes by the board, imaginatively. For, once dissection of the narrative is accepted, defence of

[45] Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence* (Dallas, Tex.: University of Dallas Press, 1970), p. 12.

[46] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, pp. 49–50.

the historicity of its referents is working, not to reinstate the narrative as an achieved literary text, but to show that a set of facts which could be described otherwise (for instance, conflict between a David and a Saul) loosely corresponds to what occurs in the text. It is thus the literary and especially the 'figural', the imaginatively unitive aspect of Scripture in which its scenes and characters are linked up into types, which is lost on both critics and evidentialist historically minded apologists. Frei lamented that, 'Instead of rendering them accessible, the narratives, heretofore indispensable as means of access to the events, now simply verify them, thus affirming their autonomy and the fact that they are . . . accessible through any kind of description that can manage to be accurate'. Since Philistinical defenders of the biblical history like Johannes Cocceius only wanted to show that the 'letter' of Scripture is in some sense true, what disappears, and just as Romanticism is appearing on the horizon, is a 'belief in layers of meaning in a single text'.[47] Just when Hegel was putting forward 'narrative as an advance on the Enlightenment disposition toward atomism',[48] Christians had, according to Hans Frei, made their bed in such a way that the 'story no longer rendered the reality of the history it depicted'.[49] Frei's apprehension of the value of retaining a unified sequence of images in Scripture is like L. C. Knights' grasp of the pattern of imagery in Shakespeare's plays. The narrativist idea of the demise of 'typological interpretation . . . under the combined onslaughts of rationalistic, pietistic and historico-critical developments'[50] is reminiscent of *Cinema Paradiso*, in which a village priest watches the first screening of every movie, ringing a bell for a cut whenever the actors are about to kiss, whereupon the projectionist obediently applies his scissors. The narrativist notion of the rebirth of a 'figural' Scripture is like the final scene of the movie, in which the discarded footage is taped together to produce, for the director's deferred enjoyment, a good erotic sequence.

In addition to relatively dispassionate philological and historical criticism, a second motif of modern biblical criticism is the presence within it of a rising mood of suspicion of the persons who wrote the texts. This reaches a crescendo in Nietzsche, with his denunciations of the Old Testament authors and of Paul as liars.[51] One applies *suspicion* to a text, for instance, holding a tenner up to the light to check if it's a forged note, or Googling a paragraph

[47] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 4 and 55.

[48] Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return In Modernity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 186.

[49] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, p. 48.

[50] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 119.

[51] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in Walter Kaufman (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1954), nos. 26–7, 42, and nos. 44–5.

to test it for plagiarism, if one imagines that the signatory may not be the actual author. In such instances, one suspects the *author* rather than the text itself. When one speaks of 'suspecting a text', one often means suspecting the author, probing his or her identity, motives, or existence. Since the eighteenth century, writers have applied a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' to the biblical texts. As opponents of evidentialism, story Barthians do not respond to this by pointing to extra-biblical evidence. For they feel that doing so makes Christians defend the truth of their faith on the ground chosen by the Enlightened.[52]

The aesthetic dismemberment of Scripture, our diminished ability to see it as a unity, exercises narrative theologians. On Lindbeck's account, 'the crucial change in the modern period has been the neglect of the narrative meaning of Scripture. . . . The narrative meaning of the stories was confused with their factual (scientific and historical) meaning, and was thereby lost.' Narrative theologians are less provoked by the issue of the personal integrity of the authors. It is set aside, perhaps, because it is felt to belong amongst the 'evidences' or 'foundations', the extra-textual facts in which prosaic 'inerrantists'[53] strive to anchor the Scriptures. But pointing to an author behind a text as the locus of its authority, as for instance Irenaeus and other early apologists did when they urged the Apostolic authorship of those Gospels which they regarded as canonical (this was also how the Apocalypse eventually gained canonical credence), is hardly the same as indicating an autonomous philosophical certitude as the justification of one's beliefs. We need not *necessarily* take, for instance, John's Gospel to be historical even if we knew John the Beloved Disciple wrote it. Nietzsche knew that Paul wrote the letters, and that did not enhance his credibility in the German philosopher's eyes. We could only know the authors are eye witnesses by taking it on their say-so, that is, by believing them, or by believing a string of say-sos. It could be more difficult to make an evidential case that a particular person, say, Matthew or Mark, wrote the Gospels which bear their names than to provide evidence for the correspondence of the texts to some historical realities. To say that the reliability of the Christian texts—the 'narrative'—comes down to that of their authors is as good a way of being a fideist of the fact as any other. What concerns us about the idea that, as Frei famously put it, 'Thought about a relation between Christ and believer must be formal and circular'[54] is not precisely that it is formal and circular, but that, lacking the irregular contours of a recourse to the personalities of the

[52] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, pp. 7–8; Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, p. 74.
[53] Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, pp. 206 and 209.
[54] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, p. 6.

resurrection-witnesses, it presages a new foundationalism. We can begin to see why this is so by considering two difficult-to-detect realities: existence and authors. Just as authors are elided in narrative theology, so existence has a relatively weak footing within neo-Thomism.

When philosophers like Buber and Rosenzweig turned their minds to what happens in interpersonal speech, they were addressing what Gabriel Marcel called a 'mystery'. Dialogues can be analysed, after the event, and we can pull to pieces the meaning of what was said. But no matter how we reorder them, recollection cannot quite make all the pieces interlock so as to reconfigure the event. Like the book of the conference and the website posting holiday photos, the reconstruction does not live up to the original event. That is why such historical events resist being taken as foundations. It is only if we freeze the moment of engagement 'in a snapshot' that the 'other is "caught" inside the self or "left" outside the self' and one is compelled to choose 'whether to take the one or the other' as a *foundation*.[55] The dialogue philosophers had put their finger on something deeper than the occurrence of human conversations. Like Irenaeus' seven heavens, the 'dialogue' which these philosophers discovered is a metaphysical or cosmic principle. The secret of the un-recreatability of dialogue on an intellectual level is its living creativity, the impact and interchange of two personalities, through language. Dialogue partners communicate something of themselves, and it is this *act* of putting oneself across which never quite figures in the reconfiguration of the meaning.

Something like this force of personality in the act of self-communication meets us in any work that comes from human hands and mind. The work is created, scene by scene, line by line, phrase by phase, in the author or composer's sensible and living act of thinking through some verbal or musical or visual form. 'That looks right', he affirms; 'That's the way it is', she judges, and thus they create the form which we eventually meet. Even a desk is the (preferably) static aftermath of a vibrantly creative act. But it is here that the troubles start, both for authors, and for an act analogous to authorship, existence. For, once he has nailed it together, joint by joint, there is no carpenter concealed inside my desk. The act of creative affirmation vanishes after the event, and we may well ask, 'Do we really meet the author?' or is it only his artefact that is present for our analysis? Neither creativity nor existence is conceptually or even imaginatively present to us: the only presence given to us is that of texts, and of solid things. But, even though conceptual thought has to rise above the anthropomorphic notion that, 'if it's really there, someone must be making it be', it may yet bow to the affirmation that things *are*, over and outside our conceptions of them.

[55] Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 169.

Greek religion and philosophy wrestled and split on the problem. In good Feuerbachian style, the 'theologian poets' who elaborated the Greek myths imagined the gods to be capricious and impenetrable, like themselves. One respects and fears the gods because their decisions cannot be systematically analysed, only confronted. Nonetheless, because its gods are thus personal, this religious cosmology affirms the 'who' in human: the Greek deities articulate the 'conviction that since man is somebody, and not merely something, the ultimate explanation of what happens to him should rest with somebody'. The names of the gods indicate 'forces, endowed with a will of their own'. Although such forces include every river sprite and the genius of each tree, Greek religion is ultimately 'monotheistic'. In Homer's *Iliad*, Zeus acknowledges a deep, irrevocable and simple 'will':

> Zeus cannot but consent to his own will, though his will is by no means identical with his own individual preference. What is the deeper will of the deeper Zeus is that everything may happen according to Fate and to Destiny. . . . Because the deeper will of Zeus is one with the invincible power of Fate, Zeus is the most powerful of all the gods.[56]

A religion whose 'monotheism' is wrung from impenetrable volition and personality was of no use to the Greek philosophers' quest to make the cosmos intelligible. Finding their goal in the Idea and the concept respectively, and thus substituting impersonal principles for personal deities, Plato and Aristotle parted company with the 'theologian poets' and thus with religion. Precisely because their belief in reason made 'humanists' of them, they also had to leave existence out of the equation. For, on the one hand, the 'human mind feels shy before a reality of which it can form no proper concept',[57] and, on the other, the real being of things cannot be conceptualized. The two greatest Western philosophers thus laid down something of the basis for the rationalist foundationalism which later bedevilled the Christian world.

If we have affirmed or judged that something really *is*, we may acknowledge that some act in things has met the act of our mind, but this act only exists in the thing we judge or affirm, not in our minds. When we think about a table, what gets into our thoughts and intentions is the concept of the table, not the block of wood. One can give a friend a reasonable definition of a novel without alluding to its author, and analyse the function of a table without mentioning its genesis or how it came to be. You don't even have to say that it

[56] Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, pp. 6, 22, and 10–11. Gilson's Augustine citation is from *The City of God*, and one can find it in Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), XVIII.14.

[57] Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, p. 69.

now *is*. If the *meaning* of the word 'table' included its existence, that meaning would be imprisoned in referring to *this one existing table*; conceptualization springs meaning from enchainment to *this*. It's only because the meaning of the word 'table' is neatly sprung from particular, concretely existing tables that we can use it to refer to any and every table.

There is, in a sense, no such thing as 'existence', only particular existents. The only reality existence has is in the particular thing. This is why it embarrasses and evades the only processes we have for detecting it: existence is a *particular* which is not a sensory datum. On the one hand, sensation gives us the *particularity* of things, but, tied to that sensed concretion, cannot rise to the thought of 'existence', and, on the other hand, understanding seems clued to the universal concept, and has no means of ascending or descending to the particular.[58] Aristotle resolved the dilemma by siding with the concept, proposing that the existence of a thing is its *form*. But then, since the form is what every tree or frog has in common, and 'Frogness' and 'Treeness' only exist in our minds, Aristotle's notion of forms can only address the mental conceptions, not the real existents. Thus, when he gave priority to the conceptual definition, Aristotle 'bungled the whole question' of universals: that is, he left individuals, or particular *existents* outside the realm of conceptual meaning.[59]

This is not the whole story, as Gilson, the author of *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again*, was well aware. Zubiri adds a nuance which explains Gilson's animadversions. He suggests that Aristotle meant more than one thing by the word 'being'. In fact, 'not only is' the Greek philosophical '*concept of being* not unitary' but 'neither is their *idea* of what *reality is by virtue of its being*'. Depending on which sort of object it is drawn from, the Greeks have had both a relatively static idea of being, suitable for conceptualization, and a mobile notion of being, too energetic wholly to be appropriated as the foundation for thought. Within Aristotle's thinking, 'being' is applied to various fields. When it is referred to 'material things'—especially inanimate objects—the Greek philosopher sees the being of things as their 'being there', their 'stability'. Such stability is potent fruit for the conceptual definition. Being then becomes 'synonymous with "stability," and "stability" with "immobility"'—that 'immobility' which is idolized in certain classical concepts of God, and deified in foundationalism. But on the other hand, in the writings of both Aristotle and Plato, there is also a notion of being taken from the observation of beings that move—*animate* existents, like puppies and fish. This gives us the *energetic* side of Greek metaphysics:

[58] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, pp. 171–3.
[59] Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, pp. 47–8.

If we sever from living movement what it has of mutation, and keep the simple internal *operation* of living, we shall understand what Aristotle told us in respect to living things, that their being is their life, understood as an immanent operation. Aristotle therefore calls being *energeia*, the substantive operation in which being consists. In this sense, being will be more perfect the more mobile it is, the more operative it is.

This indicates the realist and non-foundationalist side of Platonic and Aristotelian thought, and its *religious* side. Where being is a 'radical operation through which things are more than *realities*... they are something which *realizes* itself', one is directed toward the mystery of things. When we recognize that, 'in proportion as we approach the infinitude of being, the more shall we approximate to a pure activity, whose purity consists... in subsisting as... pure *energeia*', we are on our way to the animating intention behind the world, and the Gospels.[60]

Every a-religious philosophy tends to some kind of 'essentialism', which doesn't mean thinking of things as essential exemplars of Ideas, but, rather, preferring the *thought thing*, the 'pure' or 'known' essence to the mysterious existent. And, since things do actually exist, and ourselves and the universe with them, and it is the philosopher's business to advert to the whole of reality, not just to his method of knowing, it is a better philosophy which concedes priority to the religious and anthropomorphic belief that essences or definable natures speak to us with the force of some energetic, creative act which cannot be conceived. For the existential Thomists, it was Thomas Aquinas' vocation as a *Christian* philosopher to appreciate the significance of this act of existing, or to recognize what Wilhelmsen calls '"the paradoxical"... character of being'. Being is 'paradoxical' or mysterious, because it is the unconceptualizable source of the concept, the indefinable cause of definable natures. '"To be" cannot be defined', Wilhelmsen says, 'because it falls outside the entire order of definitions': 'if essence answers the question "what," it follows that existence or being is no "what" at all but rather the principle through which every "what" *is*.'[61]

One can resurrect a canonical Bible, as Brevard Childs did, or the 'received' form of Christian Scripture, bearing its typological emblems, without adverting to the historical reality of the events described therein. In fact, they may get in the way of the mind in search of a pattern. When Knights, or Frei, contemplated the imagery in which they delighted, what was held before their mind's eye was the potency of a textual structure, the potential of words to be

[60] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, pp. 360–3.
[61] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 39.

activated as particular thoughts, or idea-pictures. There's no actual path from these potential essences, as they lie dormant in *Macbeth* or John's Gospel, or even from the intellectually activated essence, to any given set of historical events. For words, idea-pictures, or potential verbal-essences cannot create anything or make anything happen. Words and idea-pictures are the perfect vehicle of thought because they exist in the realm where pattern-forming is at home, the world of the mind. Such patterns can be looped into a tapestry of beautiful knots, because essences have a cogency and order lacking to the mere ways of existence, in which unpredictable surprises, like the reappearance of religious fundamentalism, meet us at every turn. This may be why, on the one hand, 'pure analysis . . . reflects a hostility towards history',[62] and, on the other, why Thomas Aquinas affirmed in his commentary on Galatians that the only reason why Scripture has both a literal and an allegorical meaning is that its divine Author works in two ways at once, inspiring the authors with the allegorical intention to go into their words, and making the literal history happen in reality.[63] The literal sense is the more basic, for Saint Thomas, because the allegorical meaning is, as it were, the 'idea' of history, the former its existential reality.[64]

Despite the privileges which Aquinas ascribed to the literal sense, it remains for him that the historical particular is accidental, not necessary, and therefore beyond the purview of philosophical or even theological *reason*: for Thomas, as for Thomist tradition, 'history lay outside the limits of that which is properly intelligible and thus below the proper area of concern for theology'.[65] Writing in the 1970s, Frederick Wilhelmsen spoke of a certain allergy to the philosophy of history in scholastic circles. He gives two reasons for the neo-Thomist 'fear' of history: maintenance of the 'Greek conviction that the historical was intrinsically unintelligible'[66] and a tendency to prefer logical possibilities to realities. Decades before, Gilson had suggested that his friend Jacques Maritain was not a full-blooded realist when it came to the act of judgement. Whereas Gilson spoke of judgement as uniting sense, image, and concept in the affirmation of a particular, contingent *existent*, Maritain defined judgement as an exercise which works on the logically possible.[67] In their war against modernist subjectivism, the neo-Thomists always bore

[62] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 51.

[63] Thomas Aquinas, *On Galatians*, Caput 4, Lectio 7.

[64] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 1.

[65] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), p. 76.

[66] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, pp. 110 and 120.

[67] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, p. 59; Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Geoffrey Bles, the Centenary Press, 1937), pp. 86–7, 93, and 114.

in mind that metaphysics is a *science*. Aristotelian *method* teaches that science is of the *necessary*:

> But the beings open to our experience in their actual existence are irredeemably contingent and mutable. Therefore the necessary truths . . . of metaphysics . . . can find no solid foundation in this contingent world, but only in the realm of the eternally necessary and immutable. This order is the order of the possibles. The constant insistence of Thomists such as Fathers Gredt and Garrigou-Lagrange, as well as M. Jacques Maritain, that metaphysics is concerned with being that is *possibly* existent squares fully with this insistence that metaphysics cannot speak of the condition of human life within history . . . For these men the historical order, involving contingency and matter and the inscrutibility of human freedom must remain foreign to speculative freedom . . . these thinkers fail to distinguish between metaphysical reasoning . . . and metaphysical judgement . . . [68]

When metaphysical *reasoning* deals in the universal and the necessary, it relies for its contact with reality on the metaphysical *judgement*, which affirms or denies the existence of particulars. If it forgets this, it prefers the logically *possible* to the real.

When George Lindbeck first claimed that what really matters in belonging to a religion is not thinking '*that* the religion teaches such and such, but rather *how* to be religious in such and such ways',[69] Thomists were naturally on hand to disavow this retreat from the objective content of Christian truth claims. 'If such an approach is to be carried through,' as Colman E. McNeill observed, 'it inevitably requires that doctrine itself be formal or "second-order"; or, . . . that it be contentless in the way that formal logic is, or in the way that the paradigm of a verb is contentless.'[70] If, as Lindbeck seems to assert, the primary thing in being Christian is the 'communality', or shared character, of its doctrines, and not the truth of the propositions found in the Creeds, do we not either deny that the Creeds *refer* to historical and supernatural realities, or at least attenuate the character of such reference, making it secondary to the immanent *coherence* of a religious faith? Thomists who knew that a proposition is only *true* when it adequates to the reality to which it refers were not spontaneously friendly to the idea that, rather than indicating the salvation history, 'Church doctrines' 'indicate what constitutes faithful adherence to a community'.[71]

[68] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 122, my italics.

[69] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 35.

[70] Colman E. McNeill, OP, 'The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth', *The Thomist* 44 (1985), 417–42, p. 421. We return to Fr McNeill's argument in Chapter 4, section 7.

[71] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 74.

The twist back from the real contingent existent and toward the mental logically possible concept in the metaphysics of neo-Thomism has a corollary, perhaps an historical heir, in Lindbeck's idea of the Christian religion as operating 'like a Kantian *a priori*', that is, a set of linguistic, biblically based 'categories'. Somewhat as, for the neo-Thomist, a concept is deemed to have a take on reality on the condition that there is a *logical possibility* that it could be instantiated, so, for cultural-linguistic theologians, 'adequate categories are those which can be made to apply to what is taken to be real'.[72] Acknowledging that, if one wants to affirm a 'conjunction' of statements as true, they must be internally 'consistent' or coherent, Jay Richards wonders, 'how is this necessary condition itself a form of *truth*?'[73] A *necessary condition* can be taken to be a form of 'truth' only if the kind of truth one is after is potential truth, or the conceptual possibility of truth.

Responding to Lindbeck's Thomist critics, Bruce Marshall argued that St Thomas was in accord with the postliberal conception of doctrine. He redescribed Lindbeck's idea of religious-linguistic categories in strikingly scholastic fashion:

> Categorial truth is essentially the fitness or adequacy of an ordered set of categories to describe reality. 'Adequate' categories are those which can be made to apply to what is taken to be real, and which therefore make possible, though they do not guarantee, propositional, practical, and symbolic truth. A religion that is thought of as having such categories can be said to be 'categorially true.' Categorial truth can thus be described as potential ontological truth, and a religion . . . has this kind of truth when its 'categories' are *capable* of being used to describe what is ultimately real. By 'categories,' Lindbeck appears to mean not only the vocabulary of a religion, but its syntax as well, . . . the paradigmatic or normative patterns according to which the terms in the vocabulary are combined. In Christianity . . . these normative patterns have reached a high level of fixity by being 'paradigmatically encoded' in a canon of sacred texts.[74]

Story Barthianism remains within the Aristotelian pattern of theology whose first methodological requirement for the scientific status of a proposition is that it be *necessary*, and which therefore grounds itself, not in contingent existents, however creative, but in logically possible concepts (or 'categories'). For Lindbeck, the reason why there is no religion without linguistic 'categories' is that we cannot think *meaningfully* without expressing ourselves in words.[75] Put many such categorical meanings together into a system or story,

[72] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 33–4 and 48.

[73] Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*', p. 42.

[74] Bruce Marshall, 'Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian', *The Thomist* 53 (1989), 353–402, pp. 359–60, quoting Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 48 and 116.

[75] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 48 and 64–5.

and one has a religion, one in which 'intrasystemic truth' consists in coherence with the other meanings; so that, for instance, one could say that 'reincarnation', is 'intrasystemically' false to Christianity, because it does not cohere with pieces of the Christian pattern of meaningfulness, which includes the idea of resurrection.

It was less easy for nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologians than it had been for Calvin and Aquinas to conceive of Scripture as God's revelation of *propositions* to humanity, because the biblical critics had shown those propositions to be all too humanly scotched together. Many of them spoke, therefore, of divine revelation as consisting in experiences which are later put into faulty human words. Against this founding of Christianity in something extrinsic to Scripture, the narrativists of the 1980s followed Wittgenstein in permitting no extra-verbal experiences to occur. But it could be contended that they shored up their foundation in Scripture at the expense of relegating the truth of *correspondence* to realities outside the biblical system to a second place, basing their faith solely in the intrasystematic *coherence* of their beliefs. Defending Lindbeck against the claim that *ontological* reality has no place in a story-theology, Marshall argued that 'he wants to give an account not only of the *truth* of Christian beliefs ("correspondence to reality") but also of their *justification* (adequate categories used in ways that are intrasystemically true)'.[76] For Marshall, what allies Thomas with postliberalism is the principle that what *justifies* the 'truth' of a religious proposition is that it could, *in theory*, be used to refer to reality: 'the mind', he observes, 'cannot be conformed to reality by means of propositions unless the categories or idiom of the sentences in which the propositions are uttered are themselves suited to describe reality'.

How is one to get from the potential 'justification' of religious symbols or meanings (as intrasystemic coherence) to their actual correspondence to reality? Given their methodological preference for the 'mental' over the real, narrative theologies find it difficult to elude making Christian beliefs or meanings 'correspond' to psychological acts. This is despite the fact that, as opponents of foundationalism, narrativists are looking for a non-subjective or non-epistemological definition of the Christian story. When Lindbeck states that any one religion 'functions like a Kantian *a priori*' he means that believers work through it as a given of their believing make-up, as, for Kant, space and time are *a priori* prerequisites of perception, not empirical or *a posteriori* artefacts of perception. When he claims that 'like a culture or language', a belief-system is 'a communal phenomenon that shapes the

[76] Marshall, 'Aquinas as Postliberal', p. 367.

subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities', Lindbeck wants to say that such story-systems work independently of the biographies of the story-holders; when he argues that, for a 'linguistic-cultural model of religion' 'the inner', rather than the 'outer' 'experiences . . . are viewed as derivative',[77] he adds that the story functions independently of storytellers.

How does that cohere with the claim of one Thomistic grammatician that, since it tells what I or we believe, the Christian creed is 'autobiographical'?[78] One of the Barthians who launched Lindbeck into his 'narrative hermeneutics',[79] David Kelsey, considered it crucial to the authoritative quality of Scripture that, when '*used in the context of the common life of the Christian community*' it '*functions to shape persons' identities so decisively as to transform them*'.[80] How can it be, for narrative theology, that the language of believers is intrinsic to their identity, that 'people *are* the language they use'?[81] The ideas that narrative 'creates' its speakers and that it is simultaneously the very shape of their identities are consistent if one considers, on the one hand, that the 'truth' of a biblical type is its communal *use* or *function*, and, on the other, one finds the successful operation of that function in psychological transformation.

A 'religion', Lindbeck says, 'is above all an external word, a *verbum externum* that moulds and shapes the self and its world'.[82] Construed in its function as a *means* of communication, language finds its home amongst the things we *do*. It is a tool of inter-action, or the inter-acting itself. It is a mode of praxis, one of the ways we work in the world. Thus, at the bottom of a story-based religion lies 'church practice': 'non-foundational' theology is a 'second-order' reflection on what comes first, that is, Christian behaviour.[83] What therefore makes a religion, say, Christianity, 'correspond' to reality is how Christians *follow through* their categories, how they conform themselves to reality via the Christian story. Thus, the corresponding of religious 'meanings' or symbols is, as Lindbeck puts it,

only a function of their role in constituting a way of life, a way of being in the world, which itself corresponds to . . . the Ultimately Real. Medieval scholastics spoke of the truth as an adequation of the mind to the thing . . . but in the religious domain, this mental isomorphism . . . can be pictured as part . . . of a wider conformity of the self to God. The same point can be made by means of J. L. Austin's notion of a 'performatory' use of language: a religious utterance . . . acquires the propositional

[77] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 33–4. [78] Lash, *Believing Three Ways*, p. 9.
[79] Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, p. 197. The other was Hans Frei.
[80] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 91. [81] Lash, *Believing Three Ways*, p. 86.
[82] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 34. [83] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 81.

truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps to create the correspondence.[84]

The examples which Austin himself gave of 'performative utterances', which recur in the writings of narrativists like Lash, are the words with which a ship is christened, and 'I do', as spoken by bride and groom. Like imperatives, performative utterances bring something about. They can 'fail', if spoken in the wrong context or with a requisite object or person absent. But, like imperatives, they cannot be true or false. What I *do* could only effect the truth of the case if the utterance is about me, as with a self-directed imperative, such as *Pull yourself together!* It is only quasi or 'hybrid' performatives which can be true or false: these are statements which refer to *ourselves*. If I say, 'I'm sorry', I *apologize* and thus bring my own contrition into effect.[85] On the narrativists' analysis, the performing of religious symbols brings about their 'truth'. Where could such a 'truth' happen? Only in the minds or psychologies of believers.

One objection to this way of interpreting the Christian religion can be posed in terms of a principle important to Barth: the particular ever precedes the general. No particular tellers of the Christian stories, no stories. No story is 'just there', in the culture; before operating as a 'quasi-transcendental (i.e. culturally formed) a priori'[86] language must be spoken, and stories told. In a late essay about the 'Literal Reading of the Biblical Narrative', Frei himself posed the 'particularity' objection. By the 1980s, reason-based foundationalism had died out, perhaps at the same time as what Stanley Hauerwas called 'Christendom'. It was now that Frei affirmed that the 'notion that Christian theology is a member of a general class of "narrative theology" is no more than a minor-will-o'-the-wisp'. Frei stated that the older, 'Aristotelian' conception of meaning is really a 'disguised' *Christian* idea of meaning, but one which only works in a Christian, or biblically based, context. Where the 'New Critics' had gone wrong, he thought, was to have 'detached' and 'generalized' the *Christian* idea that one specific text—the Bible—has a specifiable literal meaning, applying it to any and every text.[87] The original turn against Romantic criticism had been undertaken by men like T. S. Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate, who, whilst they are unlikely candidates for canonization, nonetheless staked their search for meaning in the historical

[84] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 65.

[85] Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*', pp. 48 and 51–2.

[86] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 36.

[87] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, pp. 142–3.

Christ. With the second generation of New Critics, those to whom Frei had noted his debt in 1967, there is no question of 'disguised' Christianity: speaking from memory, I would say that writers like Knights, Empson, Wimsatt and their Chicago colleagues would not have captivated young aesthetes from the post-war generation down to the 1970s if they had professed any other religion than a neo-Aristotelian devotion to reason and a neo-Kantian dedication to literature.

By 1983, when Frei wrote 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition', such gentlemanly rationalism had given way before the postmodernist theorists, who argued that since the meanings of texts are not controlled by authorial intent, so, their meanings are infinitely multipliable. Frei now argues that narrative theology only makes sense within the Christian community, the community constituted by a certain way of reading its Scripture. If he rightly wants to dissociate himself from 'New Critical foundationalism', how does he go about it? Why should the Christian Scripture have a literal, fixed meaning in a way that no other text can automatically be said to do so? Frei recalled the particularist, Barthian roots of his hermeneutical method:

> The reason why the intratextual universe of this Christian symbol system is a narrative one is that a specific set of texts, which happen to be narrative, has become primary, even within scripture, and has been assigned a literal reading as their primary or 'plain' sense. . . . it is once more a case of putting the cart before the horse . . . if one constructs a general . . . quality called 'narrative' or 'narrativity,' within which to interpret the Gospels and provide foundational warrant for the possibility of their . . . meaningfulness.[88]

This means that it is only in the Christian story that meaning is tethered to literality, each word affixed to a fact. Setting aside the mental, conceptualizing processes assumed to be universal by the neo-Aristotelians, Frei argues that there is just *one* such *process*, the process which goes on within Christian narrating, which is veridical. So, he remains within the same epistemologically oriented paradigm. Alongside some neo-Thomists of the 1950s and their New-Critical colleagues, he rewinds the tape behind where the existential events (in this case, the life of Christ) happen, but he winds it back *further.* Amplifying their orientation to methodological possibility, he winds the tape back beyond some universal process of understanding or reason, to a process of faith-knowledge, the method of the method, as it were, or 'thinking the Christian story'. Frei has rewound the process of the epistemic mechanism back a few steps, to the constructing of the story.

[88] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, pp. 147–8.

But, within this foundationalist fideism, the materials of the story—the lives of Christ and the apostles—remain immanent to the process of our believing in it. What he does not touch on is the Christ who made his life a story, donating the materials of his life to others to transmit. There is, in the New Testament, 'the image of a doing',[89] because of the impact of the personal existence of Christ on the persons of others, giving them to make the existential judgements about particular events in which the Gospels consist. As Barth himself has it, 'This personal way in which Holy Scripture speaks corresponds . . . to the fact that God is not something, but someone.'[90]

Having naturalized Aquinas as a postliberal by making him take the methodological issue of 'what is logically conceivable' to drive the existential issue of who acts in history, Marshall adds a story-Barthian spiral to the pattern: the stories which religions tell are 'particular', that is, different from one another, and it is logically possible 'that there is only one religion which has the concepts and categories to refer to the religious object'.[91] Voltaire is not the only thinker to have noted a certain disregard for consistency in God's choices: we would think it unsuitable or at least 'unforseeable and improbable' that God should address Moses out of a burning bush, that an ark can have any existential bond with a church, that an overnight emigration through seas miraculously parted should *be* the raising to life of a corpse, unless it had *actually been* that way. History can only be 'justified' after the event because its materials include pure contingencies such as the weather (the 'Protestant wind' of 1588, which gave us British rather than Continental Erastianism). Pascal was as playful with the incalculable probabilities of history as our contemporary 'virtual historians': 'If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter,' he observed, 'the whole face of the earth would have changed.'[92] Both history and literature indicate that the more *particular* an entity is, the less susceptible it is to general definition, the more unlikely and illogical its conjunction of 'categories'. Or, one can think of the human person:

What combination more a priori improbable, not to say contradictory and impossible, than that of a 'thinking body'? But this is that which, with the indifference born of a common spectacle, we call a man. That 'reasonable animal' which the manuals use as the most banal example of an essence and its concept is identical to Pascal's 'thinking

[89] Wilhelmsen and Brett, *Telepolitics*, p. 31.

[90] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, p. 286.

[91] Marshall, 'Aquinas as Postliberal', pp. 360–1.

[92] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), no. 32.

reed,' that is to say an abyss of contradictions whose paradoxical profundity strikes anyone who thinks about it . . .

It's only the existing of particular persons which makes the cohering of the apparently incoherent a real possibility. The possibility of an event does not swing it into happening: the existence of a cause does so. As Gilson puts it:

When all the requisite conditions for the possibility of a thing are fulfilled, nothing is assured except for the pure possibility of the thing. If one of them were lacking, the thing would be impossible, but from the fact that all the conditions are fulfilled, it does not follow that it effectively must exist. The abstract possibility of its essence does not even include the real possibility of its existence, so long at least as we do not count amongst these requisite conditions the existence of its cause, but if we do so, it is the being of the cause which makes of this possibility a really possible existent. *Omne ens ex ente*, everything comes from another being, that is to say, not from a possible, but from an existent.

The unconceptualizable and yet real particular *existent* is the seed-bed of all conceptual possibilities. The existing cause, like the actors who brought about the Second World War, or the playwright who writes *Macbeth*, do not 'cull' it from an expectant line of possibilities, external to themselves. Rather, the *existence* of Shakespeare is the possibility of Macbeth:

From the fact that there was a Bach, the *Passion According to Saint John* becomes a possible being, but it is in conferring existence upon it that Bach made it the being which it is: its existence is thus the source of its possibility. We know that the three chorales for organ by César Franck are possible, because he wrote them, but the fourth is impossible, because the musician died without having written it. Its existence is impossible and we will never know what its essence would have been, because, in order to know what this fourth chorale could have been, César Franck would have had to compose it. The essence of the work comes about at the same time that it begins to receive existence and in the precise measure that it does receive it. The existence of the artist is the first cause of the existence of the work of art, and constitutes its possibility.[93]

If Christianity is not just something *we* do, but something which God brings into existence, its history is, like a work of art, only 'possible' after the event and because of the particular acts of its maker. Christianity is a particular *religion*, that is, a unique Church arising from divine acts which are given conceptual and imaginative unity in scriptural revelation. The Christian Bible's unlikely set of events and the gallery of rogues, fools, cowards, and patriarchs comprising its characters cohere in the animating intention of

[93] Étienne Gilson, *L'être et l'essence* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1948), pp. 301–4.

the authors to make a history. Although it may seem natural to ascribe the narrativists' lack of interest in historical events to *fideism*, their idea that only biblical inerrantists could be concerned about 'the factual veracity of the text'[94] that exhibits Christ and his 'types' could equally be defined as a kind of 'intellectualization of being', with the attendant 'presumption that the real is logical'.[95] It would indeed be 'confounding for someone to insist on the rule that *We should ascribe to Christ all the human and divine attributes we can*, but blush at the assertion that *Jesus is fully human and fully divine*'[96] unless that person preferred the logicality of rules to the unquiet sea of contingent persons and events which we call history. The interpretation of Scripture requires a theology of history, one which speaks of the human person not only as rational but as historical. The Christian metaphysics which could address that need would need to embed itself in what Wilhelmsen calls 'radical contingency':

> If a Christian metaphysician had to designate the contingent being he encounters from without and experiences from within, he might do well to call it 'Providential.' In its radical contingency, being points to its Author and thus proclaims itself as gift. Whereas no gift has to be, no gift can be called an accident because this would violate the dynamism of love. We here have passed beyond the substance–accident, necessary–contingent categories. In the Greek world, nature manifested a consistency of operation that revealed a world of law that was not to be found in history. . . . The ontology of history is . . . the metaphysical penetration of the modes of being proper to man as history. To deny reality to such a discipline on the grounds that history is contingent and non-necessary would be to deny reality to metaphysics as such: all created being is contingent and non-necessary![97]

4. The Idea of Resurrection as Foundational

The resurrection is a key example of the way story Barthianism tries to account for something described in Scripture without appealing to a feature of human psychology. For two centuries, liberal Christians have sought to recommend the life, passion, and resurrection of Christ by intimating that it has much in common with the myths of dying and rising gods. Since it is a tenet of Barthian theology that the Christian God has no relation to a general philosophical idea of God, story Barthians took it in hand to show that the resurrected Christ is unlike the reborn Osiris. For Frei, it is myth, as distinct

[94] Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, p. 209.
[95] Gasset, 'History as a System', p. 195.
[96] Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*', p. 49.
[97] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, pp. 126–7.

from the Christian Gospel, which affirms the idea of 'resurrection' as a form of collective psychic healing. Liberals, he says,

> argue that the Gospel story most likely supports their view of human identity because it is the commonly held view. Moreover, it supports the element of myth in the religious matrix out of which early Christianity arose. The New Testament, so it seems, shares the common heritage of mythological religion. It is in pursuit of the latter issue that we are driven to the suspicion of mythology at the very heart of the Gospel story... It is... true that mythological, saving gods died and rose again in liberal numbers in the ancient Mediterranean world... the common cultural backdrop and similarity in themes which the Gospel narrative shares with other redemption stories is bound to raise the question concerning whether the Christian story is at all unique. This being the case, I shall not attempt to evaluate the *historical* reliability of the Gospel story of Jesus or argue the unique truth of the story on grounds of a true, factual 'kernel' in it. Instead, I shall be focusing on its character as a story...[98]

For Frei, the non-generalizable, or unique, non-psychological and non-mythic quality of the resurrection is pin-pointed by the Gospel story which announces it. Efforts to verify the story from without, for instance by reference to historical data, miss this target and issue in generalizations about human psychology.

Postliberal theology strives to identify God by 'narrating a story or a series of stories'. These are not taken to be *human stories* about God, or even God's stories *about* himself, as I might tell you a bit about myself. Barth stated that 'Revelation is... the predicate of God, but in such a way that the predicate coincides exactly with God himself.'[99] For story Barthianism, God's revelation in Christ *is* God. The subject, the revealing Christ, *is* the predicate, God. As Robert Jenson puts it, quoting Barth, ' "God reveals himself as Lord" is "an analytical sentence"; what God reveals himself as, is exactly as the one who is able to reveal himself.'[100] What Christ does, the plot of his movement through Scripture, is not something outside or extrinsic to who God is. It is God turned inside-out. If we want to know God's identity, *this* is where we look, because it shows not so much '*what*' God is, but God's 'Is' itself. God's '*Is*' is the three-fold event of Revelation. It is usually the movie stars rather than the characters they play which imprint themselves on our memories. One reason for this is that, 'in most cases the film actor plays *himself*'.[101] That is, like a sportsman, he builds up and utilizes a skill in enacting a human type. Just as we see Martina Navratilova as *the* tennis player, so we see Sigourney Weaver as

[98] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, p. 51.
[99] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, p. 152.
[100] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 101.
[101] Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, p. 135.

the muscular *femme fatale*. Selected for his ability to *do* a particular stereotype, and visually to encapsulate our idea of this type, the film actor repeats himself in a sequence of starring roles. The cinema actor displays a skill in doing a type. The story-Barthian principle is similar. In Scripture, God plays himself: 'The resurrection, says Barth, was Jesus' "self-declaration." This is why the structure of New Testament narratives clearly centers on the resurrection: it is the event in which Jesus' identity was decisively manifested.'[102] In the resurrection, God does himself most nakedly.

Two of the most well-known movie closure scenes are freeze-frames, the hail of bullets with which Bonnie and Clyde meet their end, and the 'translat[ion] into immortality' of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, frozen in the instant of bloody execution: 'stopping the departing subjects in their tracks'[103] photographs their immortal identity in the mind of its audience. Frei speaks of the ' "self-manifestation" ' of identity as being the element in a story which gives a reader the 'ah-ha' moment when the suspect makes the give-away move which supplies the clue to his character, allowing us to recognize the criminality which *all* of his steps have quietly indicated. Readers of good novels can acknowledge that it 'is in the final sequence' that a 'person as individual figure' is 'most clearly accessible'.[104] In modern literature and film, such identifying freeze-frames can be seen as the continuation of the most dramatic element in nineteenth-century melodrama, that is, the theme of 'recognition'.[105]

Frei's study of *The Identity of Jesus Christ* is subtitled *The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*. It deals with the hermeneutical question of how we *identify* who Jesus is. Frei's answer was that we identify Jesus by what he *does*. Here we see the preference we mentioned earlier, for the notion of 'doing' over that of being. Where philosophies define, stories make their subjects *do*, and so describe them. Frei writes that,

> The appropriate answer to the question, 'What is he like?' is: 'Look at what he did on this or that occasion.' Here he was characteristically himself. If there is an instance . . . for a given person where we can say that he was most of all himself, we should say that his action in that instance does not merely illustrate or represent his identity. Rather, it constitutes what he is. A person is what he does centrally and most significantly. He is the unity of a significant project or intention passing over into its own enactment.[106]

[102] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 44.
[103] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 134–5.
[104] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, pp. 44–5 and 142.
[105] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 27.
[106] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, pp. 91–2.

Frei recognizes that there is such a thing as an 'implicit intention', one which is not yet enacted. But 'implicit intention' is for him intention with the real potential for actualization, a dynamic idea wiping its shoes on the threshold of realization: 'An intention, unless impeded or frustrated, is no intention and has no mental status at all except as a plan to be executed. The expression "I intend" is rightly and logically followed by a verb, i.e. an action word.'[107] 'Intention' must be acknowledged in its synthesis with 'action', because it is through what a character *does* and how he is *done by* that readers *identify* him. Impressed by Gilbert Ryle's criticisms of the Cartesian notion of the human subject as a 'ghost in a machine', a soul behind or inside a body, Frei 'no longer thought of persons as having an essential self somehow indirectly manifested or presented in their words or deeds'.[108] Rather, 'a person is as he acts'.[109] Hence, we identify Jesus by the action and passion of his storied-character. As Thiemann notes, '*A doctrine of revelation is an account of God's identifiability.*' If theology is to provide 'identity-descriptions'[110] of God, it must draw them from God's actions, and take those actions to be purposive-intentional, not random.

For Frei, the Gospel story presents the dual interlocked intention of Jesus and the Father. Jesus' acted-character is the project of obedience to the Father. How to pin-point this character? Frei considers that chasing after Jesus' *psychology* as the foundation of his story or character will only launch us into projecting our own human psychology onto him. He wishes to avoid the foundationalist's pitfall of selecting a universal human characteristic, such as love or the sense of dependence on the infinite, and projecting it on to Jesus. He aimed at moving beyond that 'grand trajectory of modern theology... caught up in... quasi-psychological claims about Jesus' self' observable in modern liberalism, from 'Schleiermacher's claims about Jesus' God-consciousness to Tillich's account of Christ as the expression of the New Being'.[111] Sidestepping liberalism entailed reading Jesus' intention from the *surface* of the story, as art historians read the code of narrative and allegorical paintings from their pictorial sign language. Jesus 'signs' his obedience by his behaviour. It is not detected '"deep down"' in him; we do not have to X-ray his 'private' consciousness to recognize it. 'Deep down' goes in inverted commas, because, on this analysis, there is no 'story behind the story', no 'inner intention' to be

[107] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, p. 92.
[108] Placher, 'Introduction', in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 10.
[109] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, p. 45.
[110] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, pp. 153 and 89.
[111] Placher, 'Introduction', in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 12.

sought out.[112] Frei wants no 'speculative inference' back behind the story. That is the point of making theology *descriptive*: 'for the description', Jesus' identity is 'not ineffably behind but directly in and inseparable from the events related in the story'.[113] For, as Kelsey put it, 'what one knows about the story's central agent is not known by "inference" from the story. On the contrary, he is known quite directly in and with the story, and recedes from cognitive grasp the more he is abstracted from the story.' Or, as Brooks has it, describing the French melodramas,

> 'Character' is . . . generated as a simple sign from a set of bipolar oppositions and cannot arrest our attention by any illusion of 'depth' or 'innerness.' Psychological talk about 'identity' doesn't work in a theatre where 'persons are so very typological . . . Anagnorisis in melodrama . . . has little to do with the achievement of psychological identity and is much more a matter of the recognition, the liberation from misprison, of a pure signifier, the token for an assigned identity. In a universe of such pure signs, we are freed of a concern with their reference—conventional and typical, this is immediately established—and enabled to attend to their interrelationship and hierarchy. . . . What counts is less reading through the signs than finding the right signs in relation to others, making the correct gestures, recognizing the important gestures.[114]

Intentions must be on the outside, because they are what make a character *identifiable*. Since Frei is doing biblical *hermeneutics*, his first question is *how do we pick out*, name, or detect, the unique identity of Christ? Christ is identifiable within the hermeneutical circle of the Gospel story, which is his sign. We know his identity is *unique* because it is presented to the interpreter by the biblical signs. We can only come by it through *this* Gospel.

Frei's first question was, how does a Christian reader identify Christ from the Gospels? The second hermeneutical question which he sets himself is, how is Christ's identity presented to believers? This is the issue of 'self-manifestation': how does the Gospel Christ *identify himself* to us? How is the recognition scene to be choreographed? In the Gospels, Frei thinks, the 'self-manifestation' of Christ is the resurrection. No empty-tomb man, Frei attends to the resurrection *appearance* of Jesus to the women in the Garden. He looks from this appearance to the lines, 'Why do you seek the dead among the living?' (Luke 24.5), and interprets them by the Johannine 'I am the resurrection and the life' (John 11.25).

It is because the resurrected Christ presents himself as *life* that he *presents* himself. *Life* shows itself beyond force of conceptual contradiction: 'Jesus defines life; he is life: How can he who is life be conceived as the opposite of

[112] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, p. 94. [113] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 82.
[114] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 53.

what he defines? To think him dead is the equivalent of not thinking of him at all.' Frei compares the resurrection as God's self-naming to God's indication of his name in Exodus 3:

In response to Moses' query about his name, God tells Moses to convey to the Children of Israel that 'I AM' had sent him unto them. Immediately, as though in an explanation that says the same thing over again, God adds: 'Say this to the people of Israel, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you."' The reference to God as the God of Israel's fathers does not add something new to his being 'I AM.' For him to be and to be this specific one are the same. Similarly, for Jesus to be and to be Jesus the Son of Man and Israel's redeemer are one and the same thing.[115]

Frei wants to rid Christian hermeneutics of the '*How can we know*' question, the back twist to epistemology of modern philosophy and theology. He says that 'it is not the power of our thinking that makes' Christ 'present; it is he who presents himself to us'. The Christ-sign has the existential force to present his identity because he is God. It is as '*I Am*' that he presents himself to Mary Magdalene. What she sees on Easter Morning is the divine '*I Am*.' Or, more precisely, what she sees is the *doing* of the 'I Am', the 'I Am' in its acted projection.

When Frei affirmed that the resurrected Christ is not posited or projected by Christian faith, but, rather, that 'it is he who presents himself to us',[116] he meant that the resurrected Christ 'renders the identity of God' *as God*. The resurrection shows who God is, imbuing our language with a picture of God which it thereby validates. Jenson follows this through by claiming that this self-gift of the divine identity is the Christian's proof of the existence of God. Like Barth, Jenson wants to differentiate the theist's 'classically proven' God from the God of the Gospel: 'As all the ontological determinants of the God of classical Western culture-religion come together in his ousia, so those of the gospel's God come together in the event of Jesus' resurrection. If Jesus is not risen, this God simply is not. If we bend the old language a little, instead of replacing it, . . . we may say that the resurrection is this God's ousia.'[117] God is thus *directly* identified, or intuited. The resurrection, as the self-revelation of God, gives us the idea of God. Since one of Jenson's motives in preferring 'resurrection' to 'ousia' as a name for God is that the former is an event, the latter an *idea*, the move is not entirely felicitous. For the resurrection supplies an ideationally definable act which *is* God. Jenson claims that, 'As witness

[115] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, pp. 148–9. [116] Ibid., p. 14.
[117] Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 168.

to the Resurrection, the gospel is a determinate object of thought.'[118] The thought of a determinate object is an idea. For Jenson, to know the resurrection is to intuit the idea of God, as the determinant of that piece of divine behaviour.

All of the narrative theologians affirm that the resurrection renders God's identity. Jenson adds nothing to this when he remarks that, 'Were God identified by Israel's Exodus or Jesus' Resurrection, without being identified with them, the identification would be a revelation ontologically other than God himself. The revealing events would be our clues to God, but would not be God.'[119] That it 'is he who presents himself to us' is for Hans Frei as much an analytic statement as it is for Jenson: that is, 'he'—the subject—*is* the predicate, 'presents himself'. Logical transparency is a mark of analytic sentences: the predicate equals the subject, and both sides of the equation are equally visible to us. Both ideas match. A direct intuition of God's identity—seen in the perfect match of the resurrection—thus becomes the *foundation* of Christian theology. Narrative theology fails to renounce foundationalism because it thinks of Christ as an *identity* rather than as an *existent*. Sidetracked by its anti-apologetic focus on the *unique identity* of Christ (as opposed to his historical and ontological particularity), narrative theology backtracks into the epistemic act of identifying its sources.

Frei is imagining Mary Magdalene or the other apostles reading meaning off the resurrected Christ with an immediacy similar to that in which he himself, as a theological New Critic, extracted meaning from a text. No such writings as Frei had before him existed until several decades after Christ rose from the dead. Mary Magdalene did not meet up with a text, but with a *person*, who forbade her to touch him. We will later draw from this the notion that Christ left 'the *apokalupsis* of his enduring hiddenness to the Spirit and the Church'.[120] But first we need to indicate that, because the foundations to which it reverts are not mediated by the body of Christ, the story Barthians' efforts to avoid psychologizing the character of Christ, and thus that of resurrection belief, backfire. The aim of our contention that *doing* and performing are insufficient axes in theology is to let theology rest from these activities, in the love of God. We will suggest that narrative theologies defeat their own aims because they do not consider the particular persons from whose love the resurrection stories flow.

[118] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 12.
[119] Ibid., p. 59. [120] Von Balthasar, *Glory* VII, p. 219.

5. The Movie Actor

Assuming Aristotle's idea of drama as the 'imitation of an action', Henri Gouhier described this imitation as the '*rendering present* of an action'. This enables us to compare what it would be like to know the resurrection in a movie actor's performance of it with how it would be put across by an actor on stage. A theatre actor has to be physically *there* in order to appear; his presence is bodily: *he* is there, the character he plays taking flesh in the man on stage. If he *stages* his resurrection, Christ makes his wounded body his presence to a designated audience. If you saw Olivier as Shylock, you have seen Olivier himself, using his body to play the Venetian Jew. His body did Shylock. But if you saw Al Pacino in the movie *Merchant of Venice*, your engagement with the actor's presence was more subtle. For, whereas the 'cinema only ever speaks to us through an intervening image' 'the soul of theatre is the having of a body'.[121] Wanting to complicate this distinction, André Bazin argued that, since cinema bill-boards advertise the 'flesh and blood' appearance of their movie stars,

> for the man in the street the word 'presence,' today, can be ambiguous . . . it is no longer . . . certain . . . that there is no middle stage between presence and absence. It is . . . at the ontological level that the effectiveness of the cinema has its source. It is false to say that the screen is incapable of putting us 'in the presence of' the actor. It does so in the same way as a mirror—one must agree that the mirror relays the presence of the person reflected in it—but it is a mirror with a delayed reflection, the tin foil of which retains the image.[122]

When we see someone in a mirror, Bazin claims, we *do* see them as present, although not 'face-to-face'. This works for live TV, but is insensitive to the cinematic experience of presence.[123] The temporal delay between shooting and releasing the image upon an audience entails that it is shown an image of what once had been there. The movie actor does not perform 'in the presence of spectators'.[124] The movie-actor donates himself to the camera, but he does not suffer the give and take of his audience, as theatre actors do. It is the camera and projector which pass on his now disembodied image, as it were, the idea of him.

Why should we imagine that, as the story Barthians describe it, our access to the resurrected Christ is more like that of a screen than a stage actor? The parallel is that both the resurrected Christ, as narrativists conceive him,

[121] Henri Gouhier, *L'essence du theâtre* (Paris: Plon, 1943), pp. 22 and 30.
[122] Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* p. 97. [123] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 26.
[124] Gouhier, *L'essence du theâtre*, p. 31.

and the movie actor play themselves. The difference between movie star and stage actor relates to the relative priority of being and doing in the creation of a part. The stage actor *is* his own physical self, and he does his role by grasping his physicality from within and taking it up into the part. His physical space is assumed into his playing the part; he does the role in his physical existence, or does the role he is. Conversely, the screen actor is the role he *does*. Steering clear of making Christ's inner life the locus of his identity, Frei tells us that,

> He becomes who he is in the story by consenting to God's intention . . . The characterizing intention of Jesus that becomes enacted—his obedience—is not seen 'deep down' in him, furnishing a . . . central clue to the quality of his personality. Rather, it is shown in the story . . . to indicate that it characterized him by making the purpose of the God who sent him the very aim of his being.[125]

Known in his *doing*, Frei's Christ is not so much an actor as an action. Like a 'screen performer' he is 'essentially not an actor at all'. A stage actor learns to *project* a certain identity or character. Just as Roger Federer exhibits his training by serving unreturnable aces, so Walter Matthau shows us how to do the Slob. A movie-star 'cannot project' or express his self to the camera. He simply does his 'study' in the role, and it is this performing of an action which is 'projected' by the cinematic technologies.[126] What the camera captures is a study in how to play a specific action. Frei writes: 'What is a man? . . . A man . . . is what he *does* uniquely, the way no one else does it.'[127] The story-Barthian Christ personifies the *action* of resurrection; his person is consequent upon or a factor of his doing. His physical persona is subsumed into the action-move of resurrection.

For Jenson, turning inside-out, articulating himself, is what it means to be God: 'This act of interpretation *is* God.'[128] And likewise, a film actor is what he does for us: 'An exemplary screen performance is one in which, at a time, a star is born. . . . "Bogart" *means* "the figure created in a given set of films." His presence in those films is who he is . . . in the sense that if those films did not exist, Bogart would not exist, the name "Bogart" would not mean what it does. The figure it names is not only in our presence, we are in his, in the only sense we ever could be. That is all the "presence" he has.'[129]

Our bodies are the locus of our unity or singularity; You and I are whole or one because each of us *is* a certain physical space. And so, the stage actor uses

125 Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, p. 107.
126 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 28 and 37.
127 Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 57.
128 Jenson, *God After God*, p. 125.
129 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 28.

her body to make her character a unity, so as to project an integrated 'stage image' throughout a play. On the other hand, the projected image of the screen actor is unified by a cutting process into which he does not enter, as an actor: whereas the theatre actor *makes* herself a unified image, the screen actor is made one. Whereas the 'image' the theatre actor 'finally finds and fixes in himself and in the performance, he never separates from himself as from a living, feeling, and speaking person', the 'edited image' which comes out of movie acting 'has ... been subjected to a technical finishing process quite impossible of application to a living being'.[130] The resurrected Christ of story Barthianism is a passive recipient of imaginative unity because the aim of the story is not to give us a person resurrected in the body—for this would be evidentialist—but to identify the idea of God.

6. The Movie and its Audience

Like the Ten Commandments, some of the structural features of a genre are most noticeable as prohibitions. Some of the rules of the movie genre leap out at us when someone winks at them: as when a screen actor winks at the camera. Such anarchial behaviour was common in the early comedies of Buster Keaton, W. C. Fields, and Laurel and Hardy. When Hardy 'looks at the camera, straight down the lens for 10–15–20 seconds' we have departed from 'closed romantic realism. Hardy's look ... bridges the gap between the audience in the auditorium and the screen on which the mayhem unfolds. ... mainstream film drama seldom addressed the audience directly, since the whole logic of Western storytelling was to draw the audience into the action, making them forget that they were outside it, watching a movie'.[131] Such comic transgressions send up the project of the movie-audience, its endeavour momentarily to escape the task of lining up experience and reality, and taking responsibility for the alignment. The first commandment of movie-viewing is that the experience is the reality: Hardy's 'self-reference satirizes the effort to escape the self by viewing it, the thought that there is a position from which to rest assured once and for all of the truth of your views'.[132] The wink reminds us that we are, after all, external viewers of a scenario which is supposed to be 'taking place' outside our minds. It punctures the movie experience by recreating the difference between actors and audience.

[130] Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, pp. 286–7.
[131] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, p. 147.
[132] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 126.

Identification with a hero or heroine is one of the great pleasures of film. Movie viewers experience a totality of 'identification' with a film which is denied to theatre audiences. For, as Bazin notes, the presence of a stage actor's body sets up a barrier, a line of 'mental opposition': for cinema-viewers, since the actor's body is absent, the line is easily crossed.[133] The stage actor wards us off, building a distance between the character with which he alone is identified, and his audience. His body is a tacit *noli me tangere*. Once *The Sick Kitten* had pioneered the close-up, screen actors 'became giants in the foreground. Out of such imagery grew movie stars and the devotional, psychological aspect of cinema'—the movie actor as celebrity was produced by the psychologically engaging close-up, which brought the audience one-to-one with their heroes.[134]

Movies engender literal identification because the synthesizing process of editing is a technological imitation of ordinary human neuronic processes: our minds are constantly editing our sense intake, cutting and pasting our neural reactions into meaningful images. We may fail to notice the structural similarity of melodrama to movie because our notion of melodrama is dominated by the idea that Victorian performance styles were *histrionic*, whereas movies seem naturalistic. But the lifelike absence of stagey exaggeration is an illusion created by the technology. Movie actors do not *project* when they act before a camera; this is done for them, first by the zooming camera lens and then by the editing process. The histrionics or heightenings are carried out by the zooming camera lens rather than by the performers. The *camera* silently performs the histrionics on behalf of the actors, for instance, when it pans in on an actress's face. When they watch the projected results, movie goers undergo a tacit, internalized melodrama, a histrionic scene played out amongst their own sense-images. The camera makes this happen, not by imitating what an *actor* does to mark out a moment as significant, but by replicating what an *observer* does when something thrills them, such as staring intently at the scene, and holding it in the mind's eye. The histrionics are subtly shifted to our own sensing processes, and the distinction between performer and audience is eclipsed.

Since this synthesizing process is common to all movie viewers, we do not undergo it alone. It functions collectively. The viewer of a movie has a diminished capacity for existential judgement. When we *understand* something, we reflect on how our ideas about it interrelate. When we lay down an existential *judgement* on a concept, we say *it is*! or *it is not*! A judging process has two terms. One of these, the bodily existence of the actor to be judged, is

[133] Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, p. 99.

[134] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, pp. 31 and 42–4.

not on display to cinema viewers. From the other term, that of the audience, movies are constructed with a view to becoming sensory experiences, that is, to striking us in the faculties we share with others, rather than in our individuating and existential capacity for judgement. We 'get' the idea of a movie, and evaluate it. Rather than *judging* or affirming a movie's reality, we *understand* it, as we think through how its outcome relates back to its premises. *Understanding* prevails over judgement in response to movies, because what is presented to us is already abstracted from existential or real conditions: though it be photographed from real actors, the abstracted images on display are materially no different from cartoon or digital pictures. Although movies taken from real persons often give a stronger taste of reality than cartoons, and movies with a heavy admixture of digital imagery affect us aesthetically as relatively 'weightless',[135] all of them, by dint of the medium they use, present the *idea* of persons and places, abstracted from their real existence. But, whereas, '[i]deas in a state of pure abstraction are impersonal, common, the universal property of the race, [j]udgments . . . always involve the whole man and are therefore personal.'[136] The popularity of a Hollywood movie is often, although not infallibly, a higher index of its quality than that of a play. For movies are constituted to play to what is collective in the human psyche and its material make-up. Whereas it takes a concrete, existing person to judge a real existent, ideas are there for the taking by the common mind. So, on the one hand, the inclination 'to identify' oneself 'with the film's hero by a psychological process' will 'turn the audience into a "mass" and . . . render emotion uniform'.[137] And, on the other, the movie star belongs to his or her audience in a special way. He or she has no privacy, because the most compelling experience the audience has of the stars is as undifferentiated from its own conscious experience. Any public figure who lives through the lens is experienced as an extension of the collective psychology of his viewers:

Neuronic Man does not believe in the fixed and absolute status of the individualistic 'I.' The world does not exist as a visual perspective to be conquered but rather as a surrounding field which englobes him and calls forth from him total participation in its reality. Neuronic Man lives in the group. The group is summed up in the image of the leader who is not a lonely Renaissance individual but a corporate figure, a myth, who sums up the dreams of those who participate in his life. The neuronic leader has no private life; more accurately, his private life is externalized and made public, as is the unconscious itself.[138]

[135] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, p. 458.
[136] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 115.
[137] Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, p. 99.
[138] Wilhelmsen and Brett, *Telepolitics*, p. 30.

Celebrity status can be measured by imitation, the number of those who aspire to do as the star does. Aspirant celebrities believe that to *do* as a star does is to *be* a star.

This notion of knowledge, in which the 'truth' of an image is measured not by a correlation between a viewer and an existential reality but by the extent of the viewers' psychological participation in it, is aptly rendered in George Lindbeck's claim that 'Christ is Lord' is not 'true' in the mouth of the Crusader who utters it whilst bringing his axe down on the head of his opponent.[139] Making it 'difficult for someone to be a hypocrite',[140] and impossible to distinguish the beliefs of bad Christians from false beliefs, Lindbeck redefines propositional truth as 'do-able' truth: 'A map . . . becomes a proposition, an affirmation about how to travel from one place to another, only when actually utilized in the course of a journey. To the extent that the map is misread . . . it is part of a false proposition no matter how accurate it may be in itself.' So the 'map' of Christianity is 'true' in so far as it gains psychological adhesion: 'the categorically and unsurpassably true religion is capable of being rightly utilized, of guiding thought, passion and action in a way that corresponds to ultimate reality, and of thus being ontologically ("propositionally") true'.[141] Once degree or quality of psychic participation is the primary factor in truth, 'truth' becomes a factor of the strength of the glue binding the observer to the image. On the one hand, an image is as 'true' as the faith which maintains it is authentic; and on the other, this ideational image lacks the particularity which only existential embodiment can yield. And thus the collective, and anonymous, celebrity is born. This discussion may serve to alleviate the sniggle of dissonance which will have arisen in some readers on hearing that a key cultural concomitant of the emergence of narrative theology was transcendental Thomism. Lindbeck intended his 'rule' theory as a third way between classicist propositionalism and an idea of doctrines as expressive of interior experience of which Lonergan was a typical exponent.[142] Our contention is that, not only does Lindbeck remain bound to expressivism, but he also carries the burden of the principle that the 'open structure of the human spirit' is identical in all.[143]

[139] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 64.
[140] Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*', p. 43.
[141] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 51–2.
[142] Lindbeck criticizes Lonergan's *Method in Theology* in *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 31–3.
[143] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 302.

7. Identity Equated to Story

We can sum up the previous discussion like this. Story Barthianism is, in Hans Frei's words, 'inquiring into the shape of a story and what it tells about a man, in contrast to metaphysical explanations that would tell us what sorts of things are or are not real and on what principles they cohere'.[144] It is doing this in order to detect what makes Jesus *unique*. It wants to pinpoint the *Gospel* resurrection, as against the multiple 'rebirths' of the 'saviour figures' of *Gnostic* myth. The unity or oneness, the idiosyncrasy of Christ is to be conferred, or discovered, through how he behaves, through the 'patterns of action' in which 'narratives . . . depict personal identity': 'If an intelligible narrative account, inclusive of those diverse patterns, can be given, then we can speak of Jane or of God as a persisting identifiable personal subject.'[145] We are looking for what personally belongs to Jesus Christ, for the 'acts in which Jesus has his being are *his* acts. They are enactments of his most basic and abiding intentions' and thus they '*constitute* his identity and do not just *illustrate* it'.[146] The purpose of reading Jesus' identity off his *deeds* is to avoid psychologizing him, and thus absorbing him into our collective human psychology, and thence reducing the resurrection to a collective psychic projection. The Schleiermacher–Tillich line in liberal theology is seen as having stepped straight into the arms of Feuerbach. So, Christ's identity is to be fixed or nailed, not by any historical or philosophical generalizations from without the narrative, but solely by the narrative itself. As Lindbeck has it,

> If the literary character of the story of Jesus . . . is that of utilizing, as realistic narratives do, the interaction of purpose and circumstance to render the identity description of an agent, then it is Jesus' identity as thus rendered, not his historicity, existential significance, or metaphysical status, which is the literal and theologically controlling meaning of the story. The implications of the story for determining the metaphysical status, or existential significance, or historical career of Jesus Christ may have varying degrees of historical importance, but they are not determinative. The believer . . . is . . . to be conformed to the Jesus Christ depicted in the narrative. An intratextual reading tries to derive the interpretative framework that designates the theologically controlling sense from the literary structure of the text itself.[147]

The reason why metaphysical or historical verification of the narrative is not to be sought is that extra-Gospel means of legitimating the story are taken to

[144] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, p. 87.
[145] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, pp. 88 and 112.
[146] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 39.
[147] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 120.

blur its uniqueness, permitting us to make no distinction between Christ and the 'Gnostic' saviour. According to Frei, the latter *is* a human projection, whereas the resurrected Christ of the Gospel is not. The Gnostic

> savior is the primeval man, in whom the innocence, alienation, and redemption of all those who have true insight is mirrored. Indeed, when they behold him they behold themselves. His being is nothing other than their presence to themselves or, . . . their grasp upon their own presence. This merging of the primordial man, the fallen and rising redeemer, with the realization of human self-presence is possible only because it takes place out of time; in other words, because it is a myth.

On the other hand, 'in the Gospel story, unlike the Gnostic stories, the savior is completely identical with a specific being, Jesus of Nazareth. . . . the Christian savior story is that of Jesus himself. He determines the story as the crucial person in the story. Hence, his identity is not grasped by a knowledge of savior stories.'[148]

We have argued, to the contrary, that a narrative identity is not strong enough to anchor a *particular* presence, because it is not physically embodied. It gives us the idea of the resurrected Christ. But, it does not point us along the way to the resurrected body of Jesus, as seen by Mary Magdalene and the other apostles. The upshot of this unmediated presence is that the resurrected Christ has an indeterminate, or group identity. Jesus' embodied existence is unique to him; our idea of him is the effect of pasting what he has done into a story. Owning his body, he freely makes himself through it; he has no such free self-possession or self-creation in our story. If it takes a real existent to cause any new thing, a real person to bring about an historical event, the real existent Christ is the pre-condition of the Church. The historicity of the risen body of Christ is not just '*evidence*' for the Church's foundation in something other than wish-fulfilment; his self-possessed existence is *who* creates the Church.

A unique, individual character or person speaks to another individual person or persons, one embodied act of being linking conversationally to another. There is a dialogue, as between person and person. And, in good conversations, they give themselves. Something of their own existence is moved by kindness or love to pass over to the other person. This is the everyday drama of social existence. Remove the actors, that is, the deliberate agents, and you have the story of their action. If we take away the deliberate, inward agency which creates the dialogue, we have a video or photo of the action, the plot-causality, minus what, or *who* specifically causes it.

[148] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, pp. 60–2.

The story is what is external to the action, and, to identify a character by their story is to equate the character with the story, which is the more general, less personal or unique element. Robert Jenson seems to grasp the drift of a theology which locates personal uniqueness *in* a story when he argues that God's story and God's name, that is, his identity[ies] are one and the same: 'the phrase "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" ' is, he writes, 'simultaneously a very compressed telling of the total narrative by which Scripture identifies God and a personal name for God so specified; in it, name and narrative description not only appear together . . . but are identical'.[149] Bonnie and Clyde *are* '*Bonnie and Clyde*'. Jenson states that, 'In the Bible the name of God and the narration of his works thus belong together. The descriptions that make the name work are items of the narrative. And conversely, identifying God, backing up the name, is the very function of the biblical narrative.'[150] 'God' *is* biblical narrative. 'God' has become the collective verb, or action-term, by which we designate the Christian set of beliefs as a whole. 'God' is taken to be, as it were, an eponymous movie because speaking the 'narrative' or hearing it, or passing it on, is not attributed to anyone in particular: story just happens, without being told. It can, therefore, only be understood as the undirected expression of archetypal human psychology.

Because it does not risk a reference to inwardness, or 'inner-to-outer' movement in its conception of how language, and thus narrative, works, story Barthianism both collectivizes and psychologizes the Christian drama. Like melodrama, it is not psychological:

> the characters have no interior depth, there is no psychological conflict. It is delusive to seek an interior conflict, the 'psychology of melodrama,' because melodrama exteriorizes conflict and psychic structure, producing . . . what we might call the 'melodrama of psychology.' What we have is a drama of pure psychic signs—called Father, Daughter, Protector, Persecutor, Judge, Duty, Obedience, Justice—that interest us through their clash, by the dramatic space created through their interplay, providing the means for their resolution.[151]

There is no psychology in melodrama, for it inhabits the 'realm of social action, public action within the world',[152] but melodrama is or acts out human psychology. Movies have sometimes been conceived as star-vehicles, and, at other times, the theory of the *auteur*, or director driven cinema, has taken hold of directors. But, *Citizen Kane* apart, viewing the director as the

[149] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 46. [150] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 7.

[151] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 35–6.

[152] Robert Bechtold Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 97.

auteur or author of his movie doesn't really work. The achievements and failures of the director's *collaborators*, like the screen and score writers, costumers, camera-people, actors, and editors enter into the substance of the finished movie: 'whereas a good play can be performed badly,' Gordon Graham remarks, 'bad performance in a film makes it to that extent a bad film. Directors do not stand to the outcome of their efforts as playwrights do to theirs.' Movies are collective productions, into which the work of actors, producers, script-writers, directors, camera-men, and others are seamlessly merged: 'it is an important fact about the medium . . . that it is a combined effort'.[153] A movie has no single maker or author. A movieish theology would have little to say about the authors of revelation, the persons who mediate the resurrected body to us. It would, instead, require us to subsume our personal identities in a collective story told from no-where and by no-one.

8. The Gospels Are Not Codes

Recent cinema theory has moved a long way from Bazin's 'realism'. Many contemporary cinema theorists consider that a movie presents the viewer or film theorist with a *code*. A code is a sub-species of a grammar. Every language has a grammar, or a set of rules for putting words together in meaningful combinations. We can see that codes presuppose the existence of language, because when we unscramble a code we find *another* language beneath it; whereas if one 'broke' the grammar of a language all that would remain would be Scrabble letters without relations or referents. Presupposing the existence of a language, a code is a set of rules by which one sign *really* means another, 'subscripted' sign. Cinesemioticists regard the way a film is shot as creating a code, which undercuts or overwrites what is represented in the movie. The shots are its sign-language, naming its real referent. Readers of spy novels know that codifiers try to prevent the unveiling of their codes by adding irrelevant signs, figures, or numbers. By this means, they make it difficult to know what counts as a *name* or sign in the code. Code-breaking requires the elimination of the irrelevant. One argument against conceiving movies as codes is that cinematic experience is too rich to permit the naming of its every feature. Allan Casebier argues that, '[e]diting, pace, music, camera angle, mise-en-scène, and countless other features all conspire to create' a movie's effect. A 'phenomenology of film experience reveals' that since 'we have *more*

[153] Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 114.

qualities than we have names for', 'the qualities that contribute to certain types of affect or representation are far too numerous to make it worth our while to give them names'.[154]

For the ancient and modern Gnostic, the Gospels are codes. Gnosticism *is* a gnosis, a way of casting meaning upon the universe. The Gnostic teacher or novelist is the one who knows the master *code* to Christ and cosmos, and can generate variations on it, which become the gnostic narrative. Casebier's argument pertains against the idea of the New Testament writings as codes: there is too much going on in them for anyone to translate every sign in the Christian Scripture into a name for something else. Madness lies in wait for those who would decode the Apocalypse against the signs of their times.

But is the Christian Scripture a 'grammar', and is the best response to Gnosticism to teach a variant 'grammar' of Scripture? According to Cyril O'Regan, 'the fight' between modern 'narrative ontotheologies' like those of Blake, Boehme, or Hegel, 'as between Irenaeus and Tertullian and the various gnostic specimens they are combating, is nothing less than a *grammaromachia*'.[155] On O'Regan's analysis, both Gnostic and Christian set out with the same material images, but use different formal rules for putting the 'signs' together into a meaningful story. Gnosticism produced its own Gospels, and used the Christian texts selectively, thus sidestepping the effects of what Casebier calls the 'total relevance factor'.[156] O'Regan's idea that Christians and Gnostics start from the same material images (such as the image of Jesus teaching the disciples) but turn them into different kinds of stories by manipulating them via different formal grammars assumes that the historical forms in question are like a low-grade novel, whose formal message is separable from its sensuous, imagistic content. Packing the message into the media is the soul or purpose of memorable historical and artistic form. It's only in bad art, or in trivial historical occurrences, that, because 'the form and content ... can be as artificially disjoined as they were artificially connected, the content can be repeated in abstraction, in concepts, that is, in the absence' of the whole physical and concrete image, 'the phenomenon itself'.[157] As with the material density of a great symphony, so the life of Christ resists being commuted into a formal concept that is separable from its singular basis. Casebier's 'total relevance factor' is the infinite overspill of material, never entirely encapsulable in a separate message or formal rule.

[154] Allan Casebier, *Film and Phenomenology: Toward A Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 56–7.

[155] O'Regan, *Gnostic Return*, p. 194.

[156] Casebier, *Film and Phenomenology*, p. 55.

[157] Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 187.

Lee Barrett has noted that there are two sides to Lindbeck's theory of Christian doctrine as a language, one in which meaning consists in the practical performance of the Christ-like life, and another in which meaning is formalizable in a distinct, formal, semantic grammar. When Lindbeck suggests that Christian doctrine works 'like a Kantian *a priori*',[158] he is imagining a 'purely syntactical meaning in which the significance of a concept would be determined by its role in a purely formal system'. But, as Barrett says, formal rules pin one down to little unless guided by specific concrete examples. This is because there is a potential infinity of ways of choosing 'to follow even a clearly formulated operational rule in a syntactical system'. Turning to Lindbeck's suggestion of three formal Christological 'rules'—Christological maximalism, monotheism, and the historicity of Jesus—Barrett notes that the John Wayne-like Christ constructed by Bruce Barton in *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925) achieves all of Lindbeck's 'rules' whilst being more in key with *Born in the U.S.A.* Gnosticism than with the Christian tradition. Christianity cannot enter debate with gnosticism clad in the armour of grammar, because the 'formal meaning of any rule is not prior to its paradigms'.[159] These paradigms are people, each with their particular personal qualities.

Commenting Christologically on Isaiah's phrase, a '*word shortened and cut short in justice; because a short word shall God make upon all the earth*', Irenaeus finds it to mean 'that men were to be saved not according to the wordiness of the law, but according to the brevity of faith and charity... And therefore the apostle Paul says: *Love is the fulfilment of the law*, for he who loves the Lord has fulfilled the law.'[160] If we take grammatical laws as our axis, rather than the historical and singular Christ, an infinity of divergent rules or 'grammars' could be produced to interpret him. Moreover, it is because it is 'the paradigmatic use which gives significance to the rule',[161] that we also need paradigmatic, historical *users* or hearers of the Words of the singular Christ. The Pauline analogy of the Church as the loving bride of Christ is best suited to thinking through the composition and interpretation of Scripture by the human and historical Church. Unless we want to think of Scripture as the impersonal and a-temporal foundation of the Church, it is helpful 'to affirm that, if there is to be a nuptial (and so some kind of personal) contradistinction between Christ and the Church... the basis of this lies,

[158] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 33.

[159] Lee C. Barrett, 'Theology as Grammar: Regulative Principles or Paradigms and Practices', *Modern Theology* 4/2 (1988), 155–71, pp. 160, 162–3, and 167.

[160] Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 86.

[161] Barrett, 'Theology as Grammar', p. 165.

indeed, in God's life imparted but no less essentially in the subjectivity and personality of the real subjects who form the Church'.[162]

Lindbeck developed the formal side of his theory of the meaning of Christian language to ensure trans-historical continuity of meaning. He hopes to shore up continuity or even identity of meaning from, say, Nicaea to the present by distinguishing material from formal meaning. He makes formal meaning or 'rule' the axis, because, as Barrett puts it,

> The application of this 'same' set of doctrinal rules is the basis for doctrinal permanence, while the shifts in world-views furnish the mutable element in doctrinal formulations. The same self-identical doctrinal principle can inform differing cultural matter; the repeated use of the same doctrinal rule provides the continuity between the changing cultural expressions of Christianity. . . . both first-order Christological affirmations and experiential responses to Jesus Christ can change according to transformations in the general cultural environment and yet be continuous in that they are governed by the same 'grammar'.[163]

Lindbeck's rules are supposed to function as decoding devices, which always and everywhere translate the Gospel images. But it may be that this is an impossible dream, because, 'curiously enough', the more finely image and formal meaning

> coincide, the more clearly and unmistakably the inside appears in the outside, that is, the more consummate a work of art is, the more its content eludes interpretative analysis. . . . No aspect of the work's sense has remained behind the expression; everything that was meant to be expressed has found its form. The upshot is that precisely the perfection of the expression is a perfect mystery. . . . Every time we encounter it, it is whole and intact and resists all analysis. [164]

Lindbeck's effort to avoid the material historicity of the images used in text and tradition does not work, because it is the material singulars which give meaning to the rules, and not vice versa: 'It is not as if language users already possess a significant formal scheme in advance of particular applications. The "form" of a language cannot even be conceptually distinguished from the "matter", much less declared to be logically prior.'[165] It may be that, just as it resists codification, so the Christian Church has to develop its grammar as it goes along, to account for the peculiarities of Christian existence.

[162] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. II: *Spouse of the Word*, trans. A. V. Littledale, Alexander Dru, John Saward *et al.* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), p. 157.

[163] Barrett, 'Theology as Grammar', p. 159.

[164] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. I: *The Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), p. 141.

[165] Barrett, 'Theology as Grammar', p. 163.

Our first objection to narrative theology is that it is so objectivistic that it cannot see that even the truth of Christ, his 'exposition' of the Father, itself needs an 'expositor'. In its haste to cut the ground out from under liberal subjectivism, it did not attend to the fact that the most objective of given truths needs to be consciously and subjectively apprehended and internalized by human beings. The content of Barth's assertion that God shows *all* of himself in Christ is not to be doubted; but this need not be drawn up into the 'idolatrous' idea that we can appropriate his revelation and make it our property. The infinite over-plus which is left out of this foundationalism is not unimportant, for it is God the Holy Spirit. When Christ reveals the Father to us,

> in the objective order the transposition is perfect, whereas the subjective apprehension and appropriation of this objective reality cannot be. . . . the infinite spaces of silence that inhabit the incarnating Word of God cannot be rationalized out of this transposition without the destruction of its integrity. . . . But a God who did not wish to give himself away to this extreme end, but withheld a piece of himself from us and for himself, would also no longer be our God; here, too, he would be an idol. . . . the Logos . . . is the 'super-word' (the intradivine self-expression) . . . the seemingly finite content of what he says . . . and thus the realms of silence that remain within it, are handed over to an ongoing, never to be ended hermeneutic of the Holy Spirit within the history of the Church.[166]

9. If the Church is Everything, Everything is the Church

Kelsey argues that 'to call a text "Christian scripture" ' means that 'it *functions* in certain ways or does certain things when used in certain ways in the common life of the Church'.[167] In order thus to function, two additional features are required. One is an origin, an impetus springing from a life lived in Christ. This is the *voice* of Scripture. We recall that the excellent novelist Caroline Gordon had stringent objections to Chesterton's adherence to the 'biographical heresy' exhibited in his remark that there is no such thing as a novel by Dickens, 'but only something cut off from the vast and flowing stream of his personality'.[168] If we bear in mind that a novelist does not want to express *herself*, but something which she believes to be objective,[169] Chesterton's remark must be allowed to stand, because without it, the 'laws'

[166] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, pp. 279–80.

[167] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 90.

[168] Gordon, *How to Read a Novel*, p. 13.

[169] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. I: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), p. 443.

of the work of art may belong 'to its own being', but they will have no overflowing existential truth in and beyond that essence. Conceived as what Lindbeck called a 'quasi-transcendental... *a priori*', Scripture has no particular voice. It does not leap from the mouth of Christ, through the mouths of the apostles and thence to the hearers of the Word. The second element is an end, particular purposes to be achieved by telling the story, such as to preach, to praise, to bless, to convince of the truth of God, resurrection, and Trinity.

Kelsey is interested in the shapes and figures which the scriptural stories construct. He notes that 'what theologians appeal to... is some sort of *pattern* in biblical texts'. Such 'determinate' '*patterns*', he says, are what 'make it "normative" for theology': 'To say that biblical texts taken as scripture are "authority" for church and theology is to say that they provide patterns determinate enough to *function* as the basis for assessment of the Christian aptness of current churchly forms of life and speech and of theologians' proposals for reform of that life and speech.'[170] What is the pattern of New Testament Scripture? The figure it seems to cut is a set of persons, say, Paul, Peter, John, James, revolving around Christ, the centre and motor of the drama. The narrative-theological claim that Scripture is about itself *is* true, to the extent that Scripture is about figures, or stereotypes, its authors. It describes the coming into being of the community formed by Christ, the Church. It is because it portrays Christ's bringing the Church into being that it speaks with the voice of Christ. Kelsey claims that 'it is the patterns in scripture, not its "content" that makes it "normative" for theology', but it seems to be more, and not less, 'narrative theological' to reply that the patterns *are* the content, where the patterns expose Christ's conscription of such persons as his authoritative 'voices' (as in Revelation 1, where the narrator is commanded by a voice).

There is a certain controversy over whether cinema is a naturalistic medium, or as inventively 'artificial' as any other artistic production. For Rudolph Arnheim, the 'art' of cinema 'begins where mechanical reproduction leaves off'.[171] For others, the fact that cinema is based on photography ensures that it inherently tends to realism. So devoted to the thesis that the camera literally replicates reality was André Bazin that he ranked nature movies as the perfect exemplars of the art of film. He may have been right up to a point, that is, the point of entry into mental process. Cinema really does capture what the world looks like, to us. The cinematic image is a perfect mirror image of the perceiving process. If one believed in God, the resurrection, or

[170] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, pp. 193–4.
[171] Cited in Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts*, p. 108.

scriptural revelation, in this way, one would believe in one's own believing processes. This is why epistemology, even one so sound as Aristotle's, cannot be the foundation of a theological system. Considered foundationally, even a concept that *has* been drawn from reality is simply a mental idea. So that, if we place a text, or shared inter-textual meanings at the basis of Christianity, the being of the Church is equated with the holding of an idea. The Church is then created by shared adhesion to this idea or narrative.

What we find cloudy or docetic in the postliberal idea of the Church and its Scripture relates to its lack of the notion of the existential judgement, the judgement which says 'it *is* so'. Whereas *understanding* makes meanings cohere, one with another, within the synthesizing process of the mind, a *judgement* concerning existence says, not 'this is coherent', but, 'this *is* so'. For every particular existent, there is a correlative existential judgement, to which the existence of any particular event or set of facts gives rise. One has to be an existent, a person, to make them. In the existential judgement, we move beyond the *process* of thinking to the personal *act* of knowing: 'Man thinks when what he knows is his own thought, man knows when the object of his thought is an existent. To know another being is thus not abstractly to conceive an essence nor even to formulate its law, it is to seize the essence in the existence which actualizes it.' Because we 'do not abstract essences in order to know essences, but in order to know the beings to which they belong', 'all real knowledge includes existence in a judgement, the final expression of a vital exchange between two actually existing beings'.[172] In such a judgement, a person is oriented through his or her own particular existence to something or someone else's existence. As a projection of the perceiving and synthesizing process, the camera does not make existential judgements. If the Church's act of projecting meaning is everything, everything is the Church, because— without any existential input, there's not enough to distinguish one meaning from another. It's because existent things are distinct from each other that we make distinct judgements about them. Unless they were forwarded by existential judgements, meanings could not belong to particular objects, and thus could have no specificity. 'Meanings' cannot particularize, either, for the Aristotelian, because they are common concepts (that is, universal concepts common to many objects), or for the postmodernist, because they exceed any specific denotation. And likewise, it is not mind, minds, or Mind which take in and affirm the reality of particular existing things, but particular sensitive, imaginative, knowing, human beings.[173] The personal intention animating its texts is what creates the Christian Church.

[172] Gilson, *L'être et l'essence*, pp. 287 and 295.

[173] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, p. 174.

Despite its aim of avoiding foundationalism, the hermeneutics of narrative theology misses its own best intentions because it is using a non-relational idea of truth. Instead of turning to the other, this a-historical idea of truth keeps twisting back on itself, generating a fideistic foundationalism. Just as the romantic ideas of persons and their intentions was anathema to the Older New Critics, so such notions as experience and consciousness are deprecated by the narrative theologians—because 'consciousness' smacks of foundations. But this is in itself an anti-historical stance, since consciousness is where each person makes his or her first move. Instead of avoiding consciousness, it may be a better manoeuvre to consider what consciousness is like, which means how it historically and biographically operates. One may then discover that consciousness actually consists, not in self-reversion, but in an attraction toward and by what is distinct from oneself: 'If the fundamental act of consciousness is not pure spontaneity but . . . the . . . "other-centeredness" of moving in being moved, . . . then the best way to overcome a tendency toward subjectivism . . . is . . . to enter more radically into the original experience of consciousness.'[174] Taught by Buber and Rosenzweig that my 'I' only comes to itself when addressed by a 'Thou' (as the child is awakened into full consciousness by its mother), von Balthasar can argue that the truth belonging to a person is not his or her own property, but is realized when confessed to another and accepted by that other as truth. Such truth only exists as a growing and changing trust between persons. Truth in this sense is neither a formal rule, nor an essence I take as my foundation, but simply trusting dialogue. Its 'evidence is less a stationary content than a principle, . . . a ferment that exists for the progressive realization—in an inconclusible movement—of truth within the world'. Its 'dialogical element is the permanent vitality'—Chesterton's 'vast and flowing stream' in the meeting place of two persons—'of the essence of truth'. There is no getting from 'the one' to 'the other' without a medium, a way: 'Without love, such an intimacy and communion could appear . . . as . . . embarrassing, and indiscreet: everyone would be satisfied with his own truth and at most would use the truth of others in order to fill his own treasury of, and need for, knowledge.'[175] The meeting place of the two is the Holy Spirit.

[174] Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 155.
[175] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* I, pp. 174–5.

10. Love Makes the Church

We said that once we know what the evidence is, it is time to turn back to *how* we know it. We are looking for a divine intention which could render the Gospel writers capable of voicing the evidence with which they were presented. What comes through the historical life of Christ, overflowing into the words of the authors, and thence to their readers, is the personal exuberance of the Author, his divine love. His dialogue with the world is expressed, on the one hand, through those things which go best into words, 'essences', and natures, which become linguistic meanings, and, on the other, in the exuberant self-giving of divine love. This is what underlies the truth and meaningfulness of revelation. In pointing to the New Testament writers as an ineliminable ground of the Christian story, we do not suggest that these writers were only expressing their experiences of him. They intended to describe him accurately, and, as with Paul or the Johannine visions, to depict their experiences of him. But what they exhibit is Christ as known and believed in love. It is not that the epistemic foundation of the Gospels is some generalized idea of 'love', but that love is what brings them about, the love of the Christ who selected these particular authors, and their love for him. The Scriptures express Christ as made known to the authors in love. It is difficult to read Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John without thinking that the impulsion out of which they speak is knowledge proceeding from love. We know from Bultmann that 'Gospel' is a unique genre, breaking with, and therefore not adequately fitting into any of the genres which late Antiquity had to hand. The Gospels are not just written for the practical purpose of evangelization, nor for the no less functional aim of reminding the Church of its own story. They neither hammer us with their historical veracity nor make a moral appeal. The eye with which the authors look on Christ and take down and reinvent his words and actions intends neither to do neutral reportage, nor to expand upon its own identity. What creates the Gospels' precise uniqueness as neither history, biography, nor myth-making fiction is this underlying quality of love.

The question of intention matters when we ask how the Gospel writers brought the evidence at hand, the things they and their friends had touched and seen, to articulation. As human persons responding to the miraculous events of divine revelation, they had to propose what ordinary language has no word for, in ordinary language. So the Gospel lives of Christ have a poetic quality. The narrative theologians are not wrong to conceive of knowing as an inventive process; knowing is a mental action, a doing. Truth is not just registered, but constructed or created by a knower. The Gospel writers

constructed a picture of Christ, and they did so in love. Objects and things offer themselves, their nature or 'story' to be remade by human beings. Our handling of them need not be a violation; one enables wood to be itself by releasing its potency to be a table. In that way, human and historical action in and upon the world unveils its very reality, its being. By 'permitting' our action upon it, it recovers its reality. Likewise, as Wilhelmsen observes, the 'acceptance of love' brings about the 'revelation' of our own being to us: 'The lover in loving becomes the voice of the beloved. The difference between this love of man for man, . . . for woman, and the love which man gives the world . . . he brings about within creation, is that the voice he gives his beloved is *her* own, whereas the voice he gives the world remains *his* own.'[176] In addressing them with the 'voice' of love, Christ gives the biblical authors their own poetic voices.

The truth of the Gospels is the truth of the relationships between Christ and the folk who wrote his story, their trusting reproduction of the 'dialogue' between Christ and believers. We come upon the Lazarus story as told by someone, about someone else, to a listener. Though we may come to share John's language, his way of speaking about Christ, his 'voice' is not our own, for it engages us from elsewhere. Because it comes from a particular person, with his vision and love, it is addressed *to* other people.

The living analogue of 'dialogue' seems a better way of conceiving the effective basis of the relationship between Christ and believers than the paradigm of 'story' because the most mundane of human dialogues brings something about. A dialogue does not just express the relationship between persons; the meeting place within which it occurs creates the relationship. In looking for the basis of the Gospels, we have dug, first down to the existential judgement, the judgement of existence, and then, further down to the force which creates being and simultaneously lets being be: the voice of love.

The reason why the narrative theological account of the resurrection of Christ reverts to foundationalism is that it attempts to bridge the gap between Christ's death and his return without speaking of the Holy Spirit. It thus loses the opportunity to grip the paradox that the silence of Christ's death has become the springboard for all the Church's words—her language: 'it is this silent deed that gives rise to a verbal exposition that knows no possible end'. If one considers the Gospel portrayals of Jesus and his disciples, in fact, one can become uncomfortable with the idea that he maintains a continuous dialogue with them: much of the time, they seem not to get the sense of his words. They don't understand Jesus because they do not yet grasp that

[176] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 83–4.

he speaks as the Word of God. Somewhat as Plato's dialogues turn into monologues, so, 'even the farewell discourses' in John are, 'in the end, a monologue'. Presented with the 'dialogue of the blind and deaf' of apostles who, up to moments before the Ascension, are still hoping that all of this preaching will eventually take its course toward a recognizable worldly kingdom, one has to concede that 'there is no dialogical situation until the moment when Jesus disappears from the disciples' sight. Or when, calling Mary's name as she weeps at the tomb, he communicates to her the Holy Spirit.'[177] Jesus knows that what is given to him to say, to do, and to be is *more* than he alone is: 'The Messianic sound of his "I"-utterances, the absolute sense of mission expressed in his calls to discipleship . . . and the fact that he could not fully vindicate his claims during his life span . . . show[s] that, in virtue of his absolute obedience, he identified himself with what God expected of him . . . *above and beyond* what he was able to achieve.'[178] In the Markan 'little Apocalypse' (Mark 13.10–11: 'and when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit'), 'Jesus speaks with great confidence of the continuance of his gospel after his death; this will be guaranteed by the Holy Spirit's responsibility for its correct proclamation.'[179] Thus, as we said that any one human person's 'truth' is incomplete and unrealized unless offered to and returned by another, and that this giving and returning is a meeting place which knots their dialogue together, so we must say that the 'truth' which Christ is is given to the Father, and completed and realized in and by the Holy Spirit:

the *tetelestai*—'it is carried through, concluded, brought to an end'—that Jesus pronounces on the Cross (Jn 19.30), which is simultaneously his giving up of the Spirit to the Father ('into your hands . . .') and, on Easter, to the Church ('receive the Holy Spirit . . .'). The work of the Son seems outwardly uncompleted on the Cross; the completion is entrusted to the Holy Spirit. Yet it is not his own work but the Son's that the Spirit continues on earth and exposits infinitely (Jn 16.13).[180]

We spoke of a material infinity in the sheer factual occurrences and images described in the Gospels, arguing that no separate formal rule or grammar could encapsulate them. The infinite, existentializing spirit in the material letter, that 'vast and flowing stream' of Jesus' 'personality', is *his own* Spirit: 'the Spirit does not interpret, does not initiate us from the outside . . . He is

177 Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, pp. 279 and 71.

178 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* vol. III: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), p. 160.

179 Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 96.

180 Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 154.

in the Son'. Our notion that human beings come to be in dialogue (Buber's 'inter', or '"being as relation"') has a Trinitarian thought behind it. As the meeting place of the dialogue of Christ the Son and the Father, the Spirit's 'We' is the bottomless 'more' expressing the mutual gift of the divine 'I' and 'Thou'. This act of 'divine love, and every love that reflects it, is . . . an "overflowing", because, in it, the pure, unmotivated nature of goodness comes to light'.[181]

[181] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, pp. 192, 227; *Theo-Logic* II, p. 54.

3

Naming God

> The word 'being,' as it comes to a modern Englishman ... has a sort of hazy atmosphere ... Perhaps it reminds him of fantastic professors in fiction, who wave their hands and say, 'thus do we mount to the ineffable heights of pure and radiant Being': or worse still of actual professors in real life, who say, 'All Being is Becoming; and is but the evolution of Not-Being by the law of its Being.
>
> G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*

1. Method and Content

In contemporary theological circles, some scholars are found to argue that Thomas Aquinas' Five Ways are discursive arguments for the existence of God, and others that they are not. One well known proponent of the latter idea is John Milbank, for whom Thomas' ' "demonstrations" of God's existence can only be meant to offer weakly probable modes of argument and very attenuated "showings." '[1] Denys Turner is so pained by the opinion that Thomas had no truck with rational argument for God's existence that he invokes the First Vatican Council against it. This chapter initiates our contention that a grammaticized 'Five Ways' are as empty of discursive argument as Milbank could wish them to be; that, in other words, grammatical Thomism inadvertently turns full circle into a foundationalist 'fideism of faith'. The purpose of this chapter is not to supply a novel or traditional exegesis of Thomas' text, but to argue that the 'metalinguistic'[2] or grammatical argument for God 'concedes the territory of reason ... at a price which in the end will be paid in the quality of faith itself'.[3] Once having analysed the proof offered by grammatical Thomists, we will consider its similarity to the story-Barthian way of discovering God's existence: both conceive of God as

[1] John Milbank, 'Truth and Vision', in John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 28.

[2] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 17.

[3] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 3–5 and 262.

the most important character in a wider story. Our discussion will not be complete until we advance our own interpretation of the Five Ways as an argument for the existence of God.[4]

The bishops who congregated in Rome in 1870 for the First Vatican Council wished to steer the faithful away from fideism and from rationalism. The 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith' which they promulgated states, therefore, both that

> God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason: *ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made* [Rm 1.20].

and that,

> It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself and the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that a supernatural, way. This is how the Apostle puts it: *In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son* [Heb 1.1–2].[5]

The Constitution is known as *Dei Filius*, from its first two words. In the early twentieth century, many Christians read *Dei Filius* as a positive injunction to communicate to agnostics, fideists, and rationalists the truths that the world is God-created (Rom. 1.20) and that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1.1–2). In terms of the numbers of people evangelized, for quantitative judgements sometimes apply, the two most powerful Christian apologists of the last century were G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis. Chesterton and Lewis used argument, imagination, and the force of personality to persuade their secularized, agnostic contemporaries that, for instance, Jesus' miracles happened, that materialism and rationalist idealism are flawed philosophies, or that atonement for sin makes moral and aesthetic sense. Neither of these lay-men used the 'reason them along a stretch and then drop faith in at the end' schema to which Protestant orthodoxy, liberalism, and Catholic neo-scholasticism have subscribed. Narrative theologians rightly disavow a procedure which set the act and the content of faith beyond a preliminary set of rational philosophical certainties—the classical example is Descartes' proof of the existence of God. As Thiemann says, the method which made faith extrinsic

[4] See Chapter 5, section 6.

[5] Vatican I, 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith', Chapter 2, in Norman P. Tanner (ed.), 'Vatican I: 1869–1870', in *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. II: *Trent to Vatican II* (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington DC.: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

to reason entailed that 'faith seeking understanding' became 'faith seeking foundation', in philosophical activities.[6]

Neither Chesterton nor Lewis was a foundationalist; neither of them started from a prior self-sufficient rational certainty and added faith and grace to it later on, after reason has done its work. Lewis satirized the separation of natural human desire and the supernaturally given desire for heaven in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. In this allegorical novel, a trio of 'Pale Men' present the alliance between a self-identified 'Scholastic' named 'Angular', and the atheistic 'Classical': '"Angular is for me,"' Classical explains '"in one sense, *the* enemy, but in another, *the* friend. I cannot agree with his notions about the other side of the canyon: but just because he relegates his delusions to the *other* side, he is free to agree with me about this side and to be an implacable exposer (like myself) of all attempts to foist upon us any transcendental, romantical, optimistic trash."'[7] In another novel, Lewis' knight, Reepicheep finds Narnia too mundane for his ardent, chivalric desires. Wanting to journey further than the 'very end of the World', 'he got into his coracle and took up his paddle, and the current caught it, and away he went . . . The coracle went more and more quickly, and beautifully it rushed up the wave's side. For one split second they saw its shape and Reepicheep's coracle on the very top. Then it vanished, and since that moment no one can truly claim to have seen Reepicheep the Mouse. But my belief is that he came safe to Aslan's country.'[8] *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is, like de Lubac's *Surnaturel*, a book about the natural desire for heaven. It was because they saw imaginatively that the matter of God and Christ is religious, not dryly 'philosophical' or piously 'theological' that Lewis' and Chesterton's books are humanly appealing. Hans Urs von Balthasar made great use of C. S. Lewis because he brought the English tradition of 'image' knowledge to life within supernatural faith. Since their personal conviction and witness featured in the debate, Lewis and Chesterton invariably argued from a standpoint of faith; partly because they were laymen, appeal to reason, faith, and image are unsystematically muddled together in their books: but argue they did, and for the reality of the Christian gospel. If either of these debaters ever perused *Dei Filius*, and as an Ulster man, Lewis is perhaps unlikely to have done so, they would have taken it to mean that God *is* actually known by reason to exist and that the Son of God *is* actually come in the flesh. The historical Christ is behind the idea of Aslan. The primary interest of these evangelists is

[6] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 14.

[7] C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism* (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), pp. 125–7.

[8] C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 185.

realities like the created cosmos, the Creator God, the Trinity. In their writings, the Triune God of love is the catalyst to the aesthetic, moral, and philosophical methods.

We contend that the methodological issue of non-foundationalism is overplayed in narrative theologies, so that issues of content are always down-stage from it. But we shall not claim that a return to foundationalist apologetics is the best way forward. Our case is, rather, that, unless the things which revelation teaches about God, 'romantical, optimistic trash', such as that 'God is love' (I John 4.8), lie behind our arguments for God's existence, the reality-related desire to be reasonable degenerates into the logic-related urge to be rational. Our arguments will be non-circular and speak to non-believers only if these arguments are energized by faith. Otherwise, we may 'name' God, or characterize the God of our story, but we shall not indicate evidence that we *know* God exists.

Denys Turner's *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* presents itself as a defence of Vatican I on faith and reason. It interprets the statements in *Dei Filius* as meaning, not that God's existence is rationally proven, but that it could be so in theory. Turner believes that, 'nothing is said by the Vatican Council to suggest that the act of faith presupposes an *actual* proof of God... What is claimed is only that the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is a God who is so related to the world known by our rational natures that his existence is capable of being known from that world.' Barthians have it as a methodological principle that faith in God's revelation should do the work which, in foundationalist systems, is carried out by natural metaphysics. Both story Barthianism and grammatical Thomism include as part of their method the avoidance of *foundationalism.* Turner's shyness in the face of actual proof is linked to a determination to eschew the foundationalism of post-Cartesian philosophies. He comments that, 'It may be that no actual valid proof is ever discovered; the Vatican Council does not imagine that faith would thereby be weakened for want of rational *support*.'[9]

Turner does not want *achieved* proofs to act as supporting arches to faith. An achieved proof is one which pinpoints a relation between particular existents and the existence of God. There is no reason why such a proof should be taken rationally to *support* faith, unless one holds that the dogmas of faith are substantially dependent upon a prior rational framework. Dogmas, such as God's existing or the incarnation or Christ's presence in the Eucharist refer to givens. They happened, or happen. It neither supports nor undermines their givenness if we grasp or do not grasp them. A reasonable grip on

[9] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 12, my italics.

them only supports or reinforces our judgement of the givens, not the givens themselves or the God-given faith in them. And thus, reason could not be taken to support either the act or the object of faith, unless one's rational defence of them submerged their real givenness into the means of understanding them. And this no grammatical Thomist would want to do.

2. The 'Why Proof' of God's Existence

Denys Turner pictures Thomas Aquinas himself as having had the sanctity to insist upon the 'infantile' and 'off-beat question': 'For the child asks the question "Why?" once too often',[10] he says. The question he wants to bring us back to is 'why is there something rather than nothing?' So I designate the Thomist grammarians' means of showing that God exists as the 'why proof'. Ought we to call this line of argument 'grammatical'? It may not seem to have much to do with language: the 'why is there not nothing' proof has been a Thomist standard since the eighteenth century.

Nonetheless, the arguments of Burrell, Turner, and McCabe find their metier in the context of linguistic analysis. For, on the one hand, the highest form taken by human questioning rationality is language, and, on the other, since the 'why proof' finds its vocation in providing an argument which prescinds from empirical events, it functions perfectly within a theory aimed at translating metaphysical concerns into concerns about the logic of religious language. According to Burrell, when Thomas considered that God's essence is identical to his existence, and the consequences which this has for the attributes we ascribe to God (our 'names' for God), he was not reflecting, metaphysically, upon the being of God, but constructing an analysis of our talk about God, our God-language. He writes,

> when we utter 'to be God is to-be' we are saying that God *is* what it is for God-language to obtain. . . . But what is it for a language to obtain? Let us speak of *x*-language as though it comprised all those statements we might need to understand what *x* is, as well as to describe it adequately . . . Then the fact that *x*-language obtained would be a fact about the language itself, and not one of those facts we can use the language to state about *x*.[11]

It is difficult to ascribe any logical tasks or functions to words like 'exists', 'existence', or *esse*. The word 'exists' is redundant in the domain of logic, because the latter is a virtual or procedural 'world'. You can check whether a university has procedural rules without investigating whether it carries them

[10] Turner, *Faith Seeking*, pp. 19–20.

[11] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, pp. 49–50.

out. So far as the grammar of rightly formed sentences goes, it doesn't make any difference whether the objects of the sentences, say 'bananas', exist or not. And so, in orienting philosophical theology to language, Burrell takes as its major concern, not the logic of the *doing* (carrying religious language out or applying it), but the doing of the logic, its performance: 'The fact that a language obtains is reflected only in performance,' he says, 'in asserting a proposition hitherto entertained. It would seem more appropriate to call this a performative or existential fact about *x*.'[12] This shift from the reference of religious statements to what we are *doing* when we speak about God is characteristic of grammatical Thomism. The idea that religious language is performative is expressed in Nicholas Lash's remark that, 'In its primary use, as public confession of faith, "I believe in God" does not state an opinion or express an attitude; it makes a promise.'[13]

The notion is shared with story Barthians. David Kelsey says that 'what it means to call a text "Christian scripture" is that it *functions* in certain ways or *does* certain things when used in certain ways in the common life of the church',[14] and Thiemann finds that 'nonfoundational theology seeks its criteria of judgment within the first-order language of church practice. . . . and seeks to "re-describe" the internal logic of the Christian faith'.[15] Both traditions are concerned with the logic of religious language, on the one hand, and with the skills acquired by the assiduous follower of logical procedures on the other: 'As an expressly metalinguistic inquiry', the 'movement' through Thomas' discussion of our names for God 'is not measured by uncovering new information but by discovering conceptual corollaries'. A 'metalinguistic' enquiry into our names for God will proceed on *deductivist* premises. For Karl Popper, the purpose of scientific enquiry is to come up with a refutable or falsifiable theory, and the history of science is conceived not as making cumulative *gains*, but as making repeated withdrawals from 'false' hypotheses. Likewise for Burrell, the 'engine' of working out how to speak about God 'is analysis not synthesis, which is to say that Aquinas' enquiry seems to be going around in circles . . . But learning how to negotiate such circles can equip us with a useful set of skills. They may . . . prove to be . . . what we need to push on in the dark. From working with tautologies like these, we come to learn how to go on.'[16]

[12] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 50.

[13] Lash, *Believing Three Ways*, p. 18.

[14] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 90.

[15] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 75.

[16] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 41.

Reflection on human rationality itself can only run so far as to show that a proof is *potentially* in the offing, not that there is *actually* existing evidence. Since such a consideration does not enable Christian theology to mine the *reality* of God, everything a narrative theologian has to say about God, Christ, or the world will be a *stipulation* about these realities. It will not extract the fruits of these realities. And if our language about God does not draw upon the positively given and acknowledged, it chases its own tail—the language follows from a linguistic stipulation, not from an existential given. This is why narrative theology has a tendency to identify content with method, that is, to equate God with a story.

The grammatical Thomist regards it as no defect that he does not want to 'mine', or 'extract' evidence from this world to fill in the meaning of our language about God: he finds no such intention in Thomas Aquinas' writings. 'Taken as a *doctrine* of God', says Burrell, Thomas' notion of religious language 'spawns the notorious God of "classical theism", not unrelated to Blake's Nobodaddy'. No less than it deprecates foundationalist method (reason plus faith), narrativism disavows the *content* thus conceptually demonstrated (as by Descartes). 'Deity' as demonstrated by conceptualist reasoning is taken to be a giant divine Essence. In lieu of this, Burrell suggests that Thomas' discussion of religious language was intended to make a logical map of discourse about God, permitting logic to eliminate what it is illogical to say, and cumulatively constructing the paths which thought could logically take: 'It would be doubly obtuse, then, to ask whether Aquinas' concept of God is a true one.' For, when Thomas discussed religious language, he literally discussed just that, *language*, or 'the grammar of God'. Thomas' 'aims were modest: to ascertain what logical structure true statements about God would have to have, and to determine a class of expressions which could be used of him with propriety'.[17] What he has to show us, then, is a logical thought *process*, or thought and language in their logical workings; how 'to do religious language'.

Even where they averred, like Gilson, that when Thomas baptized Aristotle he made him a new man, philosophical, Gilsonian, and Maritain Thomists all agreed in foregrounding the *Aristotelian* background to Thomas' thought. It would follow that Thomas' arguments for the existence of God are inductive inferences. On the other hand, the thesis which most excited Lindbeck in the late 1950s was that 'Thomas' procedure' was, as he phrased it, 'fundamentally non-Aristotelian', and, in fact, Neoplatonic. Lindbeck argued at this time that the central category in Thomas' metaphysics is the Neoplatonic one of

[17] Ibid., pp. 13, 69, 74, and 69.

the *participation* of finite, created beings in infinite and uncreated being. Lindbeck's Neoplatonic, participationist Thomas is no inductivist. For Lindbeck, Thomas 'does not really carry through his apparent program of constructing arguments for the existence of God on the basis of a prior analysis of the ontological structure of finite beings'.[18] As Lindbeck sees it, a participationist schema is not something one could gather inductively: it comes with the total religious package. One *deduces* it from the logic of the story as a whole.

Lindbeck's deductive Thomism was borne to academic success by a wind of scepticism about scientific knowledge. David Stove has argued that twentieth-century sceptics about *induction* like Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn followed the path blazed by David Hume in making logical *deduction* the test which all scientific theories must necessarily fail. Popper's 'irrationalism about scientific theories is no other than Hume's scepticism concerning contingent propositions about the unobserved; nor are his grounds for it other than Hume's. Popper is no less an empiricist than Hume: he does not believe, any more than Hume did, that any propositions *except* observation-statements can be a reason to believe a scientific theory.' Like Hume, Popper was both an empiricist and a deductivist, requiring the conclusions of a scientific theory to be logical deductions from its premises. This conjunction of empiricism and deductivism made Popper and his heirs sceptics with respect to the truth of scientific theories, for no empirically derived hypothesis can meet the deductivist criterion: 'from empiricism, or from inductive fallibilism ... no sceptical ... consequence follows', but 'when they are combined with deductivism, ... first scepticism about induction follows, and then scepticism concerning any contingent proposition about the unobserved'.[19] The finest point of affinity between grammatical Thomism and story Barthianism is deductivism. The Barthians are thus inclined because of regarding descriptions of God as *deductions* logically extrapolated from a revelation taken as *a priori* or analytically true.

Both Barthian storytellers and Thomistic grammarians wish to avoid the idea that God is to be ranked highest up, but otherwise *alongside* the many objects known to us, a *primus inter pares* of conceptual objects. It's a non-negotiable element of Christian faith that God is neither one of the 'gods' of the cosmos nor a human projection. As Herbert McCabe asserts, 'God could not be an item in the universe.' Barthians can agree with him that 'God the creator ... is the liberator fundamentally *because* he is not a god.'[20]

[18] Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence', pp. 19–20.
[19] D. C. Stove, *Popper and After: Four Modern Irrationalists* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), p. 45.
[20] Herbert McCabe, OP, *God Matters* (London: Mowbray, 1987), pp. 43 and 58.

The internal reason, therefore, why narrative theologians ought to take seriously the contention that they give primacy to method over content is not that it doesn't bring in a lot of converts (for Crouchback was of course right, that 'quantitative judgments don't apply'[21]), and not even that theological language is more than linguistic. The point at which narrative theologians should be open to our challenge is that the story-god is, in McCabe's words, 'perilously like one of the gods'.[22] Our objection to grammatical arguments for God is that the priority of the narrative method entails either that storytelling itself becomes the foundation upon which God stands, or else that story itself is the wider concept which contains the idea of God.

3. Robert Jenson Gets to the Heart of Grammatical Thomism

The younger Robert Jenson denoted Saint Thomas as the author of an 'epistemological works-righteousness'—a Lutheran way of expressing the customary objections to foundationalism.[23] But the American has consistently appreciated the arguments for God's existence which lie near the beginning of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*—on his own terms. The Barthian Thomist writes that,

> In themselves as arguments, these are conducted without reference to the church's specific message. But the conclusion of each is the reality of an anonymous metaphysical entity, for example, 'a certain primary mover.' That thereby the reality of *God* has been proven is each time established by the further observation, 'and all understand this to be God.' But who are these 'all'? These are, of course, those whom Thomas expected might read his writings: Jews, Christians, and Muslims, who all worship the biblical God. A Buddhist . . . would precisely *not* worship a 'primary *mover*.' Thomas's launching analyses occur with a specifically biblical apprehension already in place.[24]

Jenson is not alluding to the obvious fact that Thomas used the truths of faith to generate his rational arguments. He is claiming, rather, that Thomas' arguments for God's existence are not intended to make sense to a *Goy*, *Gentile*, *Kafur*, or pagan. They will sound rational only to someone who has been taught by the Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, or Koran what to look for in the cosmos, such as a first cause of causes, and a first cause of movement. The idea is that the 'arguments' are circular, purporting only to

[21] Crouchback sen. to Crouchback jr. in Evelyn Waugh, *Sword of Honour* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1965), p. 546.

[22] McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 42.

[23] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, p. 94.

[24] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 6.

establish the existence of a Character already known to Thomas' intended readers as the protagonist of the biblical story: an atheist who had not acquired faith in that story would not be pointed to God by Thomas' Five Ways. One might think that a Thomist, as opposed to a Barthian, would reject this characterization of Thomas' arguments. For Jenson's interpretation entails that Thomas' apparent references to movement, causes, design and so forth do not go to make up inductive or demonstrative arguments, but are, rather, sequels deduced from a plot already known to us by faith.

But, with the intuitive genius which typifies the writings of this greatest of narrative theologians, Jenson has put his finger on the implication of a widespread contemporary reading of the Five Ways, and on the ecumenical common ground between postliberal Barthianism and grammatical Thomism. For Burrell, to show that religious language 'obtains' means to show that it belongs to our manner of speaking. So when Thomas appears to argue, 'there must be a First Mover', what he would really be claiming is that, through our very use of it, language has already set up shop in the expression 'First Mover'. So the Five Ways are descriptions of the orientation of language. When, according to Burrell, we try to show that an object 'exists', we are recalling that it 'already figures into one's performance, linguistic or otherwise. ... Aquinas' five ways intend to show that I cannot use language of a certain sort without implying a language suitably equivalent to discourse about God. So engaging in the one language implicitly engages me in the other; all the proof does is to remind me of the fact. That is what I mean by language obtaining.'[25] Burrell seems to mean that Thomas' Five Ways describe what it is to talk about God rather than demonstrate that God exists. All that a story Barthian has to do to appropriate this is to replace the assumption that human language use universally tends toward God with the presupposition that only biblical language does so. Another way of putting it, more appealing to a Neoplatonist, is to claim that the Five Ways are not arguments, because they *really* move 'top-down' from God to the world, just as being emanates from God into the world, and not 'bottom-up', as Chestertonian Thomists prefer to imagine. This is how Lindbeck seems to see the matter in his early piece about Thomas as a Platonic participationist. This deductivist writes that 'it is possible to see the texts as affirming the inverse relation': not as arguments *from* the perfections of truth and goodness in this world *to* the truth and perfection of God, but rather, '[b]ecause these principles are true' in God, 'they must be verified'.[26] The arguments thus become a circular

[25] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 49.
[26] Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence', p. 123.

'verification' of what we already believe by faith. For Barth, 'proof' of God's existence can only be made from within what he calls the 'all-inclusive circle'[27] of divine Truth; thus, to make Thomas' thought circular is to assimilate it to Barth's method.

Moreover, as Burrell has it, one basic insight was shared by a Muslim, a Jew, and a Christian. This is the 'real distinction' of essence and existence in creatures, and their identity in God. Avicenna appreciated that the '"nature which is proper to each thing (*haqiqa*—lit., its truth) is other than [its] existence (*al-wujud*)"'; Maimonides saw that '"existence is . . . something that is superadded to the quiddity of what exists. This is clear and necessary with regard to everything the existence of which has a cause. . . . As for that which has no cause for its existence, there is only God . . . who is like that . . . His existence is necessary"'; and Thomas saw that '"*Esse* (to-be) itself is the ultimate act in which everything can participate while it itself participates in nothing."'[28]

The 'Five Ways' noted in the *Summa Theologiae* may look like arguments to a First Mover, a First Cause, a Necessarily Necessary Being, a Perfect Being, and an Artist. Some readers find the arguments so simplistic that they find it impossible to conceive that Thomas intended here to do anything so complex as to prove the existence of God. John Milbank is said to believe that their 'manifestly cursory character' counts against Thomas considering the Five Ways as 'full-blown apodeictic proofs'. Taking this brevity into consideration, Turner suggests that Thomas is not so much giving proofs as suggesting various 'argument strategies' to the teachers who would use the *Summa* as a textbook.[29] As we see it, however, Thomas was one of the literal-minded fellows with whom it is torture to watch television: in their naive realist delight in the facts before their eyes, such persons lose the drift of the most basic editorial cut, such as from day to night, intuit no implied sense in the gaps, and loudly require to be led across each scenic shift.[30] To rework his arguments as *methods* or 'argument strategies' is to miss the junctures at which they conduct us to informative contact with God, grasped, as by the pagan Aristotle, as First Mover and First Cause. This content adds up to 'Creator' and thus informs the subsequent discussion of language about God.

[27] Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme*, trans. Ian W. Robertson, 2nd edn. (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 97.

[28] David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), pp. 19, 26 (quoting the *Guide to the Perplexed* 1.57), and 31 (quoting *De Anima* 1.6.2).

[29] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 239.

[30] This metaphor was suggested to me by Charles Morerod, OP.

4. The Why-Proof as a Contingency Cliff-Hanger

Father McCabe's argument for God's existence works by serially applying the question 'how come?' to a sequence of increasingly large fields. The question can start with a domestic animal, Fido, and play out from there. The first question, 'How come this dog?' can be answered by reference to Rover, Fido's papa. One can next ask what brought about Fido's more distant ancestors, the canine species. The reply comes back: animals in general, the biological or evolutionary progenitors of Fido. We enquire how these progenitors came about, and the biochemists will endeavour to describe how. But as we question further, the answers become wider and wider, until we fast forward to the cliff-hanger: 'how come everything?'[31]

McCabe's argument was not intended as an original reading of Aquinas: it expounds the opinion of a drier thinker, Gottfried Leibniz, that arguments for the existence of God boil down to the single question, 'why is there something rather than nothing?' Like the Austrian philosopher, the Mancunian Dominican affirms that,

> Our ultimate radical question is not how come Fido exists as this dog instead of that, or how come Fido exists as a dog instead of a giraffe, or exists as living instead of inanimate, but how come Fido exists *instead of nothing*, and just as to ask how come he exists as dog is to put him in the context of dogs, so to ask how come he exists instead of nothing is to put him in the context of *everything*, the universe or world. And this is . . . the God-question, because . . . whatever the existing reality that answers it we call 'God.' . . . As Wittgenstein said, 'Not *how* the world is, but *that* it is, is the mystery.'[32]

Leibniz; Coplestone against Russell in their celebrated radio debate;[33] Turner; and Father McCabe intend to reduce the cumbrous passage of the original Five Ways, which wend through causes, movement, potentialities, actualities, and guided growth, to a single 'why' question. But the consequence is a considerable expansion of those specific arguments, into an overarching narrative. In his manual for Soviet movie-producers, Pudovkin tries to steer novice directors away from merely filming to genuine cinematography. A professional movie-maker understands that the 'foundation of film art is editing', that a real movie 'is not *shot* but *built*, built up from the separate strips of celluloid that are its raw material'.[34] In that sense, not even a documentary

[31] McCabe, *God Matters*, pp. 4–6. [32] Ibid., pp. 5–6.

[33] Bertrand Russell and F. C. Coplestone, 'A Debate on the Existence of God', in John Hick (ed.), *The Existence of God* (New York and London: Collier Macmillan, 1964), pp. 167–91, p. 175.

[34] Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, pp. 23–4.

reproduces reality: if 'Synthesizing sixteen hours of footage into a thirty or sixty minute *newscast* is a creative act',[35] then so too would a movie about 'everything' be so. To make the 'why is there something rather than nothing' question prove God's existence requires that one edit into the chain of enquiry one's knowledge that the existence of everything made is *contingent* upon the action of a divine Maker, or that being a dog—for instance—is not in itself sufficient reason for existing.

We notice one thing following another, that is, chains of causes and movements, and, although watching things *move* is enjoyable and catches the eye more than a static horizon,[36] we are usually inattentive to the spectacle, unless it bears some practical import, such as a dog opening its jaw to bite me. Matters are otherwise when one event follows another in a thrilling novel. Our interest is heightened still further when the plot's thickening is set before our eyes with the visual clarity of a movie. Once the editorial uses of framing and cutting had been recognized by movie-directors, and their artefacts ceased to project the slice of life which was immediately before the camera's lens, movies became far more gripping than mere reality. Henceforth, 'the core narrative structures of Hollywood-type films' entailed 'generating questions that ensuing scenes answer'. Noel Carroll proposed that the combined magnetism of visuality, and question-to-answer narrative explains the dominance of Hollywood movies as an art-form. Every shot in a movie poses a question:

> If a giant shark appears offshore, . . . this scene . . . raises the question of whether the shark will ever be detected. This question is likely to be answered in some later scene when someone figures out why all those swimmers are missing. At that point . . . the question arises about whether it can be destroyed or driven away. . . . Or, . . . shortly after a jumbo jet takes off, we learn that the entire crew has just died from food poisoning while also learning that the couple in first class is estranged. These scenes raise the questions of whether the plane will crash and whether the couple in first class will be reconciled by their common ordeal. Maybe we also ask whether the alcoholic priest in coach will find god again. It is the function of the later scenes in the film to answer these questions.[37]

Movies are not gripping because they are realistic, but because the capture of attention by a single driving question is unrealistic: it takes a gifted director's editorial cutting to ensure that an audience continues to ask itself, ' "what is happening in the other place?" '[38] It takes some editorial fine-tuning

[35] Wilhelmsen and Brett, *Telepolitics*, p. 39. My italics.

[36] Étienne Gilson, *Matières et Formes: Poiétiques particulières des arts majeurs* (Paris: Vrin, 1964), p. 119.

[37] Carroll, 'The Power of Movies', pp. 95–6.

[38] Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, p. 73.

before it could become obvious to anyone to wonder, 'is there an unanswered question about the existence of the world?' One has to edit in McCabe's '*instead of nothing*' as a real possibility alongside Fido's factual existence in order to place the dog in peril of his life. Henceforth, Fido dangles over 'nothing', and the cliff-hanger is to find out 'why', or to name the rope, before it snaps.[39] Pudovkin recommends that the 'sequence' of 'separate pieces' out of which the film is constructed 'must not be uncontrolled, but must correspond to the natural transference of attention of an imaginary observer (who . . . is represented by the spectator). In this sequence must be expressed a special logic that will be apparent only if each shot contains an impulse toward transference of the attention to the next.'[40] In order to put this sequence of shots together into a single, driving narrative, the editor must know what story he intends to tell. There can be, for him, no empirical question of where the movie is going.

As Denys Turner notes, 'when you ask of the world, "How come that anything at all exists?" you are not asking an as yet unsolved question of empirical fact, because you are not asking *any* sort of empirical question: as Wittgenstein demonstrates in the *Tractatus*, there is no possible sense of "fact" in which "that there is anything at all" can be a fact'.[41] The advantage, nonetheless, of empirical facts is that chains of them have specifiable characteristics, such as that they move, or that one is a cause of another or that they appear to achieve purposes. Taken inductively and empirically, the Five Ways pass from causes to a Creative Causer, from Movements to a Creative and Unmoved Mover, from purposes to a Creative Purposer. Beyond the initial Question, 'Whether God exists?' Thomas Aquinas never asks a single question in his Five Ways, and it is not true that 'each of Thomas' five ways ends: "Why is there anything at all, rather than nothing?" ':[42] none of them do so, and Aquinas scholars note that it was Leibniz who made this *the* definitive question.[43] Perhaps Thomas did not do so because he realized that, as an open or unedited question, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' is too abstract to have any specifiable answer. The most reasonable answer is the atheist's, 'yes, why?' It may indicate that the world as a whole is a weird place.

[39] McCabe, *God Matters*, pp. 3 and 5.

[40] Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, p. 71.

[41] Turner, *Faith Seeking*, pp. 14–15.

[42] Ibid., p. 13. We do not suggest that Turner has misinterpreted Thomas, for he states elsewhere that, 'I have no intention of exegeting, still less defending in point of formal validity, those famous and much derided "five ways" of Thomas Aquinas—nor, incidentally, does the first Vatican Council hold any brief for them': *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 120.

[43] Étienne Gilson, *Constantes philosophiques de l'être*, ed. Jean-François Courtine (Paris: Vrin, 1983), p. 144.

But this trail of questions need not prompt us to pinpoint a transcendent freedom beyond the mystery of the world as its cause.

As Burrell sees it, some elements of medieval theology tended to merge too nicely into the medieval cosmology. Arguments to a First Mover were ill-advisedly woven into the poetic 'tapestry' of Ptolemaic astronomy, with its 'moving' concentric spheres. Burrell regards the post-Galilean world as having made a 'shift from a cosmology accessible to imagination ... to one which leaves the imagination with a vast emptiness'.[44] But, as he sees it, the ground had been prepared for this 'shift' within the philosophical theologies of Avicenna, Maimonides, and Aquinas, whose arguments for God are, as this narrativist took it, focused not in imaginable facts like movement, but in the imagination-resistant idea of the identity of existence and essence in God. On this premise, one can work back from there to the absence of this identity in the objects around us. From Leibniz onwards, philosophers of religion shifted their apologetic ground from issues of fact to the general *methodology* of science. If that methodology is seen as tracking one rational question after another then, as Herbert McCabe says, proving the existence of God 'would be rather like proving the validity of science ... science as an intellectual activity ... the research which is the growing point of science, the venture into the unknown'.[45] He claims that it would be unscientific, untrue to the scientific method itself, to call a halt before the answer to the why question is known. For Turner, the purpose of the Five Ways is to prove *that*, scientifically speaking, 'why is there not nothing?' is a methodologically sound question. He begins by disclaiming any intention 'to offer any argument intended as proof of the existence of God'. He does so because, he says, 'all the issues which appear to matter theologically speaking in connection with proofs of the existence of God arise in connection with the possibility in principle of a proof'.[46] Turner finds it more valuable to examine whether there's any running in proving God's existence, than to prove that God exists. *That* it is rational to enquire into God's existence is the heart of the matter, for grammaticians. Not even Descartes required himself to prove the rationality of proving God's existence before he got going on the proof.

Stove thinks that the twentieth-century shift to scepticism about scientific knowledge may have been stimulated by the demise of Newtonian physics at the turn of the last century. For to think that the '*more* disprovable' a theory is, the better, could well be one of the 'traumatic consequences of having once fully believed a false theory'.[47] The confrontation between Vatican

[44] Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. 7.
[45] McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 2.
[46] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. ix.
[47] Stove, *Popper and After*, p. 52.

Aristotelians and Galileo had been a deterrent from linking the arguments for the existence of God to a specific scientific description of the universe, such as the Ptolemaic astronomy. So philosophers transferred the 'how' issues which apparently underlie the Five Ways ('how is it caused?', 'how is it that it is necessary?') into the domain of a generalized 'why' question. Those like Leibniz who pursued this thread asked the 'why' question without advertently referring to the 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. One of the perils to which they exposed themselves was thus *inadvertently* to presuppose various Christian premises. Denys Turner's way of posing the argument comes back to methodological rationality. 'Why not nothing?' is, he believes,

> an intelligible question, because it stands at the top of a scale of questions which are all unproblematically intelligible and is intelligibly connected with them. For you can ask of anything whatever in the world, 'Why does it exist, rather than something else?' and you ask it, in the relevant sense, in one of the many disciplines of inquiry in which we human beings engage, most of which we call 'science.' And I do not see why, if that is so, you cannot ask not alone of this or that, or of this or that kind of thing, why it exists, but why anything at all should exist rather than nothing.[48]

Bertrand Russell's own response to this line of argument was 'the universe is just there, and that's all'.[49] This was not an abrogation of scientific method: the world *is* obstinately there. The atheist factors what the believer takes to be the *created* orderliness of the world into his method. So long as God continues to throw causes, moves, delegated necessity and design into his creation, or so long as this field of investigation continues to *exist* and thus to operate, science has no reason to question the intelligibility of its method. Its method is clear to it; it is *how* the facts within the world work which is obscure to scientific minds. Scientists rightly recognize that the world, however weird, has an apparently necessary way of existing. We shall argue that the assumption that the world *is*, *in a sense*, necessary lies behind the Third Way. Without such an 'in a sense necessity' as part of one's proof, one can only construct an artificial contingency cliff-hanger, which posits an hypothetical Fido whose fall is arrested by the safety-net of the 'First How-Comer', the rationale which the movie presupposes. Although Russell's remark, 'the universe is just there' is often cited with ironic bemusement by grammatical Thomists, their indignation is more appropriate to a sermon than to an argument for the existence of God; an audience of believers will naturally be bemused by Russell's blindness, but they're the only ones for whom the indignation is not metaphysically artificial. Before they have actually proven

[48] Turner, *Faith Seeking*, p. 13.
[49] Russell and Coplestone, 'A Debate on the Existence of God', p. 175.

the existence of a God who is *not* one movement, cause, or piece of artistry amongst others, that is, who is not moved, caused, or made, and who, being unmoved, uncaused, and 'un-made', exists from himself, or whose essence is necessarily his own existence, philosophical theologians cannot assume there is anything odd about the fact that the universe *is there*. Fido doesn't automatically provoke a contrast with No-Fido, or 'nothing'.[50] The oddity of the world's thereness is a *contrastive* oddity: it's strange by comparison with the unique necessity of the God in whom being ignites or is identical to essence. In other words, we have to get hold of the unique necessity of God, the necessity of a being who exists *by nature*, or essentially, in order to espy the *absolute contingency* of the world. Without the former in view, we cannot see that Fido is precariously dangling over 'nothingness' and needs the rope of God's necessity to explain him and thus save the story. With the former in the editor's mind's eye, the dog's rescue is a foregone conclusion. The issue on to which the 'why question' latches requires a poetic jump or a logical intuition, whereby one *sees* the nature of God as necessary, and, by contrast, the contingent quality of the cosmos. One cannot set absolute contingency and God's necessity side by side and see them for what they are until one knows that both are real. Such a sermonic or poetic intuition of contingency has moved many people—but to a leap of faith, not a reasonable inference. For it is the necessary unity of being and nature in God which lights up the *distinction* between 'being *there*'—being a specific kind of thing or nature—and '*being* at all' within those things that are not God. The absolute 'oddity' of non-divine things to which Turner calls our attention is their *existential* contingency, the fact that their existing as such does not necessarily ignite, generate, or equate to their particular natures, as Fidos, or pumpkins, or pigs. But there would be no poetic bestrangement or sermonic uplift in a dog's being *there*, unless we already knew that it exists contingently, as the creature of a Creator. Given that the 'Creator' is what the argument sets out to prove, something is missing here, and that is some evidence which is not presupposed by the 'cliff-hanger'.

The world's 'contingency' is artificial within the 'why proof' of God's existence because the proof hangs on the premise that the world is rational, or answers to the question 'why'. A story collects all the material it contains into a rationally rounded unity: everything in it is to the point. This is why shaggy dog stories are jokes about the nature of stories: they upset our assumptions about what stories should do by never coming to the point. Both grammatical Thomists and scientific naturalists assume that the world is

[50] McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 5.

a story, answerable to endless questions. So far as the agnostic naturalist, like Russell, is concerned, the universe is a rational story: it needs no God, for its internal rationality is 'telling its own story'. One way to go wrong in a debate with the agnostic is to agree that the universe is a meaningful unit or story, but argue that one must therefore concede that it has an author—no author, no rationally rounded story. For it is open to the agnostic to insist that the story itself is generating or igniting its own rationality. If rationality or narrativity is the shared ground of debating theist and agnostic, the latter can opt for an internal, self-generating narrativity. All one achieves here is to deify the story of the universe (which in effect the agnostic has already done), not to move her beyond it to the supernatural God.

A second problematic approach is to argue that the only *reason* one can be looking for a *story* is that God is a storyteller. That is what the philosophers did when they shifted the terms of the debate to methodology. Here one sets aside the observable facts of the case, as lacking the necessity appropriate to the act of construing or telling a story, and throws the questioner back on his or her abiding desire for storied rationality, for things to make sense and come to a point. One will *see* or intuit that the universe falls together into a story in one and the same act that one *sees* that it is *created*, that it 'participates' in the divine storytelling. 'God' is the implicit logic within the human desire for a story, and thus God's existence and the 'story' quality of the world are grasped simultaneously. For transcendental Thomists like Lonergan, the notion of God is *implicit* in all human questioning, the guiding thread of what he calls 'the detached and unrestricted desire to know'.[51] Lindbeck commends transcendental Thomists such as Maréchal and Hayen on the ground that

> they hold that to become aware of the existential structure of creatures is, at the same time, to perceive the reality of God, who is the necessary condition for the existence of beings so composed. This clearly has affinities with the view that it is because creatures are conceived as participating in the being of God that they must be represented as acts of existence limited by essences which are in potentiality to them.[52]

Lindbeck conceives of Thomism as a system in which the conclusions (such as God's existence) are deductions from participationist premises, not evidential or inductive arguments. Narrative theologians do not eliminate the core of Lonergan's system when they pare it down to 'grammar', for with Lonergan the 'open structure of the human spirit'[53] intended to prove the existence of God is a formal or necessary truth, that is, not an empirical fact, but an

[51] Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 354. [52] Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence', pp. 19–20.
[53] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 11.

analytic truth which, the transcendental Thomist believes, can be shown to have synthetic purchase on reality, by dint of understanding what it is to understand.

The idea that our questioning rationality is of itself an indication of God's existence has been deployed not only by transcendental Thomists from Maréchal to Lonergan, but, on one occasion, by C. S. Lewis. Although, as we have said, historical comparisons indicate little about the value of a philosophical argument, it is helpful to recall Lonergan's example, if only to explain the odd piece of eisegesis which has Thomas Aquinas *asking questions* in the *course* of his arguments, rather than, as was the customary scholastic practice, at the heading of his articles.[54] Briefly, then, for Lonergan, the historic human being is a questioner, the field of the transcendental notions, such as being, is defined by what questions we can ask, and 'the question of God is implicit in all our questions'.[55] Our idea of being cannot result from a fulfilled act of understanding, but emerges, rather, from 'an anticipative desire to understand', a questive orientation to transcendence. Our questions seek to uncover ever more *intelligibility*, for one in fact 'defines being by its intelligibility'. It follows that to understand being is to understand what God is: once a profound mapping of one's thought processes has revealed that being is indeed intelligible, one knows that God exists. Lonergan thinks that the Five Ways show that, since the universe proportionate to our minds is not entirely intelligible, or responsive to questions, a deeper intelligibility is required than that reflected in the world of empirical facts. Since perfect intelligibility is not found in being as it is proportioned or related to our minds, there must be a higher form of being. As the motion of mere facts, movement is not entirely intelligible and leaves questions unanswered; since contingency is just a matter of fact, it leaves us asking 'why?' Any incomplete intelligibility, anything which leaves a 'why' question open, proves the existence of God.[56] Lonergan hoped to create a theology which was 'empirical' rather than 'classical'. For Lonergan, Aristotle epitomizes the classicist mentality, in that the Greek philosopher deprecated contingent, historical events: for him, all value lay in 'celestial necessity'. As against this, the transcendental Thomist claims that it is not the *timeless* regions of the stars 'that assures the success of terrestrial process, but emergent probability that provides the design of all process; and that design is not an eternal, cyclical recurrence, but the realization through

[54] Although it should be noted that, for instance, the *Summa Contra Gentiles* does not use the *quaestio* method. See the sombre description of this medieval practice in John Marenbon, *Later Mediaeval Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), esp. pp. 18–33.

[55] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, pp. 24 and 105.

[56] Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 521, 499, 677–8.

probability of a conditioned series of ever more developed schemes'.[57] But Lonergan's argument for the existence of God may seem to betray his empiricist stance, for his claim is that we ask questions until we discover that reality is not just knowable in unsatisfyingly empirical terms, but, rising beyond this, that our acts of knowing are *logically* justifiable. The criterion is the ideal of necessary knowledge, knowledge which is not merely empirical or *a posteriori* but *a priori*. The 'open structure of the human spirit' is expressed by the 'transcendentals' which 'are contained in questions prior to the answers. They are the radical intending that moves us from ignorance to knowledge. They are *a priori* because they go beyond what we know to seek what we do not know yet.'[58] And so the great adventure of human history is reduced to the forward impetus of an *a priori* structure.

In the form in which it is posed both by Lonergan and by the grammatical Thomists, this argument both turns on a 'natural desire for heaven' *and* presupposes that heaven is implied by the natural desire to know. Lonergan defends himself against this charge thus:

> we are led to disagree with what seems to have been Schleiermacher's position. Correctly he maintained that our knowing is possible only if ultimately there is an identity of *Denken* and *Sein*. But it does not follow that in our knowledge such an identity must be genetically first. And so it does not follow that the whole of our knowing rests on a belief, prompted by religious feeling, in the ultimate identity. As has been seen, our own unrestricted desire to know defines for us what we must mean when we speak of being; in the light of that notion we can settle by intelligent grasp . . . what in fact is and what in fact is not; and while this procedure does not explain why every possible and actual reality must be intelligible, it does settle what in fact already is known to be true and, at the same time, it gives rise to the further question that asks for complete explanation and complete intelligibility.[59]

We argued in the previous chapter that one intended result of movies is a certain affective impact. But even in a movie, the contents should not be isomorphic with the intended results. For instance, in the 1933 'Fay Wray' *King Kong*, the content is the *action* of the discovery, capture, escape, and heroic death of a giant gorilla. This has, as an affective aftermath, a slight sense of the pitifulness of the supersized Kong's condition, wedded to a faint impression that the action is a *romance*—captured in the bystander's comment that, 'It was beauty that killed the beast.' A beauty and the beast myth may lie behind *King Kong*, just as it may be encompassed within the Christian verities. The 2005 Peter Jackson *King Kong* makes the

[57] Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 130.
[58] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 11.
[59] Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 678–9.

woman–gorilla romance the very action of the movie. Making us attend to the *myth* distracts our 'believing' attention from, so to speak, what makes us attend to the myth—*the action.* A narrative theologian more radical than the grammatical Thomists makes explicit what is implicit in the 'why proof' when he finds in Sigmund Freud's

> account of religion a belated discernment of religious belief as social dreaming, as the fulfilment of a wish, a desire for the remaking (redemption) of reality as it is, for seeing it truly. . . . No less than Freud's dreaming, cinema also deals in wishes, in the secret desires of its audience. And no less than the cinema, the church proffers the fulfilment of wishes . . . the Christian cave projects that which is alone truly desirable, the projected image enticing the gaze of the congregation by whom it is projected, caught up in the power of the Spirit, the Trinitarian 'apparatus.' . . . to see the crucified become the risen Christ, is to have terror give way to wonder; and to see Christ present in the Eucharist, in the bread and the wine and the gathered community, is to have wonder transfused with joy and the hope of once more walking in the garden. Then one is the viewer who has become like a little child, enamoured of the screen, unable to tell shadow from flickering shadow. . . . Only such a gaze can believe the beatitudes.[60]

The most which such a cinematic belief in God can deliver to Christian theology is an account of how thought, feeling, imagination, and belief function within it. Such an account would be worthwhile. But, no matter how accurately we describe the interweaving of faith and reason within our believing and knowing acts, this mapping leaves us lodged within the potentialities of epistemology, the virtualities of our minds and hearts. This is where Gerard Loughlin wants to go; but a cinematic fideism is not where McCabe and Turner aimed to take us.

There is a good reason why not. It comes back to the meaning of 'belief' in relation to cinematic experience. Loughlin proposes a suggestive comparison between the 'gaze' of a child who abandons itself to a movie and the Christian who can 'believe the beatitudes' or 'see Christ present in the Eucharist'. But are the two cases of 'belief' analogous, and do we in fact have two cases of 'belief' at all? It may seem, rather, that the movie-goer indulges, not so much in an extreme act of 'belief' as in a willing *suspension of disbelief.* As we have suggested, theatre acting requires the physical presence of actors, whereas cinema viewing does not. This physical presentation sets up a commonality between the theatrical presentation of person or character and the everyday presentation of the self: it makes sense, in ordinary language, to speak of the

[60] Gerard Loughlin, *Alien Sex: The Body and Desire in Cinema and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 56–7.

'drama of social life'. Ordinary language can thus recognize an *analogy* between theatre and the role playing which spontaneously enters into many facets of daily experience. One thus speaks naturally of 'belief' in relation to theatre. But expressions comparing everyday life to cinema, such as 'I've seen this movie before', indicate that one is referring to an extraordinary, not to say, surreal, experience. Movies attain a chemical purity of storytelling beyond the reach of novels and theatre. Bypassing the 'limits' which Aristotle set on theatre, 'according to which the possible has to be made probable', movie-directors can make *anything* come 'next': 'film', says Stanley Cavell,

> has an absolute freedom of narrative. ... Things like that don't happen in the world we go our rounds in—your father does not turn out to be a foreign spy, one's life does not depend upon finding a lady with a strange hat ... one man does not hold another by his sleeve from the top ledge of the Statue of Liberty, people do not (any longer) turn into werewolves and vampires ... But there they are. There is nothing people do not do, no place they may not find themselves. This is the knowledge which makes acceptable film's absolute control of our attention. It is the knowledge ... that we exist in the condition of myth: we do not require the gods to show that our lives illustrate a story which escapes us ... [61]

Hence, 'belief' is an equivocal term in relation to movies: to suspend disbelief in the fantastic realms of mythopoeia is not analogous to believing that what transpires on stage reflects, and is anchored in, what happens in reality.

Within a movie, 'Relevance' is ... determined by the narrative, or, ... the questions and answers that drive the narrative which ... are saliently posed and answered ... by means of variable framing.'[62] Movie editors continually focus our attention on what's important by cutting out 'superfluities',[63] and by the framing of shots, with close-ups which literally enlarge the important features of the plot upon the screen. Editing makes us *see* immediate *practical* import; its purpose is to convey meaning. Because of 'the way it can be organized through camera positioning', 'action' in movies 'is far more intelligible than the unstaged events we witness in everyday life'. Thus, as Carroll says, the 'film maker in the movie genre has far more potential control over the spectator's attention than does the theatrical director'.[64] This points us to the kind of intelligibility movie-viewers are looking for, the line of questioning in which they are absorbed. In movies, we don't so much ask 'why?' as we ask 'what next?' What could happen next to Fido, dangling over non-existence? The movies' 'what next' quality is driven by what Cavell calls

[61] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 156–7.
[62] Carroll, 'The Power of Movies', pp. 99–100.
[63] Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, p. 86.
[64] Carroll, 'The Power of Movies', pp. 92–3 and 89.

its 'absolute freedom of narrative'. We don't truly ask 'why' in a movie because, here, story is more important than, and has absorbed the main engine of why questions, characters. Whereas, in theatre, we look for an intelligibility at the level of character, in movies we only want intelligibility at the level of action, or 'what happens'. So far as we seek to penetrate the characters in a detective film, it is to get the wider picture, or hold the suspense at bay by grasping the idea of the story. Movie actors are there to 'illustrate a story'. If you doubt it, and you have a life outside your DVD collection, attempt to recall the movie-*names*—that is, not the names of the actors—of a dozen movie protagonists. Even the obvious counter-example, James Bond, is really an animated plot vehicle. And this is why the Thomist grammarian's 'what next' question cannot take us to a free, transcendent God. One has to shift the analogy to theatre genuinely to be able to ask a 'why' question. By contrast with an actress on a screen, a real person has a name that sticks: a personal name 'fingers' the one to whom it is ascribed 'in his being'. For 'my personal name *is* the "who" that I am'. A person does not fit into a wider story, but enacts the name he is: 'To be a person', Wilhelmsen argues, implies 'not only having a name—spies and criminals . . . often have half a dozen names—but *being a name*'. And if naming taps our very being or existence, then the giving of a personal name 'bespeaks being called, ultimately being called into existence'.[65]

Thus, a 'theatrical' presentation of the argument would infer its way through designs and moves to an Artist or First Mover, and *only then* have the temerity to enquire of Him or Her, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' The answer returned to Moses was, 'I am that I am.' If the *who* is the person, then, in properly Christian parlance, 'Creator' means Person. Any non-foundationalist presentation of the argument has Yahweh's answer behind it—it believes it theologically, or by dint of revelation. And it is this 'knowing who God is' which enables it to see that the world might not exist, or is not necessarily there. For the designation of God as 'I am that I am' makes us see that everything other than the One who bears this character is properly named as a 'might not have been'. It's the name or 'nature' of God to exist; it is not anything else's. As argumentative inferences, the Ways analytically apply this information to unexplained facts to hand, such as that they move, cause one another, seem 'designed' and so on. These inferences are informative because they take us to the source or cause of otherwise inexplicable facts, such as movement and artistry in nature.

[65] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, pp. 100–1.

On the other hand, the 'cinematic' take on the arguments, lacking that contentual inference from which to begin, has no *who*, that is, no free agent, of whom to enquire 'why'. Whereas the 'dramatic' version draws a philosophical or metaphysical analysis out of its generative-faith knowledge, and thus has a purchase in reality, the movieish one repeats what we know by faith in the form of a question; as it were, winding the tape backwards, and thus has a purchase only in mental acts. Thus, Jenson's interpretation of the Five Ways, as aimed at believers only, is inadvertently that of all grammatical Thomists.

Behind the grammatical Thomist argument lies a sense of the 'real distinction', the difference, in 'creatures', as theists call them, between 'essence' or nature on the one hand and existence on the other. It's because existence does not inhere in the *nature* of 'created' things that one can ask ' "What if *nothing at all existed*?" or, in other words: "Is the world as such contingent?" ' The meaning of God's 'I am that I am' is that there is no such parting of essence and existence in God: 'to be God is to be'. Seeing the centrality of these notions to Saint Thomas' theology, Turner takes them to mean that Thomas' line of thought goes there directly, bypassing questions of fact. The 'question itself', he writes,

> seems to spin off the world entirely, as having no purchase on anything at all *in* it. It seems that . . . this is what Thomas thinks, and that it is . . . in its 'spinning off the world' that the question acquires both the character of the properly theological and of the properly existential. It is the properly 'existential' question because . . . we get at the notion of existence, *esse* in its proper sense . . . as that which stands over against there being nothing at all, occupying a territory divided by no 'logical space' from nothing. It is, therefore, the centrality of this *esse* to Thomas's metaphysics which places the 'Why anything' question at the centre of his arguments for the existence of God. For it is this *esse*'s standing in absolute, unmediated, contrast with nothing at all which gets to the contingent heart of creation, and to the heart of the sense in which creation is contingent.[66]

In agreement as to 'the centrality of . . . *esse* to Thomas' metaphysics', we cannot concur with the opinion that *esse* is metaphysically questionable before one has proven the existence of God by other, and more worldly and dramatic, means. What distinguishes the Christian theologian from, say, Aristotle, is that he knows, by faith, that it is only God to whom one can ascribe an identity of existence and essence, and thus that in 'creatures' a real distinction pertains between existence and nature. He thus gives arguments for the existence of God which both can lead non-believers to this insight and

[66] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 245.

which enables believers to corroborate their faith with evidence.[67] 'Existence' is precisely the gap across which he spins his web, from that which 'has' or is given existence to that which is and gives existence; but God gives no existence to creatures without giving natures (moves, causes, artistry), and these are the building-blocks of Thomas' argument. It is likewise these which give material content to analogical language about God (the Mover, Causer, Artist).

Variable framing, narration, and shots linked as answer to question are the means by which movies hold our attention. Lacking these technological devices, drama is forced back on acknowledging that the rationale of the plot is its individual characters. These characters do and undergo things which make us ask questions, but they themselves are not questions; they're the facts upon which a story is built; not illustrations *of* narrative, but motive forces *to* drama. And likewise, it is only within the uniform dialectical format of the *Summa*, that is, in common with all his other 'replies', that Thomas' Five Ways can be described as 'asking questions': his manner is not to question but to build an argument. Grammatical Thomists are drawn to the movieish method of expressing intelligibility through questioning, because the Leibnizian, or methodological, conception of the Five Ways telescopes them down to three words, 'How come reason?' A question can be either loaded or open. If loaded toward God, the 'How come reason?' question is circular: the answer is because the universe makes rational sense, is a circumscribed story. If 'rationality' is all that it is based upon, the philosophical theologian's presupposition that the universe is rational is as unwarranted as the scientist's—or as warranted, for both assume circular stories. Even if it could be an open question, 'Why reason?' could not contain sufficient content to pinpoint a transcendent *freedom* as an answer. The question doesn't 'stick' to an agent.

If it can't give us much sense of what it might designate, the 'why question' does not apply to anything which concerns us. The appeal of translating what Thomas actually says in the Five Ways into an eight-word sentence is not unconnected to the intricate task of explaining the meaning of 'potentiality' and 'actuality' to undergraduates who do not appreciate that all objects both animate and inanimate behave like *characters*. A drama holds us because of its characters: the question is, for instance, '*Who* dunnit?' Persons are significant, to us, or relevant, in theatre as in real life, because persons betoken advertent agency. *Who* did it is more interesting than *what* did it because it means it was done deliberately. When we ask *why*, the answer is normally a person. Modern philosophies tend to restrict *why* questions to persons. A person as such

[67] This is the argument of Étienne Gilson's 'La Preuve du *De Ente et Essentia*', *Acta III Congressus Thomistici internationalis* (1950), 257–260.

transcends his or her environment, including his own nature; for a person is not so much 'possessed by' as 'possessing' a human nature.[68] It is only to the extent that an object fails to transcend its story that one can approach completeness in *describing* it. One may feel that the teleological end point of a perfect *description* is an explanation: a perfect description of *how* an object is ought to cover *why* it is. The story ought to get the person covered. But it cannot, because free agents do not so much *have* stories as create them. We feel cheated when a novelist does violence to her characters to bring the story round to the completed conclusion of a happy ending. That's because we sense that it is the characters, with their deliberate choices, who *create* or invent the story. This, in turn, is because we identify them as free agents.

This is also the reason why no one's historical life is actually a story, except in the oxymoronic sense of a shaggy dog 'story'. Although biographers may strive to lend the rational roundedness of story to their subjects' lives, and probably must do so if they want their text to conform to the universal human desire to know, and although we can cull stories from selected portions of our own lives, no human life is identifiable with a single pattern. In a human life, too many things just 'happen because they happen' for the whole to seem a story, even and especially when the subject is not the victim of circumstance. This is not just because there are too many dead-ends and random events to fit into a rounded whole, nor because there's a loose thread of mystery, over and above the pattern. It is because the free agent *is* the mystery of his or her life and simultaneously *is* its rationale: a free, creative agent *is* herself the pattern of her actions, the 'sufficient reason' of his effects, the designer of her history. It is only as the effects and moves of a personal agent that the things which he produces can come to seem rational; but precisely as the effects of a personal agent, these actions and effects, this history, is absolutely free from a specifiable beginning, middle, and end, free from confinement in a story. A person's free effects, the histories which he leaves in his wake, do not constitute a 'story' because they sit loosely to the person who constructs it and gives it meaning. The same is true of sub-human and even inanimate entities. The energy which invigorates them is its own explanation, so that, for instance, the 'embryo *is* the law of its own development'.[69] A 'formal' description of it, that is, an explanation that goes so far as its rational structure, does not tap the root of its own interior creativity. Anything which harbours the 'law' of its own history in itself is both somewhat necessary, and free. We have suggested that it is a false move for a theist to

[68] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 99.

[69] Étienne Gilson, *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality, Species, and Evolution*, trans. John Lyon (English, London: Sheed & Ward, 1984), p. 125.

agree to the naturalist's assumption that the universe ought to look like a story. Rather, we propose, one should argue that everything in nature looks suspiciously free of the constraints of narrativity, in some empirical respects, and thus like the effects of a free agent. Like a human life, the cosmos is a throw-away gesture, disarmingly pointless, and yet a gesture for all that, a free, creative act. Like a person's historical life, the cosmos does not altogether add up. To those who do not yet *know* that God exists, its oddity is not that the existence of finite existents sits aslant to their essential natures, but that their narratable rationality is askew to their energetic freedom of action, in which the reign of chance coexists with the law of necessity.

Thomas may have been looking for something analogous to such specifiable, creative free agencies in his Five Ways: it doesn't seem to do violence to them to describe his causes, moves, worldly necessity, perfections, and functioning design as five *character-effects*. Fergus Kerr suggests that 'causing, for Thomas, is pictured on analogy with a person's own experience of bringing things about'.[70] Causes, moves, and perfecting touches are the events left in the wake of decisively free moves, inventions, and makings. Since not even an *explanatory* description can get them surrounded, they act like what Ralph McInerny called *Characters in Search of Their Author*.[71] Thomas' moves and causes have the look of *free* effects, effects invigorated by a free author. They act like free beings, entities which cannot be covered by a story or description. *After* the proof is made, the revealed analogy for which it gives metaphysical evidence becomes explicit: the analogy is from one freedom to another, from finite to infinite freedom.

The proof shows us that, 'not only do *I* exist but also in a sense I exercise that existence in my own right. St. Thomas emphasized this aspect of personality when he justified Job for complaining to God for having lost his goods, his health, and his family. Job could "speak up" to God because there is a certain mysterious equality between persons.'[72] So why not keep the more concrete expression, *person*, rather than speaking of infinite 'freedom'? Thomas Aquinas, Karl Barth, and Hans Urs von Balthasar all have it that this would be a false move.[73] For what we mean by 'person' in God is far detached from the everyday application of the term to human beings. As the last named theologian puts it,

[70] Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 46.

[71] Ralph McInerny, *Characters in Search of Their Author* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

[72] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 99.

[73] Thomas argues that we can use the word 'person' analogically but cannot use it univocally of God and creatures in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 3 and a. 4. According to Barth, 'We cannot

> even in faith's contemplation of the form of Christ there is . . . revealed to every believer . . . that the eternal Father in his relation to the Son—the Trinitarian God who reveals himself in the Son—is not an 'existent' who, along with creatures, falls univocally under the category of personality: it becomes obvious to the believer that the analogy's greater dissimilarity also cuts through the category of person.[74]

If, with the grammatical Thomists, we ask the 'why is there something' question without building it upon empirical givens, taken as the 'effects' of a free creative agency, it gives us a self-sufficient block of storied rationality, which doesn't go anywhere or do anything, and doesn't permit the existence of anything outside of itself. It takes further, dramatic elements to enable a story to go beyond itself. One is the creative impulse of the characters, the sense of their freedom, which makes them the inventors, not the vehicles, of the plot. With that, we transcend the narrative of this world, seeing its contingency. And it's only now that we can ask the 'why' question in earnest, having good reason to telescope our search to a transcendent, divine, free agent. We will make this case in Chapter 5.

A problem for the grammatical Thomists is that they operate a part of the Thomist apparatus without being able to give credence to the medieval cosmology, in which natural objects function somewhat like the effects of personal agents. But, perhaps the shape of Thomas Aquinas' arguments comes back, not so much to his being in the 'unquestioning' grip of an 'old fashioned, pre-scientific idea' of causation,[75] as to his being an heir to the Chalcedonian formula, which made the *person* of Christ the mover to his two 'natures'. Chalcedon gave the impetus to much modern philosophical reflection on personhood. Unless a story is stimulated and moved by dynamic agencies, that is, unless the story is *less* than the sum of its characters, then it does not point beyond itself. David Schindler remarks, 'a coherent drama requires an author who is not merely one of the players':[76] this is only so if the players are free agents, and not just plot vehicles. Only the effects of a free agent can lead us to wonder, '*Who* made you?' The consequence of doing without these elements is to absolutize the story itself, lending it the condition of myth. Thus, what the grammatical Thomists believe in as 'God' can be one of two things. It is either a rationale internal to the Story of everything, or it is

speak of "personalising" in reference to God's being, but only in reference to ours. The real person is not man but God. It is not God who is a person by extension, but we. God exists in His act. God is His own decision. God lives from and by Himself.' *Church Dogmatics* II/1, p. 272.

[74] Von Balthasar, *Glory* I, pp. 194–5.

[75] Kerr, *After Aquinas*, p. 47.

[76] Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 21.

The Story: the narrative God is either a concept of everything, or Everything. And this, one may say, is 'perilously like one of the gods'.[77]

5. Naming God into Existence in Story-Barthian Theology: Hermeneutics

The grammatical Thomists have settled on the 'why proof' because they think that, since it is 'questive' rather than factual in some literal sense, it gives us a God who is not 'an item in the universe'[78] *and* can thereby manoeuvre around Immanuel Kant's objections to cosmological arguments. According to Kant, an argument to God which begins from *empirical* facts cannot rise above these factual premises, but can only replicate them on a larger scale, and will thus deliver some 'intra-cosmic' force, not the transcendent deity of Christian faith. Kant considered the matter epistemologically, that is, from the perspective of our knowledge of the intended object of proof. The would-be prover of God's existence is, he thought, caught in an epistemological double bind: either one moves from the known to God considered as *known*, and attains only an intra-cosmic Architect (a rationale internal to the Story), or one attempts to move from the empirically known to the *unknown* (God as The Story). He considered the latter move illegitimate, for the process of empirical knowledge (of facts) cannot deliver 'unknowns', or nonempirical entities. Kant wrote that,

> If the Supreme Being forms a link in the chain of empirical conditions, it must be a member of the empirical series, and, like the lower members which it precedes, have its origin in some higher member of the series. If, on the other hand, we disengage it from the chain, and cogitate it as an intelligible being, apart from the series of natural causes—how shall reason bridge the abyss that separates the latter from the former?[79]

Hegel believed that Kant was right to make Anselm's argument for God's existence foundational to the cosmological arguments, but thought him wrong to dismiss this so-called 'ontological argument'. Hegel thought that Kant had misinterpreted the ontological argument. As he saw it, the argument invented by Anselm does not move from our having a concept of God to God's reality, but, rather, the reverse: *the reality* of God engages or manifests itself in our finite minds as the concept of God. Since, for Hegel, God constitutes itself as Trinity in the differentiation of universal being into

[77] McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 42. [78] Ibid., p. 58.

[79] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (London: Dent, 1934, 1988), p. 362.

the particularity of essence (the Son), and thence into Spirit or individual concept,[80] the ontological argument expresses the final stage of this divine process—the eruption of Spirit into full *reality* in human minds, or the return of Spirit to itself, in finite spirit. As Hegel sees it, the ontological argument is no 'natural philosophy' seeking to work from human concept to divine reality: 'the movement from concept to reality is not executed by the finite intellect but by the divine itself . . . what is really going on in the proofs' is the mind's elevation to God—by God.[81]

One of the irons which Barth has in the fire in his landmark book on Anselm is to retrieve Anselm's proof from Hegel. His book contends that, in the hands of the believing theologian who invented it, there is no 'Ontological Proof'. That is, since Descartes and Leibniz misinterpreted it by making it a proof of God's existence, attempting to refute Kant's strictures against a thesis which belongs to them rather than to Anselm is 'so much nonsense on which no more words ought to be wasted'. What we find in Anselm's *Proslogion* is not, Barth maintained, the 'ontological proof' of eighteenth-century theism, but, rather, God's own Demonstration of his existence, elicited through prayer. Anselm's argument turns on an idea or name of God as 'that than which no greater can be conceived'. Barth describes this formula as one of many 'Revealed Names of God'. Anselm did not, he argues, think up a concept of God which proves that God *really* exists—on the grounds that real existence is a higher and finer thing than life as a conceptual Idea. By way of what Barth calls 'prophetic insight', the God in whom Anselm already believed revealed to him the necessary bearing of his being, and thus his bearing toward us, as Creator to creatures:

> Thus in no sense is he of the opinion that he produced this formula out of his own head but he declares quite explicitly the source from which he considers it to have come to him: when he gives God a Name, it is not like one person forming a concept of another person; rather it is as a creature standing before his Creator. In this relationship which is actualized by virtue of God's revelation, as he thinks of God he knows that he is under this prohibition; he can conceive of nothing greater, to be precise, 'better', beyond God without lapsing into the absurdity, excluded for faith, of placing himself above God in attempting to conceive of this greater. *Quo maius cogitari nequit* only appears to be a concept that he formed for himself; it is in fact as far as he is concerned a revealed Name of God.[82]

Philosophical theologians will wonder what Anselm's argument is *for*, if it does not prove that God exists. Barth was already set upon writing a theology

[80] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* III, pp. 275–6.
[81] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 79 and 325.
[82] Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, pp. 171 and 75–7.

based in revelation, one in which the creeds of the Church are, as he puts it, 'the self-evident basis of the discussion'.[83] To write a systematic theology about divine revelation, Christ, the Trinity, reconciliation, and creation, one needs to use an immense number of *words*, words like good, flesh, incarnation, generation, procession, sin, and human. But if everything we know about God comes from God, one cannot take these words in their ordinary usage, or as from their apparent human origin. One must assume that one is using them *not* only with the truth imparted to them by their correspondence to ordinary objects, but also and crucially with the truth imparted to them by God, the first Truth. Barth says that Anselm is not concerned with the *existence* of faith—bringing it into being by showing its object exists—but with the *nature* of faith. What kind of *understanding*, or *intelligere* can use theological language appropriately? Only one, according to Barth, which, through grace, attains a 'participation' 'in God's mode of Being'.[84] In his discussion of Anselm's proof, Barth is looking for a divine anchor onto which to hook theological language. There are no philosophically or naturally known 'analogies' between creatures and God, according to Barth, only analogies made known by the Revealer: he called analogies known by the revelation of God in Christ the analogy of faith, the *analogia fidei*. Barth began to develop his notion of the *analogia fidei* in his book about Anselm, where he writes that, 'It is in the Truth and by the Truth, in God and by God that the basis is a basis and that rationality possesses rationality.'[85] Since he has chosen an eleventh-century Platonizing Benedictine monk as his paradigm, the *analogia fidei* is very much an *analogy of participation*, the 'truing' of the theologian's words about God through their participation in the first Truth. Barth recognizes, of course, that no *perfect* participation of our human language in the divine Truth can take place here below: every 'theological statement' must be, he says, 'an inadequate expression of its object'. Nonetheless, the Creator creates the *truth* of the objects which exist in dependence on him, and which are not maximally 'true' as only uncreated Truth can be, and so, likewise, he can create a certain reflective similitude of truth in our language about him:

just as everything which is not God could not exist apart from God and is something only because of God, with increasing intensity an *aliqua imitatio illius essentiae*, so it is possible for expressions which are really appropriate only to objects that are not identical with God, to be true expressions, *per aliquam similitudinem aut imaginem*

[83] Ibid., p. 60. [84] Ibid., p. 17. [85] Ibid., p. 51.

(*ut cum vultum alicuius consideramus in speculo*), even when those expressions are applied to God who can never be expressed.[86]

The theologian's human language may darkly mirror the first Truth, as and when the first Truth graciously enables that language to do so, on the condition that the theologian has taken the precaution of drawing everything he says from the 'all-inclusive circle'[87] of divine Truth.

Barth's book on Anselm was to prove decisive for his later theology.[88] Three distinct theses are present in it. The first is that Anselm's 'argument' works from revelation: 'We can interpret his proof only when, along with Anselm, . . . we share the presupposition of his inquiry—that the object of the inquiry stands over against him who inquires not as "it," not even as "he," but as "thou," as the unmediated "thou" of the Lord.'[89] The second thesis is that Anselm's 'prophetic' naming of God elicits *two* principles, the first, in *Proslogion* 2, that God exists in the general sense in which all objects exists, and the second, in *Proslogion* 3, that God exists in a way unique to himself, that is, necessarily. Thirdly, the function of the 'demonstration' is to explore the nature of faithful rationality, and thus of theological language: these are shown to take their *theological* character from creaturely participation in the first Truth.

We have seen that, with Hans Frei, 'If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then he was not who this story claims he is, and the narrative coherence of the story considered as a unity radically collapses.'[90] Many people have perceived an affinity between the way the resurrection functions in Frei's theology and the task of the 'Revealed Name' in Anselm-as-read-by-Barth. According to

[86] Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, pp. 29–30.

[87] Ibid., p. 97.

[88] This is a controversial point. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, Barth freed his theology from philosophy and began to speak, not just of *dialectical* knowledge of God, but of the *analogy* of faith in his Anselm book: see *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Drury (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 78. The idea that there is a shift from dialectics to analogy has been challenged by Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 1–20. Not foreseeing the construction which story Barthians would put upon his theology, Barth wrote in the Preface to the 2nd edition of *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, 'Only a comparatively few commentators . . . have realized that my interest in Anselm was never a side issue for me . . . Most of them have . . . failed to see that in this book on Anselm I was working with a vital key, if not the key, to . . . that whole process of thought that has impressed me more and more in my *Church Dogmatics* as the only one proper to theology' (p. 11). Our point is neither that Barth used the idea for the first time in his Anselm book nor that analogy henceforth became the only means by which Barth understood theological language, but that, for him, analogical language is an *effect* or result of God's self-revelation.

[89] Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, p. 151.

[90] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 14.

Placher, Frei saw in his understanding of the resurrection, 'an analogy to Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God as Barth had interpreted it. For Anselm, the logic of talk about God implies that God exists; God cannot be conceived as not existing.'[91] An attentive reader may be able to observe that this story-Barthian interpretation of *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* merges two distinct moments in Barth's thesis: God's self-demonstration of his existence, including the necessity of that existence, and the harvest which this yields for Christian theology—the analogical language of faith. The conflation of these two theses alters Barth's argument: the fact of theological language, even say, the revealed language of Scripture, now becomes a *proof*, albeit a circular one, of God's existence. On the one hand, Barth explicitly rejected the term 'Ontological Proof', attributing it to Descartes and Leibniz; the self-demonstration of God's existence *follows from* the gracious act of the 'unmediated "thou" of the Lord'. On the other hand, then, for Barth, we do not know God because we have got a name for him, we know God because *he has visited us*. Theological language follows from the demonstration, and not vice versa. The ladder of participatory language is let down by the first Truth, as and when grace provides. This is a sort of occasionalist participationism: its function within Barth's theology is not to prove God's existence, but, as an *effect* of God's speech, to enable us humanly to speak of God. Barth does not imagine anyone using it to climb back to God—although, of course, many Christian thinkers influenced by Neoplatonism, from Anselm[92] to Aquinas, have used perfections like truth to argue for the existence of the first Truth; and the reader can expect some action replays of the Fourth Way later on in this book.[93]

This nit-picking distinction between Barth's apparent intentions and their development in story Barthianism is of some importance. For if Barth saw in Hegel's Spirit coming to self-knowledge merely a *projection* of humanity coming to understand itself, what he may have intended to do, in his interpretation of Anselm, was to up-end Hegel. God speaks *to* humans; humans do not, naturally, speak the word of God. But if one relinquishes the prohibition on conceiving this route as a *proof*, and simultaneously makes language that proof, one may have turned Hegel back the other way again. To put it another way: Barth's thesis contains an *ontology* of revelation, linking revelation to a being who exists necessarily in and of himself. If one restates it in terms of *hermeneutics*, it no longer connects to a necessary being

[91] Placher, 'Introduction', Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 14.

[92] Gillian Evans notes that Anselm uses the perfections to argue '*upwards*' to God in the *Monologion*, in her *Anselm and Talking about God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 49–55.

[93] See below, Chapter 5, section 6, and Chapter 7, section 5.

existing in and of himself, because hermeneutics is the study of language, and language is transitive, or intrinsically related to an 'addressee'. At the very best, then, the Revealer will exist on the same broad general level as all other beings; at worst, the revealer will be ourselves. We will now consider how this works out.

With Barth, the protagonist or the agent of human knowledge of God is God, and this knowing takes place within the 'self-enclosed circle' of the Trinity. Story Barthians ascribe to Barth the notion of theological *circularity*; narrative theologians believe that they share their vision of a circular, descriptive theology with him. Just as one of Barth's methodological principles was that 'the definition of deity' is 'circular within the Gospel story',[94] so, in story Barthianism, the resurrection of Christ should attest or 'true' the Gospel story. It does so by giving logical coherence to the 'language' in which the story is told, not by making it 'correspond' with evidence outside those words, in first-century Jerusalem. For the latter would give us empirically mediated 'knowledge' of God (an impossibility for the Kantian), rather than knowledge 'in God and by God'.[95]

Hans Frei elaborates the Barthian 'in God and by God' in terms of the language of the Scriptures. For Barth, the 'act' in which God reveals himself is the act of his being Christ, the Christian revelation. God 'does' himself as Christ, God's revelation of God to humanity. If one translates this into linguistic terms, as the story Barthians do, it becomes a thesis about the 'meaning' of 'God': the act of God, God's 'being-in-act' by which we know him, Christ, is the *meaning* of God. Meaning is always meaning *to* someone: whether or not it makes a sound, the unheard tree's fall has no meaning. This is the theological reasoning behind Frei's insistence that we look upon Christ by considering the Gospel text itself, not 'an action in back of the outward, visible scene' presented by the textual descriptions of Christ.[96] His *meaning* is extroverted; *how else should we grasp it*?

In a movie about his origins, Batman tells a girl who wants to date Bruce Wayne, 'I'm not who I am underneath; I am defined by what I do.'[97] As the vehicle of the Batman story, he is not Bruce Wayne, but the Caped Crusader. It's important to Frei that the 'identification and description' of Jesus 'in the gospel story' is achieved by 'what he does and undergoes', and what he does is 'chiefly' to be 'crucified and raised'. Frei insists that our 'slant' on him is 'public', that the Jesus of the Gospels 'extroverts' his identity. For, if his nature

[94] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, p. 161.
[95] Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, p. 51.
[96] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 29.
[97] *Batman Begins*.

and character were outside or beyond the Gospel story, that story would not be the self-expression or revelation of God.

For Frei, the 'truth' of the biblical text for us is its Truth in God. The 'authority' or revealedness of the New Testament consists in its 'identity or unity of text and meaning'. He does not simply mean that the text is authoritative because God uses it to express his meaning, or that the Gospel story is the revelation of God. He means that the story spells out the being of God *for us*. As God enacts his being in, as it were, our direction, it becomes our knowledge of God, or the *meaning* of God for us. Frei writes: 'Jesus *is* his story. (Karl Barth makes the same point when he says that Jesus *is* reconciliation and not simply the Reconciler who would then, in a separable action or sequence, enact reconciliation.)'[98] Taking his stand on Barth's methodological principle that God is known only in and through God, Frei transfers what Barth understands as the *content* of God's self-revelation into the language of Scripture. For Barth, the *content* of revelation was 'the unmediated "thou" of the Lord';[99] the *method* of theology—its *analogia fidei*—was the language of theology. Frei is using the Barthian *analogia fidei*, but taking the biblical story as God's self-demonstration, the content. With Barth, *God* demonstrates himself, and this results in faithful analogical language. With Frei, the analogical language of Scripture is itself the demonstration. Frei is translating what Barth says about God revealing himself to us through Christ into a Christ-for-us of the Bible. Frei does this within an analysis of how Christ makes himself known to us. He looks at this issue hermeneutically, or in terms of how we understand a text. As he lays out the 'circularity' of Christological hermeneutics, Frei has in mind the difference between the way unbelievers, on the one hand, and believers or pilgrims, on the other, reflect on Christ. For Frei, it is the very '*exercise of ordering*', which engages no 'new evidence for the truth of Christian faith': it 'is a purely formula and circular procedure'.[100] Frei states that '*thought* about the relation between Christ and believer must be formal and circular'.[101] Frei is claiming that the *practice of developing and composing theological hermeneutics* is one which turns on circular claims, or constitutes its own linguistic 'world' of meanings and their referents. Here, Christ is a purely intentional object within theological thinking. What Frei seems to be referring to is a circularity within thought itself, a noetic or hermeneutic circularity. Frei requires that

[98] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, pp. 37 and 42.
[99] Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, p. 151.
[100] Frei, *The Identity*, p. 5. [101] Ibid., p. 6.

thought about the relationship be circular, and both believer and Christ are considered *within* this epistemological nexus.

Within story Barthianism, the idea that God is known only in God and by God's act, and not mediately, by relating empirical *things* to God, develops into the theory that the object of faith is to be known in the biblical story alone. Heidegger observed that 'words world the world': the language we use is the tool by which we find or give meaning to our world. Just as 'natural humanity' has its language, so the Bible has or is a language. Its meaning is God ('Jesus is his story', as Frei put it). Just as grammatical Thomists eschew 'how' arguments and empirical facts, so the story Barthian does not think the Bible tells us *how* history happened. It follows, for the story Barthian, that the Bible isn't making brute factual assertions about the world around us. Rather, it is asking us to enter its own world, and inhabit it. The relation between 'word' and 'object', for instance, between 'donkey' (Num. 22.23–35) and existent donkey, is not taken to be one of *correspondence* from textual to brute, factual donkeys. Since on this view, any 'object' belongs to *a* language, and gains the meaning it has for us from that language, narrativists take the theologian's task to be describing our world as conceived through the window of biblical language.

Recall that for Barthians the deity of theistic philosophers has nothing in common with the revealed God. Since we have no pre-linguistic experience of *any* realities, so Christians cannot compare 'God' as described by the Bible and Church Creeds with the God spoken of in the languages of the non-Christian religions. Barth's method, derived from the Kantian epistemological prohibitions on speaking metaphysically of God, required that a general 'theistic' notion of divinity has nothing in common with God as Revealed. This is extended into the idea that biblical and non-biblical religions are different 'languages', incommensurable thought-worlds. This is why story Barthians refuse to countenance arguments for the existence of God. There is no God to argue for. The Trinity emerges into existence for us through the Christian language which describes Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

In this descriptive theology, the biblical story does not only 'absorb the *universe*', it absorbs God too. The only God it can know is 'God for us', God in relation to our language, or, God in the salvation history inscribed in the biblical story. A story Barthian cannot know a God who transcends the relationship to humanity which the Bible spells out. The reason is that language does not exist just for itself. Spoken or written language, like that of Scripture, must not only be, but mean. Meaning as significance is always meaning *to* someone. It exists *for* an interlocutor. Linguistic meaning is a means of passage. It may come about *within one mind*, as when I articulate a thought for myself. Or it may swim from one mind to

another. It can doggy-paddle from one person to another in conversation, or backstroke from the mind energizing a piece of writing to a reader's mind. It is integrally transitive.

Story Barthians make three steps which appropriate Barth's self-revealing, scriptural God into a scriptured God of human thought. First, there is the assumption that we can experience no reality which has not been codified in a language. Second, there is the belief that theology must be descriptive, not assertive, because one can describe the biblical language-world, but one can't assert that it corresponds to reality, since there is no existent reality outside the biblical language. And so, third, there is no transcendent extra-biblical God in himself to which the Christian language could 'correspond'. There is only the God-related-to-us of the Bible. For narrative theology, what Frei calls Christ's 'presence' to us is the very existence of God. The 'God' of narrative theology is not self-subsistent being, *Ipsum esse Subsistens*, but a being which is in its essence related to human minds. And this is thus a contingent existence, dependent upon a language-using other for its reality.

Many of these ideas are in line with Barth's own. He does deny that we can prove God's existence; he does affirm both that the only knowledge we have of God is revealed knowledge and that the very *reality* of God is made known to us in Christ. But what seems to be lost in the hermeneutic appropriation of Barth's thought is the assent to a God who is the *protagonist* of our knowledge of him, its free Creator. Anselm's idea of truth is not easy for non-medievalists to get hold of, for it is both *noetic*, or epistemological, related to meaning, as it is in modern discussions, and *ontological*: as he sees it, God, the first Truth gives not only words but also *objects* their 'truth'. One has to consider the ontological participation of created beings in divine being to follow his drift. Even our *thinking*, with its truth or falsity, which we spontaneously think of as an *epistemological* category, is primarily a metaphysical one, for Anselm the Neoplatonist. Our language is likewise *ontological*, a participation in the divine language, before it is an expression of human cognitive processes.[102]

Barth seems to follow Anselm faithfully in recognizing that truth and rationality are ontological before they are epistemological, or noetic. As he writes in his Anselm book,

> Ontic rationality precedes noetic necessity; the establishing of knowledge of the object of faith consists also in the recognition of the rationality belonging to the object of faith. ...As ontic rationality is not itself an ultimate but is only true rationality

[102] Gillian Evans writes that, 'for Anselm, language is something more than a device for making statements about reality. It possesses a reality of its own which sets it on a level with other *res* created by God. It is both a vehicle of understanding and an object of understanding,

measured alongside the *summa veritas*, the same is true of the ontic necessity that is consistent with it. It is in the Truth and by the Truth, in God and by God, that the basis is a basis and that rationality possesses rationality.[103]

If we reconceive the divine 'Truth' outside the objective participationist schema in which Anselm and Barth locate it, truth becomes a purely noetic or epistemological matter. Once 'Truth' ceases to be conceived in relation to the will of a Thou, and is resuscitated as an answer to the Kantian 'how can I know' question, it becomes truth as moderns understand it, that is, *meaning-to* someone.

This conception of God is put across clearly in Kelsey's appropriation of Barth's idea of God's personal presence. For Barth, he says, 'The being of a person is being-in-act.' Kelsey prescinds from Barth's assertion that the word 'person' only applies properly to God.[104] For Barth it is *God* who makes and defines us as persons, and not vice versa; for 'God's being as He who lives and loves is being *in freedom*.' The Swiss Calvinist writes that

The definition of a person—that is, a knowing, willing, acting I—can have the meaning only of a confession of the person of God declared in His revelation, of the One who loves and who as such (loving in His own way) is *the* person. . . . Man is not a person, but he becomes one on the basis that he is loved by God and can love God in return. . . . Therefore to be a person means . . . to be what God is, to be, that is, the One who loves in God's way. Not we but God is I. For He alone is the One who loves without any other good, without any other ground, without any other aim, . . . and who as He does so is Himself and as such can confront another, a Thou.[105]

Instead of following this lead, Kelsey fills out the meaning of person with reference to Frei's anti-Cartesian anthropology. A person is not, he finds, a hidden 'essence' or mind *behind* their acts, but the act-intentions expressed *in* his or her acts. So there is no gap between a person's being and his or her act-intentions. A person's 'identity, constituted by his acts, simply is his "being" '.[106] In the acts of his self-revelation, the Gospel acts of Jesus Christ, 'God does not just communicate information about himself . . . he makes his "person" to be present to men'.[107] The pattern of a person's acts is their identity, or being, and another word for 'pattern of actions' is story.

a means to the end of knowing itself, which might also be described as a means of knowing God by knowing God': *Anselm and Talking about God*, p. 36.

[103] Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, p. 51.
[104] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, pp. 46–7.
[105] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, pp. 301 and 284–5, my italics.
[106] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 47.
[107] Ibid.

If someone's act-intentions *are* his being or identity, and the sum total of these intentions make up a story, then his being or identity *is* his story.

A 'story' is a framework for characters to work in. 'Story' is the wider project, encompassing and giving a pattern to the actions and interactions of its characters. So if we say that God's identity is constituted by the biblical story, we have two options. One is to make 'God' one of the many characters within the project of the biblical story. This makes that 'story' the principle that defines 'God', rendering God lesser than Story. The second option is to *identify* God with the story as a whole, which again makes God but one of many constitutive features of the story, contingent upon the others, and thus contingent *like* the others. Both of these options fictionalize God, turning 'God' into a human construction. The theology of the story Barthians collapses the object of theology into its subject, humanity. For them, the divine 'presence' or being is necessarily 'presence-to' to a subject, humanity.

6. 'God' as One Character Amongst Others

Robert Jenson shifts the hermeneutical perspective of story Barthianism into an assertive ontology. The story Thomist recognizes the importance of enforcing a distinction between God and contingent beings. This is how he pin-points it:

> Father, Son, and Spirit are three personae of the story that is at once God's story and ours. Insofar as the triune narrative is about us, it is about creatures; insofar as it is about God, it is about the Creator. Therefore the difference of Creator from creature must be acknowledged throughout: the triune history as our history is the creature of the triune history as the history that is God.[108]

Instead of speaking a religious, 'theistic' 'Esperanto', Jenson wants to tell the story of God in 'Christianese'.[109] So the conceptual building-blocks of his construction are not taken from metaphysics, but from the biblical story. Thus, the only way of distinguishing God and contingent beings Jenson has to hand is to label 'God' as the 'Creator character within the story', and contingent beings as the 'created characters within the story'. Having set himself outside the extra-biblical linguistic world, and within the language of the Bible, Jenson's concepts, including that of God, are contingent with respect to the biblical story. Jenson is unhesitant in asserting the identity of God and the biblical story. So he has made 'Story' the larger concept which

[108] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 110. [109] Ibid., p. 19.

defines God's character: it is the *Story* which gives 'God' the role of 'Creator'. The words or roles Jenson uses for God and contingent beings, 'Creator' and 'creature' are given their meaning and function *by* the Story. Like 'God' in traditional theology, Jenson's *Story* directs and necessitates the roles and reality of its characters.

Some people may take from this the conclusion that Barth must be blamed for both Yale narrativism and Jenson's narrative ontology. For, it can be said, however oddly they construed his Anselm book, Barth could not expect to deliver a *fiat* that arguments for the existence of God must henceforth not take place. Anselm himself played up and down the metaphysical scales, arguing from God in the *Proslogion*, and to God in the *Monologion*. Barth seems to have accepted Kant's account of the relations between human reason and God,[110] and this error of judgement turned out to be more influential, in some quarters, than his proscription on proofs. Jenson and the story Barthians simply gave, then, *deductive* proofs, taking 'Scripture' as a premise, instead of inductive ones. This is, however, as far as Barth's culpability goes. There are those who would want to add the charge that Barth made it impossible for theologians to take up the suggestion which, for instance, Stove makes against Popperian scepticism: instead of infallible, deductive arguments, one must rest with common sense, and *fallible* claims.[111] Philosophers of religion are given to feeling that it is the prevalent mood of 'Barthianism' which leads theologians to deprecate the *probabilist* reasoning of modern apologists from Richard Swinburne to 'intelligent design' theorists like Michael Behe. But proponents of Vatican I are stuck with infallibility in more ways than one. For *Dei Filius* states, as we saw, that God 'can be known *with certainty* from the consideration of created things' (my italics). Theologians must propose that the existence of God is a *necessary*, rather than a probable or hypothetical, inference, neither out of a Humean retreat from inductive inference, nor in the misguided opinion that their observational *ken* has nothing in common with that of a *Goy*, *Gentile*, *Kafur*, or pagan. It is rather a matter of the *aesthetics* of theological reason: necessary arguments are beautiful, as probable ones are not. Here a theologian can learn from the

[110] See for instance the discussion at the end of the chapter on Kant, in Barth's *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, trans. John Bowden and Brian Cozens (London: SCM Press, 1972). Barth discusses a third 'way forward' for theology from Kant: 'It might perhaps well be possible to concur with an untroubled mind in the premise of Kant's undertaking . . . This third possibility would . . . consist in theology resigning itself to stand on its own feet in relation to philosophy, in theology recognising the point of departure for its own method in revelation, just as decidedly as philosophy sees its point of departure in reason' (p. 307).

[111] Stove, *Popper and After*, p. 147.

Swiss Calvinist's insistence that the *objectivity* of faith is likewise its beauty. As Barth said with respect to the theologian who composed the *Proslogion* in a Romanesque presbytery: 'he still had some freedom left to admit other spirits, one of them clearly being the aesthetics of theological knowledge. And indeed why not? . . . what exactly does "to prove" mean, if it is the result of the same action which may also lead straight to *delectatio*?'[112] Theologians would do well to keep an eye out for instances of *necessity* in the world around them.

7. On Not Raising the Game

We have considered three arguments for God's existence, one deliberately set out by grammatical Thomists, one created inadvertently within a hermeneutical presentation of story Barthianism, and a mixture of the two, in Jenson's story Thomism. There are, as we shall note below, two points of confluence between the grammarians and the storifiers: process and collision. Both the idea of a single process and that of a collision presuppose an event occurring within a *single* dimension or order of reality: two objects cannot collide, for instance, unless they are on the same plane. It may seem puzzling to propose that narrative theologians conceive of God and created things as existing in the same dimension, for it is one of their outstanding concerns to avoid such an outcome. Turner objects to the evidences for intelligent design given by 'Creationists' on the grounds that they 'are . . . playing the *same* game'[113] as their factually minded neo-Darwinian opponents. He wants theologians to engage in a wholly *different* game or to use a different 'language' from those, such as logical positivists, for whom 'the world is everything that is the case'. The desire for a God who *cannot* be referred to in the language we use of ordinary observable things is part of the legacy of Wittgenstein to linguistic theology: 'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical,' the Austrian philosopher legendarily asserted, 'but *that* it exists.' To accept the latter proposition as it stands is simultaneously to accept the propositions with which the *Tractatus* opens: 'the world is everything that is the case', 'the world is the totality of facts'.[114] One is playing along with the scientific naturalist's first postulate if one conceives of the universe as a vast container of physical items, and declares that 'God could not be an item in the universe.'[115] What one fails to do, if one neglects to challenge the metaphysics

[112] Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, p. 16. [113] Turner, *Faith Seeking*, p. 8.
[114] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1 and 6.44.
[115] McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 43.

of scientific naturalism, is to *raise the game*. That is, if one elects to play the same game and discuss the same observable phenomena as one's atheist opponents, one raises the game, whereas if, at the naturalist's injunction, one succumbs to playing a different game, one has been roped into the same game against one's purposes and intended outcomes. A naturalist would imagine that God is something like 'Blake's Nobodaddy',[116] a very large and potentially malign *item* or object. Looking forward to our next chapter, we will find that the *process* of showing that God may *not* be so described is the grammatical Thomist's answer to the problem of evil. Once the theologian has relinquished all stakes in how the world is rightly conceived and imagined, the naturalist is free to imagine God as Nobodaddy or Darth Vader, and the grammatical theologian has no ground in which to anchor a distinctive, analogical articulation of God's being. Obedient to the atheist's decree, and operating within the same naturalistic thought process, he can deny all the naturalistic ideas of God, but he cannot suggest actual analogies for God. To do that, he would have had to determine from the outset on playing the *same* game, but raising the stakes, and proposing events the atheist can observe and experience, like freedom or necessity, as indications of a Creator. The notion of the *analogia entis* comes down to the createdness of creation. Doubtless some of the grammaticians' Thomist precursors have leaned too heavily on the epistemological benefits of the analogies which the proof of a Creator God yields. It is God the Creator who creates a world bearing a family resemblance to himself. It is not, conversely, the human need to avert a fideistic evacuation of religious language which produces the analogies, as if to say, there must be such analogies or else we would have no propositional language for God. But when the Barthian denies that creation is 'family' to God, or that created analogies exist by dint of the Creator, on the ground that created analogies enable us to get an epistemic hold on God, he is again 'playing the same game' as the epistemologizing Thomist, conceiving analogy as a human epistemological technique rather than a facet of the creation at large, as a method for knowing God rather than a God-given orientation to perfection or God within events. But unless we think of created events as participating metaphysically in the divine perfection, why shouldn't epistemology be relegated to the 'game' of the engineer, logical positivist, and scientific naturalist; why shouldn't 'knowing' be taken as a technological process for manipulating data rather than as the art of participating intellectually in events which themselves participate in a scale of perfections? Because, at least, situating the division between theology (as revelation)

[116] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 13.

and philosophy (as reason) along the fault-line of how God is to be *known* plays along with the game of epistemology. It might be a better idea here, too, to raise the game by recentring the axis of analogy where Saint Thomas himself put it, in its Creator. This 'protagonist Creator' is distinct from his creation, not devised in reference to a 'different game' from that of the creation. Because he is not part of the world process, he is not liable to colliding with it. Now we consider process and collision themselves.

The Thomists and Barthians concur in placing great weight upon *process*, doing, or performance. One can consider linguistic meaning either in terms of dramatic content or in terms of cinematic-conveyance. With the former, linguistic meaning is conceived contentually, as the 'content' of a discourse. Consider two people conversing, each getting the other's meaning. Even a purposive, command-oriented conversation, as between secretary and boss, has its 'content' aspect: 'Sign this letter.' When one considers meaning in terms of its content, one is selecting out its conceptual aspect—the concepts signalled by 'sign' and 'letter'. One might also think of the concept at the centre of an as yet unread book, lying in wait for the reader who picks it off the library shelf. The immediate function of language in this aspect is meaning. The contentual 'upshot' of a conversation is the meaning of the words. One can put it aurally: each 'hears' the other's meaning.

A good storyteller is one who keeps us absorbed in her telling; this is the quality required to create marketable story-ideas for movies. One wants to know how it comes out. It is, we will later suggest, the eschatological orientation of narrative theology which makes it accentuate that aspect of the Gospel where the suspense motif is at its height—the death and resurrection of Christ. In its 'dramatic' aspect, conversely, language is used as by a bad storyteller: we don't want to keep turning the pages forward to find out what happens, but turn the pages back to get the fullest sense of the meaning. One is trying to *hear* the *voice* of the words, to capture their existential suggestion. The suspense motif is, as it were, suspended.

To look at linguistic meaning cinematically is to consider it more purposively, in its aspect as the *way* to putting one's thought across, the *means* of making oneself understood. Language use is here what we *do* in order to achieve the goal of understanding and being understood. When one views language in this performative angle, one is leaning on its *use* aspect. To take it in this pragmatic aspect is a 'purer' or more elemental way of considering language, because why else should we converse, except to make someone understand us? Why should we articulate our thoughts in words except to get a better grip on what we are thinking? In this aspect, our words *describe* what we are thinking about.

When we thus consider linguistic meaning in an elemental or functional sense as 'meaning *conveyed to*' someone, we are thinking of it as a means

by which someone *identifies* what we are talking about. Taken at its most elemental, meaning is identification. Pudovkin notes that whereas 'the average spectator . . . glances casually around him', the 'camera goes deeper' and discovers the 'deeply embedded detail', the key to the significance of the whole. Perception is usually cursory because everyday streams of events, such as one can see on the street, do not hold us in suspense. Our faculties of identification are therefore operating at low pressure. Most of what we see is not immediately relevant to us. But once our attention is editorially directed, 'an aura of clarity' is imported into what we perceive, thus 'affording an intense satisfaction concerning our cognitive expectations and our propensity for clarity'.[117] We *identify* targets of significant perception, or, follow the story. The literal-minded person is low on one's lists of potential movie-viewing companions because he is more interested in meaning than in identification.

When we think of linguistic meaning cinematically, we consider conversation as a process in which each speaker makes a sequence of acts of identifying the other's meaning, picking up the descriptions. When we mentally 'describe another's description', or follow through their pragmatic use of language, we identify their meaning. Taken performatively, the activity meaning denotes is identification. Jenson writes that proper names 'work only if . . . identifying descriptions are at hand. We may say, "Mary is coming to dinner," and be answered with, "Who is Mary?" Then we must be able to say, "Mary is *the one who* lives in apartment 2C, and is always so cheerful, and . . ." continuing until the questioner says, "Oh, *that* one!" ' Construing our naming of God as a like, pragmatic process, one whose function is to *convey* the meaning of the word 'God', rather than to *hear* the meaning of 'God', Jenson argues that, 'The doctrine of the Trinity comprises . . . the Christian faith's repertoire of ways of *identifying* its God, to say *which* of the many candidates for godhead we mean when we say, for example, "God is loving," . . . The gospel identifies its God thus: God is the one who raised Israel's Jesus from the dead.'[118] If, upon arrival on Mars, one wanted to give a taxi driver an explanation of what Christianity is, one would describe the sorts of things God is said to do in the Scriptures. If we lean on its performative, task-oriented function, then religious language achieves its purpose or function when it identifies God. The flaw in this missionary strategy is that it is the *process* of meaning which comes to fruition within it. If 'God' is no more than a *conveyed* meaning, the passage of my meaning *to* the Martian taxi-driver as he mentally describes my description, then 'God' is just the identity I *give* him. 'God' is just a meaning I construct.

[117] Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, p. 86.
[118] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, pp. 8, ix, and 21.

If 'God' has no contentual aspect, but solely a performative one, God is the story I tell the driver.

If we compare the words 'uniqueness' and 'identity', my 'uniqueness' is what belongs to me, my property of being myself, whereas my 'identity' is commonly understood as that by which others differentiate me as this one in particular. A character's uniqueness is the particularity personal to her; a character's identity is that different or *contrasting* feature which makes him stand out to an audience over against all others. Someone's uniqueness is just the distinctive reality of his existence; his identity is his discernible difference from an opposite number. God's uniqueness relates to *who* he *is*, his identity to *how* he is known. Jenson relates God's identity to the process by which we select '*which* of the many candidates for godhead we mean'. The narrativists' 'identity' question is like the Thomist grammarians' 'what next' question, both focused in methodological *process*. If, as grammatical Thomists inadvertently imply, and as story Thomists deliberately affirm, the 'proofs' for God are not *proofs* but descriptive characterizations, then their function is to pick out or identify the Christian *God* from within a wider story which may include other candidates for the name, other gods.

Inspired as they are by the idea of the contrast of essence and existence, a second notion common to narrative theologies is that drama entails conflict. For Aristotle, a drama is an *action*, whereas, for Hegel, a drama is a *collision* of opposites. Whereas Aristotle had a 'non-agonistic approach to tragedy', Hegel put what he called 'Kollision' at its centre.[119] '[W]here', Barth asks, 'is the man who, with the blood of this modern man in his veins, would not listen to this,' that is, to Hegel, 'and hear the finest and deepest echo of his own voice?'[120] Hegel's 'Kollison'-based notion of tragedy is the modern, story-based idea of drama, which grips us by beginning with a potential conflict, say, a dog in danger, continues by holding us in fear and expectation of his colliding with opposite and hostile protagonists, and concludes with a bang, when the stronger Dog-personality overwhelms the whimpering opponent of Nothingness. Committed in his aesthetics as in his theology to the axiom that, 'without contraries there is no progression', Hegel identifies the build-up to the tragic moment as the self-differentiation of a universal ethic into the many, particular and ethical viewpoints held by finite minds: the moment of tragedy is that in which two equally valid ethical positions *collide*—as with Antigone and Creon.[121] Having set up this climactic conflict, like any good story, tragedy produces a satisfying ending—a *reconciliation* of

[119] Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, pp. 13 and 94.
[120] Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 397.
[121] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 323; Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, pp. 43–4.

the conflicting ethical standpoints of the individuals through the absorption of one individual's ethics into the other's. Just as in Hegel's theology, God's 'activity is to posit himself in contradiction, but eternally to resolve and reconcile this contradiction: God himself is the resolving of these contradictions',[122] so, in his aesthetics, 'drama . . . must display to us the vital working of a necessity which, itself self-reposing, resolves every conflict and contradiction'.[123] It is not the hero's unique reality or particularity which triumphs, for idiosyncrasy is not enhanced by opposition; rather, his 'identity' prevails over theirs.

For Hegel, the potential for drama lies in the fact that finite goods are incommensurable, and therefore come into conflict: a favourite example is the tragic conflict between Creon, standing for civic virtues, and Antigone, representing personal loyalty to her brother. Creon's 'badness' is a piece of the puzzle: when we see the resolution of the conflict, we perceive why his 'identity' is as necessary to the whole as Antigone's. Drawing in 'history to reveal the effects of reason in the world . . . required finding sense inside evil itself'. It is as a *theodicy*, an explanation of evil, that Hegel's philosophy works its way through the collisions and struggles of history: opposed forces must fight because the 'other's recognition is essential to one's own self-consciousness' or identity.[124]

Hegel's philosophy intends to show 'how tragedy exposes the way the world works'. For the German Romantic philosopher,

> tragedy arises from a commitment so deep to a partial good that one who holds on to it through all opposition undergoes a kind of crucifixion. As ultimate example of this 'misfortune and calamity' Hegel quotes the abandoned cry of Christ on the cross, 'the grief of soul in which he had to cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"' . . . tragic experience is the nuclear core of Hegel's system. For the reconciliation of the individual person with God . . . enter[s] . . . as a harmony proceeding only from . . . infinite grief . . . Hegel describes his project as tracing 'the way of the Soul which journeys through the series of its own configurations as though they were the stations appointed for it by its own nature, so that it may purify itself for the life of the Spirit, and achieve finally, through a completed experience of itself, the awareness of what it really is in itself'. These 'stations' invoke the Stations of the Cross . . . The stage to which he most frequently alludes is the passion: Gethsemane, the *via crucis*, Golgotha, the seven last words— . . . the kernel of tragedy as understood in a Christian culture. It is . . . the wisdom and

[122] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* III, p. 271.
[123] Hegel, *Aesthetics* II, p. 1163.
[124] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 96.

suffering of Greek tragedy, stretched across the open sky of the Christ story, that forms the model for the journey of spirit that Hegel outlines.[125]

Hegel's theodical impulse, his determination that 'Philosophy should help us to understand that the actual world is as it ought to be',[126] made it difficult for him to hold on to *tragedy*: he wants conflict or dialectic, but he also needs resolution or synthesis. Like a reader more gripped by the *story* than by its existential suggestion, he flips ahead to the ending. He oscillates between delight in oppositions and an 'intolerance of disorder'. Hegel's veering between an authentic feeling for tragedy and a desire for harmonious resolution is an indication that the conflict between essence and existence need not be *tragic*. Hegel's God is the self-differentiation of existence (Father, Universality) into essence (Son, Particularity), and the homeward return through finite spirits of the Concept (or Spirit). Hegel wants the differentiation of essence and existence to give us God. Can it do so? Prising the natures of things apart from their existing, or showing that these natures are contingent, need not open a crack through which the transcendent God can be espied. Unless we have shown by other means that God exists, the crack will open, not to the identity of essence and being in God, but into a world experienced in an eternal moment of pure suspense—absolute contingency. Once essence and existence are set on a collision course, we have the birth of melodrama, for whose partisans 'individuation and appearing' or having a nature, is 'Apollonian', and the 'tragic hero . . . is . . . Dionysius . . . undergoing in this disguise *the agony of appearing at all*, having to be and to act in this . . . limited mode of being'.[127] As Nietzsche saw, the character of difference within the same game as the scientific naturalist is nihilist.

The story-theological arguments for God do not work especially well. It matters to prove that God exists because knowing that God *is* gives an existential input into what we say about God. We prove it so that our language about God will not be mere stipulation but ordered toward the Person who orders creation. The existence of moves, designs, causes, and perfections, is the material from which we make statements about God. Once we know that *we* don't ask the questions, we *know* that the Mouse's belief is true: the sea runs toward 'Aslan's own country'.

[125] Cowan, 'Tarrying with the Tragic: Hegel and his Critics', pp. 46 and 43.

[126] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 100, quoting Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 66.

[127] Arbery, 'The Mystery Doctrine of Tragedy: Nietzsche's Sublime', p. 70.

4

From Theodicy to Melodrama

> But you and all the kind of Christ
> Are ignorant and brave,
> And you have wars you hardly win
> And souls you hardly save.
>
> Chesterton, 'Ballad of the White Horse'

> For these are the foundations of a fallen world, and a sea below the seas on which men sail. Seas move like clouds and fishes float like birds above the level of the sunken land. And it is here that tradition has laid the tragedy of the mighty perversion of the imagination of man; the monstrous birth and death of abominable things. I say such things in no mood of spiritual pride; such things are hideous not because they are distant but because they are near to us; in all our brains, certainly in mine, were buried things as bad as any buried under that bitter sea, and if He did not come to do battle with them, even in the darkness of the brain of man, I know not why He came. Certainly it was not only to talk about flowers or to talk about Socialism.
>
> Chesterton, *The New Jerusalem*

> Not only is it through Jesus Christ alone that we know God but it is only through Jesus Christ that we know ourselves. We know life and death only through Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ we do not know what our life, nor our death, nor God, nor ourselves really are. In the same way without the Scriptures, which have Jesus Christ as their sole object, we know nothing and see only darkness and confusion in the nature of God and in nature itself.
>
> Pascal, *Pensées*, 36

1. An Unresolved Problem of Evil Makes Life Melodramatic

Unless we *know* that he exists, a problem of evil darkens our image of the Deity. I say *a* problem of evil, because there are at least two. One of these poses the issue inductively, or as a matter of facts. When anti-theists pose the problem of

evil inductively, they argue that the sheer *number* of evil events in the world outweighs the *amount* of good which balances off against it. And so the world cannot have been made by a good God. The theist's inductive counter-argument likewise posits that certain higher goods, such as an intelligible, consistently functioning universe, outweigh what one theodicist terms the '"victims of the system"'.[1] On this theistic analysis, a good God factored the *quantities* into his omniscient calculus, and came up with more good. The inductive argument is a matter of adding up losses and gains, and coming up with net loss (so the atheist) or net profit (the theist). Gordon Graham remarks that the authors of inductive theodicies 'aim at a calculation, the purpose of which is to estimate whether the amount of evil we encounter in experience is greater or less than the good that accompanies it, arises from it or depends upon it'. The drawback in this argument is, as he says, that it 'ignores a possibility which ought to be considered—that engagement in calculation . . . and comparative weighing is a wrongheaded approach to the problem of evil'. The problem to which the atheist or theistic 'weigher' of goods and evils turns a blind eye is comparable to that of proving that, overall, history is a story of decline or of progress: whether one finds a downswing or an upturn depends upon 'where one puts the thermometer in', or which facts one takes into account. Goods are of many different kinds, and which are to count for most? As Graham observes, the weighers of good and evil seldom examine the freight from every angle: those who see pain or suffering as an obstacle course without which we could not achieve the virtues of self-sacrifice or courage, fail to notice that the possibility of pain also permits people to use it against others, becoming, for instance, torturers, and thus morally '*worse*' people than they would be in a pain-free world.[2] How can one *know* that one has done one's sums right, that certain virtues counterbalance their ineliminable defects? One would know that some factors count for more than others only if one already knew that there is a God who squares the books.

A second way of positioning the problem of evil is deductive. Here, the question is not of *amounts*, but of logic: is the existence of a good, infinite God logically inconsistent with the existence of evil? As J. L. Mackie put it: 'God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between the three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. . . . the theologian . . . at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three.'[3] This deductive problem could be

[1] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 210. The author himself puts the expression in inverted commas.

[2] Gordon Graham, *Evil and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 166–8.

[3] J. L. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', in Baruch A. Brody (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion: An Analytic Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), pp. 157–67, p. 157.

pictured spatially: as if infinite goodness ought to be occupying all of the spaces on a chess-board, because, logically, it covers them all, since it's infinite, but some are in fact black, so that black and white are intermingled, and that's logically impossible, because, in principle, goodness and evil cannot coexist on the same board. Therefore, infinite goodness, or God cannot exist. The idea is that the common existence of infinite good and any evil is a logical incompatibility—so one of them cannot be there if the other is.

Many readers will be dissatisfied by the statement with which the chapter opened, that, *unless* we kick off with a resounding demonstration of the existence of God we shall have an insoluble problem of evil on our hands. Some may consider that a conclusive case has yet to be made against the 'why-proof', and continue to prefer a knock-out, logical proof to the inductive arguments I have mentioned. Others may think that the problem of evil just *is* insoluble, and that to persist in looking around for a 'solution' is yet another instance of the rationalism to which apologetics is prey. With an explanation of the 'inductive' and 'deductive' problems of evil behind me, I can restate the thesis of this chapter thus: the insistence upon a logical proof of the existence of God inevitably encounters the counter-demand for a response to the deductive problem of evil on the same plane, of logic. To reject arguments for God, as the story Barthians do, going directly to revelation without passing the inductive evidence, is to place oneself in the same tricky position. Conversely, to demonstrate God's existence on the field of observation is to scale the problem down to that lesser height. Evil is, as it were, a violent contingency, a contingent fact which does violence to someone. On the level of contingent facts rather than of logic, it is one fact amongst others. The other natural facts, those free movements, causes, and designs, may not make sense of their unpleasant neighbour: but such explanations as may turn up will resound on that common-or-garden, contingent and historical level.

This is what Thomas Aquinas does in the *Summa Theologiae*, and in a thought-provoking way. When he asks, 'Is there a God?', Thomas lines up the problem of evil as his first objection. He writes that, 'It seems there is no God. For if, of two mutually exclusive things, one were to exist without limit, the other would cease to exist. But by the word "God" is implied limitless good. If, then, God existed, nobody would ever encounter evil. But evil is encountered in the world. God therefore does not exist.'[4] This is a *deductive* presentation of the problem of evil—should it exist, limitless good must by its very nature rule out the existence of evil. Thomas' reply to the *question*—not

[4] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3, obj. 1.

to the objection—are his Five Ways of inferring that God exists from motion, causes, necessity, perfection, and design. Having done this, Thomas answers the objections. His reply to the first objection, concerning the problem of evil, is that, 'As Augustine says, "Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good out of evil" (*Enchir.* xi). This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it to produce good.'[5] But now, Thomas doesn't speak to the *logical* problem of the mutual incompatibility of infinite good and evil. He poses the problem of evil inductively: it has now come to be, not a question of infinite good and evil 'sharing the same space', but of empirical quantities.

Suppose we consider article 2 question 3 dramatically, or as a piece of literature which tells us something *via* its beginning, middle, and end. Then we begin with the hypothesis of infinite good and evil sharing the same board, and it appears to be a contradiction in terms. So one term must be excluded. But it's a logical problem, a virtuality which we don't yet know applies to the real world. So we turn back from it to the real world, and show that, as a matter of fact, the existence of God is given. The God whose existence we have proven transcends 'the board'. The Unmoved Mover, Uncaused Cause is outside the sequence of moves and causes, or, supernatural, and therefore doesn't jostle for living room with natural moves, causes, or empirical evils. And so, when we return to evil, it's no longer a logical problem, but an empirical, as it were practical one, of divine 'prudence' or providence. Only if we already *know* that God exists and transcends nature can we assume that *someone* is bringing good out of evil, and thus that goods ultimately outweigh evils.

That doesn't mean that innocent suffering need no longer give us any qualms, or cause us to question God. Modern theology will naturally touch on different angles of the topic than Thomas does. But Thomas' resolution does mean that the deductive issue can be set aside: logically, although infinite good and evil both exist, they don't coexist, because the way in which God exists is different from that in which anything else does. Once God is a given, the empirical existence of evil still forces us to *wrestle* with God; but the givenness of a transcendent God ensures that good and evil can't spill into one another.

What happens, if—being at sometime innocent sufferers all, and at many times observers of vile acts of malice—we venture out without taking God as given? The problem of bearing up against the physical world becomes almost too heavy to endure. And since the physical world embraces our own bodies,

[5] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3, reply obj. 1.

this crucial aspect of our nature is slid under the carpet of our public language. Sophocles' Philoctetes, with his wounded foot, becomes 'like an animal, intimate and conversant with earthly objects—rocks, caves, trees, birds, precipices'.[6] His bodiliness is in communion with things and with creatures. It is just other humans who will not talk about it: 'People with disabilities and illnesses learn that most people do not want to know about the suffering they experience because of their bodies.'[7]

Naming an event 'as evil is a way of marking the fact that it shatters our trust in the world'.[8] Like tragedy, evil 'exposes one to groundlessness simply—the abyss'.[9] Because not being able to trust the world exposes our fragility, people would rather forget the locus of that vulnerability. Thus, as against self-identification *through* the body, we get self-identification through *control* of the body. As the feminist philosopher Susan Wendell puts it,

> A major obstacle to coming to terms with the full reality of bodily life is the widespread myth that the body can be controlled. Conversely, people embrace the myth of control in part because it promises escape from the rejected body. The essence of the myth of control is the belief that it is possible, by means of human actions, to have the bodies we want and to prevent illness, disability, and death.[10]

A second consequence of bearing up *against* rather than *with* our bodily world is that, a little niggle, a suspicion goes with us that good and evil are in complicity. For, on the level of logic, evil does violence to reason, and this logic can never admit. It must, then, be absorbed into the logic of the system. This is an imaginative problem, as much as it is a philosophical one, a problem of getting our image of the world into tolerable shape.

Most historians of philosophy describe the modern era as a period of preoccupation with 'the problem of knowledge'. Almost unanimously, they tell us that the 'how can I know' problem drives modern thought, from Descartes, who takes recourse in the *cogito*, to Kant, with his synthesizing categories, to the German Idealists, with their epistemically based pragmatisms, and through to the postmoderns. Against this consensus, Susan Neiman has recently queried whether philosophers for four hundred years can have been *that* worried by the illusionist tricks of the senses, such as that 'a stick looks bent in water'. She argues that, 'On literary grounds alone,

[6] Dennis Slattery, 'Bowing to the Wound: Philoctetes as a Tragedy of Compassion', in Glenn Arbery (ed.), *The Tragic Abyss* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), p. 126.

[7] Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 91.

[8] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 9.

[9] Arbery, 'Editor's Preface', in *The Tragic Abyss*, p. vi.

[10] Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, pp. 93–4.

the narrative is flawed, for it lacks what is central to dramatic movement anywhere: a compelling motive. . . . There is no good reason for the history of philosophy to have consisted in this story: as Descartes himself knew, none but madmen ever really think all our representations might be dreams.' Neiman proposes an 'alternative' narrative, for which Enlightenment and Romantic thought is 'guided by the problem of evil'.[11] The catalyst to the philosophies of Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche is the need to give a reason why we suffer physical pain in and through our world and our bodies.

The ex-Calvinist Pierre Bayle had proposed in his dictionary article on Theodicy that, since the two opposed Forces of Manichaeism better corresppond to what we can observe than the unitary God of Christianity, the only option for the Christian believer is closed-eyed fideism.[12] Other philosophers gave upbeat answers to the problem of suffering. Leibniz's response to Bayle's pessimism devolves upon the principle that God has his reasons, or is, indeed, constrained by reason. God makes the world using the 'rules of reason', or the eternal, potential forms of things, piecing them together in the most rational, and thus, best, design. Since reason contains the methodological ground rules which God's world-manufacture must follow, Leibniz has 'put reason above God'.[13] Leibniz, who invented the term theodicy, turned a riposte to the problem of evil into a proof of God's existence—but proved the existence of a God who creates the world because that is the most rational project.

A second optimist, Hegel, agreed with Bayle that Manichaeism is the obvious option. Commenting on the good and evil principles deduced by the Persian Parsees, Hegel remarks that 'Religion and philosophy as a whole turn upon this dualism.'[14] The purpose of his philosophy is to overcome it. Despite his concurrence with Bayle, Hegel was thus, as Neiman says, 'right to see himself as Leibniz's heir'.[15] The German Idealist began his *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* by explaining that

> Our investigation can be seen as a theodicy, a justification of the ways of God (such as Leibniz attempted in his own metaphysical manner, but using categories which were as yet abstract and indeterminate). It should enable us to comprehend all the ills of the world, including the existence of evil, so that the thinking spirit may yet be reconciled with the negative aspects of existence . . . [16]

[11] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 6.

[12] As mentioned above in Chapter 1, section 3.

[13] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 27.

[14] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. II: *Determinate Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, J. M. Stewart, and H. S. Harris (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), p. 613.

[15] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 92.

[16] Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 43, quoted in Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 86.

Hegel's theodicy entails tackling the problem of evil, and reality itself, deductively: on the plane of *reason*, the way things *are* is identical to how they should be. As we began to see in the previous chapter, Hegel's philosophy of history and his theory of drama run in tandem. Both in history and in drama, 'conflict can be identified with the *logos*' or rationality 'of drama, as a structural element that gives unity to the shape of dramatic events'.[17] Once 'the Divine . . . enters the world and individual action', thereby becoming 'subject to the principle of particularization . . . the ethical powers', that is, the world-historical characters and the protagonists of drama, are 'differentiated in their domains': the 'original essence of tragedy' 'consists then in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides has *justification*' and yet each is 'involved in *guilt*'.[18] If this sounds somewhat cheerless, it is because '*tragedy*' or the self-differentiation of the divine, the fall of the divine into the finitude of creation, is only the second Act of the drama of world history as Hegel depicts it. The entire journey of Hegelian theodicy runs from Universality to Particularity to Singularity:

> The absolute, eternal idea is: 1) First, in and for itself, God in his eternity before the creation of the world and outside the world. 2) Second, God creates the world and posits the separation. He creates both nature and finite spirit. What is thus created is at first an other, posited outside of God. But God is essentially the reconciling to himself of what is alien, what is particular, what is posited in separation from him. He must restore to freedom and to his truth what is alien, what has fallen away in the idea's self-diremption, in its falling away from itself. This is the path and the process of reconciliation. 3) In the third place, through this process of reconciliation, spirit has reconciled with itself what it distinguished from itself in its act of diremption, of primal division, and thus it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit [present] in its community.[19]

Hegel presents here the core of a *fall* and redemption myth: the fall into differentiation or multiplicity is enacted by all individual human beings. By virtue of their multiple individualities, that is, all humans are involved in guilt and tragedy. But Hegel sees the 'tragedy' of differentiation as a necessary stage on the way to reconciliation, or felicity.

Friedrich Nietzsche also irons out the fact of evil until it is one with reality itself. Nietzsche called theodicy 'my *a priori* . . . as a thirteen year old boy, I was preoccupied with the problem of the origin of evil: . . . I dedicated my first literary childish game, my first philosophical essay, to this problem, and as regards my "solution" to the problem at the time, I quite properly gave

[17] Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, pp. 41–42.
[18] Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* II, pp. 1195–6.
[19] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* III, pp. 273–4.

God credit for it and made him the *father* of evil.'[20] Despite aspiring to regard the cosmos as tragic, Nietzsche did not relinquish the idea that suffering fits no rational design. His image of tragic suffering is procreation. He argued that, within the Greek, tragic vision, '*pain* is pronounced holy: the pangs of the woman giving birth hallow all pain'. And yet, as Neiman observes, 'were all suffering like suffering in childbirth, it would always make perfect sense. The pain is so brief, the end is so good, that a lifetime of misery in return for eternal paradise is scarcely a better exchange. Childbirth is the paradigm of *meaningful* suffering—in simple and straightforward terms. It's a paradigm that informed Nietzsche's discussion even as he recognized that the problem of evil concerns *meaningless* suffering. And so it leaves untouched the question: What if evil creates nothing?'[21]

'Giving a reason' for suffering is not a pastime restricted to German philosophers: many people prefer to think of both illness and even physical accidents as avoidable, that is, deliberate. Explanations vary, from the moral to the psychological. Human beings are commonly 'reluctant to believe that bad things happen to people who do not deserve them', that is, that human lives are laid open to the irrational, through their bodies:

> Affirming that bad things happen to people who do not deserve them, or seek them, or risk them, or fail to take care of themselves not only frightens most of us, it also raises challenging religious . . . issues for people who believe that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent . . . Job's friends . . . offered (unsolicited) many theories of how he had brought an unremitting plague of misfortunes upon himself by his own actions and omissions. Reactions to other people's disasters do not seem to have changed much. The book also portrays Job's own agonized attempts to understand why God is punishing him so harshly. In fact, as the reader knows, God is not punishing him but allowing Satan to test Job's faith. That God would allow God's faithful servant to be tortured for so long to prove a point to a fallen angel does not offer an attractive or comforting picture of God. *Job* is a vivid story of terrible things happening to someone who did not deserve them . . . with which the writer forces the reader to think beyond a religious faith based on the fantasy of the perfect parent. *Job* presents the spiritual challenge: Can you love and seek to know God even if God might be like this? Or, put more generally (In Platonic terms): Can you love and seek to know Reality even if Reality might be like this?[22]

[20] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 16, quoted in Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 205.

[21] Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, 109–10, quoted in Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 224.

[22] Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, pp. 108–9.

Put more particularly, Job 'is not merely suffering pain; he is *afflicted*',[23] struck down by the God in whom he trusts.

Within realistic accounts of imagination or knowledge, acts of imagining and knowing the world are based in 'suffering' the impact of physical fact. For instance, William Lynch claimed that, with 'every plunge through, or down into, the real contours of being, the imagination also shoots up into insight, but in such a way that the plunge down causally generates the plunge up'.[24] To 'plunge down' is to accept the *pathos* of experience. Neiman's 'alternative narrative' suggests a deeper explanation for *why* epistemology comes to centre-screen in modern philosophy. Thinkers will describe 'knowledge' as almost anything *except* embracing reality, through one's body. Modern circumspection with regard to accounts of knowledge which make us subject to an unfriendly world is a way of evading the analogy of knowing to suffering. We prefer to think of knowing as doing something to reality rather than absorbing it, so as to keep the untrustworthy and irrational at bay. We would rather not conceive of suffering, the energetic 'plunge down' into a finite fact, as the way into insight.

Being in denial about suffering is not the same as failing to give it *meaning*, for suffering *is* the piece which fits no logical puzzle. Rather, the denial means holding the experience of suffering at bay, pretending it is not there. But 'there' is where tragedy leads us. For Aristotle, the

> very structure of tragedy is the exact mirror of the insight it embodies. . . . The most profound imaginative experience . . . is for him one that leads down a narrowing corridor that promises certainty but turns into an unpleasant surprise, a revelation of the dark horrors we have tried and failed to hide from ourselves. The causally linked episodes of the complex tragic *muthos* set up a rhythm that makes us feel this tightening noose which awaits us at the end of the journey without our knowledge or power to escape it. Pity and terror are the products not of an idea but of a movement, the outcome of a *praxis* that we feel bound to perform but helpless to implement. And yet, because this terrifying experience is . . . structured to fit our very human contours, it is passed through (*prasso*) and looked back on with relief. For ultimate knowledge of the most terrible things that can happen to us brings with it a kind of relief and even a release from uncertainty. This is what *catharsis* is about . . . We enter the theatre at one end of the narrow tunnel that leads to terror and we leave it at the other, having learned not the meaning of suffering but what it means to experience it truly and unexpectedly . . . [25]

[23] Daniel Russ, 'Job and the Tragedy of Divine Love', in Glenn Arbery (ed.), *The Tragic Abyss* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), p. 90.

[24] William Lynch, *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 12.

[25] Dupree, 'The Tragic Bias', pp. 36–7.

We should not be too quick to make modern, constructivist or idealist, philosophy the culprit for our inclination to rationalize suffering out of account. Alasdair MacIntyre has noted that, in the history of moral philosophy, 'From Plato to Moore and since there are . . . only passing references to human vulnerability and affliction and to the connection between them and our dependence on others.' Even Aristotle gave no 'weight to the experience of those for whom the facts of affliction and dependence are most likely to be undeniable: women, slaves, and servants, those engaged in the productive labor of farmers, fishing crews, and manufacture'. Aristotle's 'failure to acknowledge the facts of affliction and dependence may be', MacIntyre suggests, 'in part at least a consequence of his political exclusions'.[26] It might also connect to the Greek philosophers' notion of being setting a right foot securely in the concept and the left on the moving beltway of *energeia*: it was the right foot which took precedence, leaving the sufferings of animate entities out of the case. It could be that, in its failure to acknowledge the pre-givenness and reality of tragedy, Western and Christian thought laid the trap into which it would later fall, when it altogether lost the sense that the vulnerability to the meaningless, or groundless is the source of meaning and reality.

The Christian Scripture attests that the resources for doing so are not only found within revelation. Job does not belong to the covenant people; he is an Uzzite, not an Israelite (Job 1.1). Daniel Russ observes that Job is sustained in his suffering by the fact that he 'has the audacity to believe that the Creator of the universe will hear him and become his defender. He even believes that God watches over his petty life and cares about his affliction.' Unlike his 'friends', who exalt God at the expense of creation (Job 25.5–6), the 'name' in which Job believes is 'Creator': and yet, or just because of this, the 'gentile Job who knows the true God . . . fits Aristotle's ideal of the tragic hero'.[27] To isolate tragedy as an absolute or finality is one way of avoiding it. If the abyss to which it leads is taken as a dead-end, a pier that hangs out to sea and does not circle back to land, then the abyss is not integrated into experience. Thus held at a distance, it becomes entertainment or distraction.

If 'the problem of evil is the root from which modern philosophy springs',[28] then the typical modern art form will express it: it will seek to obtain what Leibniz did with his 'why-proof', that is, a point of transcendent moral clarity on the human situation, but it will have to wrestle not just with God but with

[26] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999), pp. 1, 6–7.

[27] Russ, 'Job and the Tragedy of Divine Love', pp. 68, 94, and 98.

[28] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 13.

evil incarnate. This genre is neither tragedy nor comedy, but melodrama. Within the melodramatic universe, 'good and evil are highly personalized... evil is villainy; it is a swarthy, cape-enveloped man with a deep voice. Good and evil can be named as persons are named—and melodramas tend... toward a clear nomination of the moral universe. The ritual of melodrama involves the confrontation of clearly identified antagonists and the expulsion of one of them. It can offer no terminal reconciliation, for there is no longer a clear transcendent value to be reconciled to. There is, rather, a social order to be purged, a set of ethical imperatives to be made clear.'[29] Such a melodramatic confrontation of good and evil can be found not only in *Star Wars* but in the way we imagine the biblical God. If we don't approach the God of Scripture within the knowledge of God's givenness, He will become one of a pair of deities, good and evil. We begin with an initial characterization of melodrama. This is needed because, although we fancy that we give as much effort of thought to high and low culture, the most popular genre tends to be conflated with tragedy. The message of *Star Wars* is well adapted to the medium of visual storytelling.

2. First Steps in Characterizing Melodrama

George Bernard Shaw defined melodrama as involving 'broad contrasts between types of youth and age, sympathy and selfishness, the masculine and the feminine,... the sublime and the ridiculous'.[30] A melodrama has obvious 'heroes and villains'. As the bearers of 'the expressionism of the *moral* imagination', melodramatic characters achieve their moment of truth when they encounter their Opposites. Its authors being less concerned with subtle distinctions than with death-defying differences, the melodramatic cosmos 'is subsumed by an underlying Manichaeism, and the narrative creates the excitement of its drama by putting us in touch with the conflict of good and evil played out under the surface of things'.[31] At the same time, melodramatic characters are constructed to serve a plot in which '*enantiodrama*' or 'Poetic Justice' can 'manifest itself after many trials and vicissitudes'.[32]

If 'melodrama implies the simple pleasures of conventional or straightforward conflict, decked out in the various excitement of threats, surprises,

[29] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 16–17.
[30] Quoted in Davies, *The Mirror of Nature*, p. 26.
[31] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 39, 55, and 4.
[32] Davies, *The Mirror of Nature*, pp. 22 and 26.

risks, rival lovers, disguises, and physical combat, all this against a background of ideas',[33] then *Star Wars*, 'the most influential film in post-Second World War cinema', is a perfect specimen of the genre. If the key thing in melodramatic plot is 'bi-polar contrast and clash', we have it in the Republic versus the Empire, and the tale of Luke Skywalker's engagement with the Death-Star, his journey to learn from Obi-Wan Kenobi how to use the Force against evil, and his confrontation with, and victory over Darth Vader. Melodrama deals with good and evil in the dimension of imaginative *space*, and utilizing computer-controlled cameras to 'move through space with more dynamism than any previous film', *Star Wars* is about space.[34]

Hegel claimed that tragic heroes 'act out of this character of theirs, on *this* "pathos", because this character, this "pathos" is precisely what they are: their act is not preceded by either hesitation or choice. . . . They are what they are, and never anything else, and this is their greatness.' To us, this more narrowly characterizes the hero of melodrama than of tragedy. *Star Wars* would not have had 'the moral clarity of a 1930s B-movie Western, cutting between goodies and baddies' if its heroes had suffered internal conflict. Whereas the melodramatic character stands before us 'whole', allegorizing a single idea, 'tragedy springs' from a 'dividedness . . . deep in human nature'. Oedipus and Agamemnon are divided against or within themselves—a point not noticed by Aristotle, for whom 'to be at odds with oneself is the mark of a no-good'. Secondly, the tragic *pathos* is not merely 'pathetic'. Lear is not simply a *victim*, a passive sufferer, for the evil which enters through his internal division 'is less a blow than an incitement to self-discovery'.[35] As experienced in a cosmos conceived as tragic, suffering shows us a truth about our human contingency.

Thus, melodrama differs from tragedy in that it is secular, or post-religious. The melodramatic cosmos is anthropocentric in that the 'sacred' does not hover around it. It gives us 'combat' in place of the tragic or comic 'rite of sacrifice'. Guilbert de Pixerécourt claimed that his *Victor, ou l'Enfant de la forêt* was the ' "first born of melodramas" ', and that play was produced in 1798. Peter Brooks claims that,

> The origins of melodrama can be accurately located within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath. This is the epistemological moment which it illustrates and to which it contributes: the moment that symbolically, and really, marks the final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church

[33] Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama*, p. 78.

[34] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, pp. 382 and 385.

[35] Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* II, p. 1214; Cousins, *The Story of Film*, p. 385; Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama*, p. 7; Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, p. 134; Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama*, p. 33.

and Monarch), the shattering of the myth of Christendom . . . Melodrama does not represent a 'fall' from tragedy, but a response to the loss of tragic vision. It comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, . . . is of immediate . . . political concern. When the revolutionary Saint-Just exclaims, 'Republican government has as its principle virtue; or if not, terror,' he is using the manichaeistic terms of melodrama, . . . and imagining a situation . . . where the world is called upon to make present . . . a new society, to legislate the regime of virtue. The Revolution attempts to sacralize law itself, the Republic as the institution of morality. Yet it necessarily produces melodrama instead, incessant struggle against enemies, without and within, branded as villains, suborners of morality, who must be confronted and expunged, over and over, to assure the triumph of virtue.[36]

Where tragedy reaches out, beyond the evils suffered here below to 'reconciliation under a sacred mantle', melodrama offers no 'higher synthesis'. And where comedy prefigures the eschatological enjoyment of a paradisial feast, melodrama dreams of social 'reform'. The Poetic Justice it vaunts to achieve is this-worldly: for all the allegory compressed into him, the melodramatic hero is human. The anti-theist use of evil and suffering lacks moral grounds on which to base objections to these features of human life. 'Humanism', as Graham says, 'cannot explain . . . the evil of evil.'[37] Hence, to a Christian, as also to Aeschylus and Sophocles who recognized the transcendent, tragedy is likely to become melodrama in a humanist world: for it is *sentimental* to conceive of human suffering as *absolutely* awful, if humanity is the last word. We call an emotion sentimental when it is inordinate or out of proportion to its object. If being has no final weight or necessity, the subjection of human beings to it is not tragic. The poignancy of death depends on the sense, at least, that human beings are *ecstatic*, or self-transcending. Likewise, where there is no absolute lightness of being, or grace, comedy becomes melodrama. We leave the relationship of gravity and grace to the next chapters, in which both tragedy and comedy will figure.[38]

3. 'It is a Rare Melodrama that does not have a Villain'[39]

Poor Luke Skywalker is a vapid bore and no tribute to his more glamorous Papa. The highbrow aesthetic theorists of the early nineteenth century articulated the common mood of the time in their innovative conception of tragedy

[36] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 206, 87, and 14–15.
[37] Graham, *Evil and Christian Ethics*, p. 154.
[38] See in particular Chapter 7, section 8.
[39] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 32.

as a *conflict* of forces. In Hegel's writings, 'the Tragic and the dialectic coincide'.[40] Before him, Schelling had argued that the 'contradiction' lies between the tragic hero and the *fate* against which he fights: 'It was by *allowing* its hero to *struggle* against the superior power of fate that Greek tragedy honored human freedom', he suggests. One might infer from this that fate or the 'power of the objective world'[41] is for Schelling the villain of Sophocles' tragedies. But is it not rather the case that Schelling makes a character such as Oedipus the first *anti-hero*? Schelling has perceived in the human characters of Sophocles and Aeschylus, the doomed but glorious counter and nay-sayer to the divine will. With Schiller, who sets his understanding of tragedy in the context of the *sublime*, that aesthetic object which overthrows human thought and sensibility, the tragic hero is the man who issues a counterblast against this attack upon his sensibilities: 'The highest consciousness of our moral nature can be sustained only in a violent situation, a war', he affirms: 'Nobility through suffering is at the core of tragedy. Identified with a principle of inner freedom . . . man's grandeur is his own creation. He defines himself in the process of staving off threats to his autonomy and choosing without constraint his own course of action.'[42] In nineteenth-century French melodramas, as today, villains have the '*beau rôle*, the one played by the famous actors'.[43] It is a rare author of melodrama who is not 'of the Devil's party'. Because evil is the problem which drives it, evil is what interests it most. Failure to tackle the inductive proofs of God's existence leaves evil rampant in the world. When, setting *things* aside, we ask *Being* to do all of the work of the proofs, 'too much is demanded' of it, and 'since this excessive optimism lies clear to view', or, the proof is unconvincing to non-believers, 'the forced optimism of the forced worldliness turns perpetually into nihilistic tragedy'.[44] A post-Christian world is not necessarily godless, but in it, evil occupies the same imaginative space as God, or the *Force*. If we imagine that 'the challenge for Thomas', or any other theologian 'is never to prove God's existence', for the 'question was not whether there is a god; it was about which god,

[40] Peter Szondi, 'The Notion of the Tragic in Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel', in *On Textual Understanding and other Essays*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 50.

[41] Schelling, quoted in ibid., p. 43.

[42] Schiller, cited in Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, p. 251.

[43] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 33.

[44] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. V: *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern World*, trans. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, and Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 624.

and whose god',[45] then God has diminished into a character in the narrative. Once the supernatural God thus becomes a player the question is *which* lead he is playing, Luke or Darth. How should we identify him? The compelling question of narrative theological readings of the Bible is whether God is of the Devil's party. Constricted to the space of a secular aesthetics which pits divine and human freedom against one another, Scripture cannot be other than a melodrama.

4. God as Villain in Narrative Readings of the Bible

Narrative readings of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures are primarily preoccupied with the literary qualities of the texts, such as the verbal dexterities by which they point up ironies or push character home, or with their use of imagery, repetition and satisfaction or withholding of audience expectation. It is also naturally concerned about the literary question of *genre*. In seeking an answer to that question, Cheryl Exum was 'led' to 'the conclusion that the Bible contains a profoundly tragic dimension', and she speaks, there, for the preponderance of literary treatments of Scripture.[46] In my own efforts to defend the comic and dramatic character of Christian revelation, I have contrasted the view of Scripture as comedy with modern presentations of the biblical stories as tragedies.[47] I now regard this contrast as a mistake: the real question is not whether to find tragedy *or* comedy in Scripture, but whether to find in it either these two dramatic and sacred genres *or* the story-like and secular genre of melodrama. Most scriptural narrativists are reading the Bible more as a melodrama than as a tragedy. If Nietzsche sometimes 'sounds like Feuerbach gone to the opera',[48] then God construed by a Nietzschean humanist is a sort of operatic villain.

Jack Miles' 1995 *God: A Biography* was a popular book, but this best-seller put into the vernacular common currents of contemporary biblical scholarship, both narrativist and source-oriented. Taking God as a character in the narrative of Hebrew Scripture, it traces his biography from Genesis to

[45] Kerr, *After Aquinas*, pp. 39–40. Grammatical Thomists such as Denys Turner do not, of course, think that they are interpreting Aquinas in the same way as Fr Fergus Kerr; cf. *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 196–7. My point is that arguments such as McCabe's and Turner's, drawing on Burrell's grammatical interpretation of Aquinas, appear to reach the same conclusion as Kerr does.

[46] J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 8.

[47] Francesca Aran Murphy, *The Comedy of Revelation: Paradise Lost and Regained in Christian Scripture* (London: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2000).

[48] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 218.

the divine withdrawal into silence at the close of the story. Melodramatic characters are undivided, because, here, good and evil are wholly knowable, unmysterious commodities. In the melodramatic universe, evil is, for instance, what hurts or makes us suffer. The widespread misuse of the term 'tragedy' sees it as a *disaster*, as in 'Tragedy on Highway 40'; on the other hand, the same author regards melodrama, with its victim protagonists, as really occurring in 'a disaster area'.[49] With the Flood story, Miles' God creates his first 'disaster area', and therefore the apparently benevolent Creator shows that he can easily go over to the dark side. 'In the story of the flood,' Miles says, 'the creator—both as God and as the Lord—becomes an outright destroyer. For a brief but terrifying period, the serpent in him, the enemy of mankind, takes over completely.' Developing the fault line which source critics trace between the deity the Hebrew Bible sometimes names as *Adonai* and sometimes as *Elohim*, Miles argues that *both* personalities have absorbed a further persona, the Babylonian goddess, Rahab or Tiamat, the 'watery destroyer'.[50] So far as he or she suffers, the melodramatic character does so as a victim, for in 'disaster, what happens comes from without; in tragedy, from within'. If the earth's antediluvian inhabitants did anything in the scriptural narrative to provoke the downpour, Miles neglects to mention it. Perhaps the issue cannot be settled by the text alone. Unless we are convinced, like Augustine, that God's own goodness is '*such as to bring good out of evil*', countless other scriptural examples of excessive divine reaction will strike us, not as a prompt to the agent's self-discovery, but as violent victimization.

Miles' tri-personal God is in fact raw violence, that is, a wielder of a force which bypasses the secular moral categories. God's promise of fertility to Abraham is 'subtly aggressive': it's about *control*, of sexual intercourse. The divine injunction to Abraham to circumcise himself is 'a sign with an intrinsic relationship to what it signifies'.[51] Scholars have compared the silent Abraham to Job.[52] Walter Brueggemann sees Job's story as expressing Israel's 'Crisis of Theodicy', and he takes it to be one in which a 'God beyond God', that is, a God of raw violence, 'denies to Job (and to Israel) the comfort of moral symmetry. Job (and Israel) now are required to live in a world where *nothing is settled or reliable except the overwhelmingness of God*.'[53] For God's biographer, 'the Lord refers to absolutely nothing about himself *except* his power'[54]

[49] Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama*, pp. 19 and 62–3.
[50] Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 42 and 45–56.
[51] Ibid., pp. 47, 57, and 53.
[52] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 490.
[53] Ibid., pp. 386 and 391.
[54] Miles, *God: A Biography*, p. 314.

in the speeches from out of the whirlwind, never once mentioning the creation of the world. We may be importing metaphysics into the text if we think that the descriptions of ostriches, horses, and morning stars undermine Miles' exegesis: if it is really an unintelligible process, bound by no thread of likeness, kinship, or analogy to our own acts of divine making, creating could be a doing of violence, or at least, a fiasco. But Miles has missed some textual cues to the character of Job's God. In the prose prologue and epilogue, God is named as *Yahweh*, the God of Israel's revelation. In the dramatic speeches, he is usually called *Elohim*, a name for the Creator God for which there are analogies in amongst the religions contiguous to Israel's, such as *El*. But when God speaks to Job from the whirlwind about ostriches and mountain deer, the God of Creation is named Yahweh: 'it is', Russ says, 'as if two aspects of God's character and of his relationship to man, to Job, are reconciled in this loving litany of his creatures'.[55]

By contrast, Miles' God has swallowed Satan into himself:

> whether as God or Lord, the deity has within him a submerged demon, a serpent, a chaos monster, a dragon goddess of destruction. The Job-writer externalizes that inner conflict by presenting God as prey to temptation by an actual demon, Satan... And this new actor is introduced to make a point. On the view taken in Proverbs, the world is generally just, but when it isn't, the Lord is presumed to have his reasons. The Job-writer accepts this view as a starting point but then speculates, in effect, 'Very well, what might those reasons be?' He answers his own question by telling a profoundly blasphemous story about the Lord God.

Miles' God has no reasons, and is thus something like 'a fiend'.[56] Like all readers of Scripture before him, Miles sets the text against a metaphysical world view: his philosophical world is one in which good and evil occupy the same space, and therefore converge. But, since that implies a contradiction, in a world in which God is not known to exist, we are compelled to say that immanent poetic justice is achieved by the vanquishing of good by infinite evil.

5. Melodrama: The Aftermath of Tragedy and of Comedy

We think that some literary critics who ascribe biblical stories to the genre of tragedy really mean melodrama. We may be able to recognize why 'melodrama' works better as a description of certain kinds of narrative than

[55] Russ, 'Job and the Tragedy of Divine Love', p. 95.

[56] Ibid., pp. 306–7 and 309.

'tragedy' or 'comedy' by considering Cyril O'Regan's use of the latter terms in his interesting studies of Gnosticism. Borrowing Paul Ricoeur's idea of 'rule-governed deformation of classical narrative genres', O'Regan makes the fascinating suggestion that Gnostic narratives are deliberately transgressive or subversive readings of Christian Scripture. O'Regan observes that the Gnostic endeavour to give an 'archaeological account of the emergence of evil' results in a six-scene narrative and that each of these six scenes corresponds to, and advertently mutilates, a scene in the orthodox Christian or scriptural narrative. The narrative moves from invulnerably perfect pleroma, to fault-fall, to cosmogeny and anthropogeny, to the fall of the 'pneumatic' Knights, to the appearance of a Saviour figure, and ends with an eschaton in which all rescuable being is integrated into the pleroma. The 'fault-fall' can take the form of, for instance, 'Sophia's' over-arching curiosity, which leads to the expulsion of this aeon from the pleroma, the divine realm, and to the creation of the physical world: since 'faulting can be accidental and tragic', Sophia's fall thus serves as explanation for the 'fiasco' of human history, the 'debacle of extrapleromatic existence'. It imports a certain logic into the fact that human beings suffer as a result of living in a physical universe. Our sole quarrel with this analysis is that the only word O'Regan has for the 'fault-fall' scene in Gnostic texts is 'tragic': he speaks of 'the tragedy of primordial fault and fall'.[57]

Our ordinary use of language may put us on to the fact that O'Regan has misfiled his texts: unless we studied them at A level and have conceived a determination to ridicule them, it would be unnatural, in our everyday use of English, to describe the aftermath of Lear's decision to give away his kingdom to Goneril and Regan as a 'fiasco'. We would not call the marriage of Othello and Desdemona a 'debacle' unless we were trying to be funny; the Witches on the heath indicate that the sequence of events Macbeth calls down on himself is not 'accidental'. An event which is a fiasco or debacle may not strike us as tragic. Rather, it emerges as ridiculous or pathetic. According to Heilman, the melodramatic protagonist, the one with whom the audience is intended to identify, is a *victim*. Such a protagonist 'is cursed by the necessity of walking, victim and innocent, through an insane world'. Such a pure pathos is an exaggeration or decontextualization of what happens in tragedy, in which the hero or heroine achieves a point of 'real helplessness'. This is true, too, in ancient, classical texts like *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, and *The Aenead*. Thus, the Gnostic imagination does not just subvert the *Christian* narrative, but the genuine sense of tragedy amongst the Greeks and Romans. Homer's *Iliad*

[57] O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, pp. 44, 139, 111, and 122; cf. *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 183.

shows that we really *are* helpless in the face of physical death, not in control of our own bodies. Where melodrama puts the victim on a pedestal, tragedy acknowledges helplessness or passivity as part of the picture. It is, as William Lynch says,

> the region of the soul into which Christianity descends . . . the theologian says it is the place of faith. By this he means that there is a point to which the mind must come where it realizes it is no match for the full mystery of existence, where, therefore, it suffers a death; it is only at this point that it will consent to put on the mind of God—as that mind is given us through the Christian mysteries—and thus rise to a higher knowledge and insight. Here the points of death and life coincide in the one act. In this sense Christian faith has the tragic at its very core and is never a simple or easy intellectual act.[58]

According to Francis Fergusson, modern theatre fails to integrate what the Greek and Renaissance dramatists had held together. One side, represented by Racine's baroque tragedies, would be rational, whilst the other uses music to express affectivity: 'neither Racine nor Wagner', he says, 'understood the dramatic art in the exact spirit of Aristotle's definition, "the imitation of an action." Wagner was rather expressing an emotion, and Racine was *demonstrating* an essence. But expression of emotion and rational demonstration may themselves be regarded as modes of action, each analogous to one moment in Sophocles' tragic rhythm.'[59] But perhaps this idea of modern theatre as falling into two halves captures only one side of the dilemma of modern commercial theatre. There was a genre which, developing from the early nineteenth century, integrated the tendencies of classical or baroque theatre with those of opera, and this was melodrama. We cannot describe the history of melodrama in any depth, but we can mention a few of the steps by which drama, the tragedy and comedy of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and Calderon, ceased to be a viable vehicle of Western communal self-understanding.

According to Hegel, 'the romantic Ideal expresses a relation to another spiritual being which is so bound up with depth of feeling that only in this other does the soul achieve this intimacy with itself. This life of self in another is, as feeling, the spiritual depth of love.'[60] As both Hegel and Aristotle saw it, tragedy is not about *personal* emotions; it deals rather with *universal* attitudes. The 'romantic Ideal' appeared in Shakespeare's time—it can be seen in *Romeo and Juliet* or *Anthony and Cleopatra*, for these are 'love tragedies', plays which

[58] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, pp. 78–9.
[59] Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, p. 41.
[60] Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* I, p. 533.

dramatize the romance of two unique souls. A Marxist would observe the symmetry between a new kind of theatre and the new kind of drama which the 'love tragedy' represents. As Robert Dupree remarks, 'The entry into the world of personal feelings and individual character . . . was made possible by a thoroughly commercial enterprise: the modern theater.' By the end of Shakespeare's life, theatre had a new competitor in opera, whose appearance 'changed the nature of the theater by focusing on the affective consequences of the tragic plot'.[61] The stage mechanics for visual spectacle which we noted as a feature of nineteenth-century melodrama[62] had their precursors in the first opera houses, built in Venice in the 1630s. When dramatists tried to incorporate music into their plays, as Racine did in *Esther* and *Athalie*, the choral odes passed straight through there into oratorio, where they worked.[63]

Melodrama differs from drama in its concentration upon the suspense motif. This can be taken to evolve from baroque tragedy's concentration on one specific and transparent *idea*. According to Fergusson, when Racine and Corneille say 'action', 'they usually mean the concatenated "incidents" of the rationalized plot, or "intrigue" as they call it'.[64] For if the focus of a drama is a single idea, and the purpose of the plot is to enact it, then our whole interest will be engaged in seeing what happens next to this idea. The idea will be all the more magnetic if it appeals to our emotions. Here the 'dynamic interchange' of theatre with opera makes itself felt, creating a theatre 'combining elements of Aristotle, Greco-Roman themes, operatic passion, and current dramatic proprieties. . . . The great plays of Racine . . . have been . . . rightly praised for the strength of their psychological characterizations; but the cosmos they depict . . . is . . . restricted to a narrow, interior space reminiscent of the tradition of love tragedy.'[65] Fergusson thought that the focus of drama on the psychology of story entails a loss of a sense of mystery: 'In Racine's dramaturgy, the situation, static in the eye of the mind, and illustrating the eternal plight of reason, is the basic unit of composition; in Sophocles the basic unit is the tragic rhythm in which the mysterious human essence, never completely or finally realized, is manifested in successive and varied modes of action.'[66] It does not seem unduly declinist to note that the theatre

[61] Robert S. Dupree, 'Alternative Destinies: The Conundrum of Modern Tragedy', in Glenn Arbery (ed.), *The Tragic Abyss* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), pp. 279 and 282.

[62] See above Chapter 1, section 1.

[63] Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 68.

[64] Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, p. 49.

[65] Dupree, 'Alternative Destinies: The Conundrum of Modern Tragedy', p. 283.

[66] Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, p. 51.

of Sophocles and Shakespeare rested upon certain social conditions, including cultures which integrated the rational and the affective, and the personal and the communal, and that these conditions are not forthcoming to the modern commercial theatre. Deploying a seat-filling combination of song and spectacle, the commercial theatre unselfconsciously gave birth to melodrama. For the 'word melodrama means, originally, a drama accompanied by music'. Rousseau may have been the first to use it like this, 'to describe a play in which he sought a new emotional expressivity through the mixture of spoken soliloquy, pantomime, and orchestral accompaniment'.[67]

One can see the draining of what pertains to the tragic and the comic visions, the exaggeration of some features of tragedy and comedy at the expense of others, in early modern characterizations of God. From Aristophanes' plays to the *Divine Comedy* itself, the comic vision extends on three spatial planes.[68] The comic domain has a paradisial level, above the earth, as in Aristophanes' *Birds*, a purgatorial level and an infernal, subterranean level. Paradise is like our world but more so; Purgatory is fairly much the same; the infernal level is like our world but less so. Paradise is an intensification of our world, hell a diminishing mimicry thereof. The protagonists of paradisial and purgatorial comedies are *heroes* with whom an audience identifies. They come through, in triumph, and our laughter is a sharing in their ascent. On the other hand, the objects who inhabit the infernal plane are *comical* boobies. The kind of humour proper to the infernal level is satire or black humour, laughing *at* a target rendered *comical* by the pain inflicted upon him. Erasmus gave imaginative encouragement to the Reformation through his *satirical* portraits of religious ritualism. Satire is a major pictorial vehicle of the mutual violence of Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century, as with the cartoon depiction of the opponent's villainies. The modern idea of comedy as a string of laughs emerges through this flattening of the genre to mockery of another's vices or faults. So far as he is confined within the perspective of infernal comedy, the Christian God is a *mocker*, one who 'sets his enemies in *derision*'.[69]

Henri Bergson said that laughter '*s'adresse à l'intelligence pure*', 'speaks to the mind alone', not the emotions.[70] The laughter is *rational* because the comical target is getting his just deserts. It is, in a sense, mechanical, because

[67] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 14.

[68] Louise Cowan, 'Introduction: The Comic Terrain', in Louise Cowan (ed.), *The Terrain of Comedy* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 1984), pp. 10–14.

[69] The best work of secondary literary on humour in the Reformation period is M. A. Screech, *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (London: Allen Lane, 1997).

[70] Henri Bergson, *Le Rire: Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947), p. 4.

of the element of *compulsion*: the offender is being brought back into line with reason. This is not unlike the Leibnizian claim that 'all the Creator's actions in fact happen for the best'. The peculiarly 'modern' aspect of Leibniz's theodicy, the point at which it departs from apparently similar suggestions in Augustine, is his 'conviction that the causal links between sin and suffering will become clearer with time'. Leibniz's God is Calculus personified, compelling miscreant contingencies into line. The modern deductive theistic responses to the problem of evil have their seeds in the Austrian philosopher's conviction that, so well does the divine Calculus round up the scales, balancing a greater good against a lesser evil, that even predestination can be included in the balance, since the glory of the saved outweighs the pains of those selected for damnation.[71] The modern idea of comedy, included within philosophical theodicy, is that goodness is punitive—the good of rational order is achieved by violent compulsion. This can veer towards 'tragedy', and coalesce with it, once that genre has undergone a parallel remodelling.

When early modern theologians tried their hand at dramatizing the Christian Scriptures, they made the biblical stories into Stoic tragedies, as in George Buchanan's 1554 rendition of *Jephtha*.[72] The Christian-Stoic God is a punitive character, and his ways are unknowable. He is 'the hidden God'. Where, in Leibniz's distorting mirror of comedy, all is eternally as it should be, Kant 'viewed the world as . . . built along a gap between the *is* and the ought'. For Kant, the gap is not so much metaphysical as moral: to claim that God is sufficiently knowable for us to harbour the belief that he will reward virtue is an insult to his transcendence of all human ethical give and take. Kant was convinced of the '*impiety* of theodicy': for Kant, 'to break our tendency towards idolatry, our idea of God must be so exalted that we cannot even represent it'. 'Our faith is not scientific knowledge, and thank Heaven it is not!' Kant declared, and in so far as secular tragedy 'is about the ways that virtue and happiness fail to rhyme', the 'younger Nietzsche' was right to designate the Prussian philosopher's thought as 'tragic'.[73] The Kantian story is that our limited human goods are not to be connected to a transcendent Good. The moral *and* metaphysical contention which undergirds it is that God is unknowable *as the Good*.

The last essay Kant penned was 'On the Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives'. Unusually, Kant gives a concrete example: if you hide a friend from a murderer, and, answering the door, find the assassin enquiring

[71] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, pp. 25 and 18.

[72] A fine description of the circumstances of the production of Buchanan's *Jephthas sive Votum*, its content, and influence is found in Wilbur Owen Sypherd, *Jephthah and his Daughter: A Study in Comparative Literature* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware, 1948).

[73] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, pp. 70 and 75.

as to your friend's whereabouts, you must not lie, because, for all you know, your friend may have escaped out the basement window and encounter his murderer on the way home. According to Neiman, this looks like 'slapstick' but is really 'tragic'. It could be that Neiman is mistaking tragedy for *fiasco*. For Kant's 'Good' has no truck with ordinary human goodness.

In short, if we conceive the source of comedy as a satirist who achieves rational ends, and the source of tragedy as the hidden logic of the unknowable God, we have set out on the path to making both genres available for consumption in the secular market-place. The genre into which comedy and tragedy are now merged is melodramatic entertainment, but as containing two different orientations. It will help to clarify this if we untangle two threads from our initial characterization of melodrama: on the one hand, in the contrast with tragedy, we put the *victim* at the centre of the picture of melodrama, but, on the other hand, we spoke of melodrama's urge to achieve 'Poetic Justice'. We said that, in melodrama, characters are tormented by a meaningless universe; but we also claimed that good defeats evil, as in *Star Wars*. Robertson Davies says that we know the Heraclitean principle of structured 'antithesis' or 'enantiodrama' 'as the way in which at last villains meet their downfall, the oppressed are given their due . . . in melodrama, . . . the hero is made the instrument of the Lord's will, and we see him triumphing over his adversaries, with right demonstrably on his side.'[74] But how can melodrama be *both* about victimization *and* about 'Poetic Justice'? Susan Neiman speaks of two ways in which philosophers have responded to evil, pessimistically and optimistically. She puts Leibniz and Hegel amongst the optimists, and Kant amongst the pessimists.[75] Thus, there are pessimistic melodramas, focused in victimization, like the movies of Ken Loach, and optimistic melodramas, in which poetic justice wins out. The one came about in the aftermath of tragedy, the other is the remnant left by comedy. The optimistic stories tend to go on international release, and the gloomy ones to be relayed in art-houses; but since even the pessimists exhort us to rise up and *overcome* political victimization, both are governed by the drive to a rational and total narrative.

With at least one eye on 'modern Gnosticism', Cyril O'Regan takes a special interest in the texts of Valentinian Gnosticism in which the second stage of the narrative, the 'fall-fault' is transformed into a 'felix culpa'—that is, those in which the fall of the 'Sophia' figure achieves the best of all possible worlds at the end of play. He calls this line in Gnostic thought 'comic'. O'Regan writes that the

[74] Davies, *The Mirror of Nature*, pp. 26–7.
[75] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 11 and *passim*.

distinguishing mark of the *Tractate* as a Valentinian text is the way in which it systematically rereads episodes of tragedy such that the net result of tragedy is positive rather than negative, a gain rather than a loss. . . . Two aspects of this redescription are analytically separable: 1) rupture, which, as providentially guided, is always implicitly, 2) fall, which, again, as providentially guided, turns out to be gain rather than loss, a fall downward, which submitted to the positive torsion, engendered by teleological context of tragedy, is transformed into something like a fall upward. . . . this means that in some important respects the tragic narrative of the divine is sublated into a divine comedy.[76]

Comedies do have endings which are happy for most of their characters: the comic note of *inclusion* entails that some villains are *sometimes* invited to the green glades to enjoy the marriage feast which they had sought to obstruct. But, on the other hand, comedies which breathe with authentic life do not bring off redemption mechanically. The plural ('comedies') is important here, pointing to the difference between particular comedies, and comedy taken as a distilled essence, 'the Comic'. We have mentioned Bazin's observation that what movie adaptations extract from their theatrical originals is their 'scenic *essence*.'[77] Consider a 1940s adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, which concludes with an assurance from Laurence Olivier/D'Arcy that Lady Catherine meant no ill, but had been sent by him as his ambassador, and shows us Mary alongside a suitable flute-playing suitor in the final shot. Those who don't know the movie can easily substitute other cinematic adjustments, not just of the text, but of textual realism, to an essentialized notion of comedy. In such a cinematization or essentialization of comedy, everything is grist for the mill of the Comic attitude. In energetic comedies, conversely, the villain seldom turns into a hero-bridegroom. It would compel us to dwell on moral improvement when our minds are on the marriage of two bodies. Matters are otherwise when comedy is co-opted into melodrama. Darth Vader is Luke's father, and was originally a knight of the Republic, and this may indicate that the Heraclitean 'antithesis' played out in melodrama entails the *absorption* of evil within good, or, as with Miles' pessimistic subversion of the biblical texts, the absorption of good within evil. This is tidier than what comes about in vital comedies. For the anarchic and graceful uplift generically common to comedy, melodrama substitutes the ethical principle of 'justice'. 'Poetic justice' speaks of a univocal, one-to-one fittingness of character and consequence, which satisfies the 'univocal mind': 'I call univocal', says Lynch,

76 O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, p. 127.
77 Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, p. 115, my italics added.

that kind of mind which having won through to all the legitimate unities and orderings of the logical and rational intelligence, insists, thereafter, on descending through the diversities, densities and maelstroms in such a way as to give absolute shape to it through these unities and orderings. This mentality wishes to reduce and flatten everything to the terms of its own sameness, since it cannot abide the intractable differences, zigzags and surprises of the actual.

'The comic', with its note of analogical *inclusion* is, therefore, 'the great enemy of the univocal mind'.[78]

To insist on proving the existence of God on a logical level with the 'why proof', or, likewise, to give a circular argument from Scripture to God, is to meet with a come-back requirement of solving the problem of evil on the same deductive level. Once we raise the stakes to univocity, we need univocity all the way down. The idea that the cosmic Story, and God as a character within it, are governed by Poetic Justice is such an aesthetic logic. I shall set the mechanism of the 'why proof' on one side until the next chapter, where it will return as the demand for a Poetic defeat of death. For the moment, let historical revelation have its say. Now we begin to consider original sin.

6. The Logical Necessity of Evil: Story Thomism

In our determination to defend a certain inductive inference, we seem to have left an alternative theological manoeuvre out of account: could we not leave it up to *God* to solve the problem of evil? Karl Barth attempted to do so, and the results may not seem especially propitious. For, on one reading of Barth's theological theodicy, evil becomes natural reality itself, and, on another, evil is absorbed into God.

No Barthian would spontaneously pinpoint the sin of a creature as the clue to unravelling the problem of evil. A Barthian would, rather, refer to God as the original means of our rightly conceiving the difficulty. Unless one starts from God's redemption of sinners, one will fail to see what evil is. No mundane evidence can be turned to show that humanity has fallen into a morass from which only God can rescue it. Frei notes that Barth took this thesis further than most other Reformed thinkers. 'Few theologians', he says,

have denied that the *actuality*, the factual occurrence of incarnate Reconciliation, is based solely on the free grace of God and must, therefore, look like a completely contingent event—or perhaps like a non-event—from the human side. . . . But . . . very few, would affirm that the *possibility* and especially the *need* for the event . . . are also to be explained solely from the event itself.[79]

[78] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, p. 107.
[79] Frei, 'Karl Barth: Theologian', in *Theology and Narrative*, p. 173.

Frei credits Barth with the recognition that the only *evidence* of human sin is its requiting, in Christ's salvific turn toward humanity. God's passionate gesture of rescue is the screen on which our own sinfulness is exposed to us. As we began to see in the first chapter,[80] Barth intends his own exegesis of *election* as a rebuttal of the deistic interpretation of predestination, within which God makes his selection of saved and damned, and disappears into the wings. So, he proposes that election and rejection are an eternal, and eternally *present*, act, in the election and rejection of Christ: in Barth's Christological idea of election, 'predestination ceases to be an *apologia* for God's absence, but becomes the means of his presence in time for the "predestination of God is unchanged and unchangeably God's activity" '.[81] Richard Roberts sees this as nullifying the *historical* reality of both sin and salvation. From an inductive, that is, non-Barthian perspective, sin, on the one hand, and salvation on the other, are only *real* so far as they occur in historical, temporal sequence, with human sin occurring first, and salvation following as a consequence. If all or many are eternally elected and rejected in the divine eternal electing and rejecting of Christ, there is no real surprise or peripeteia, no turn of the tide, in Christ's *historical* passion. The methodological manoeuvre of considering evil from a divine perspective may seem to address evil on the divine or ideal plane, not the created or 'real' one.

Barth called 'evil' 'the nothing', and he saw true created reality (as it were, 'the *something*') as becoming *really* itself, really what it ought to be, in God's eyes, in its eternal election in Christ. Neiman remarks that 'Heine called Hegel the German Pangloss. But not even Pangloss claimed that *only* the ideal possesses reality.'[82] Roberts' objection to the Barthian conception of election is along the same lines. The question which Roberts puts to Barth is, 'Is created reality not *really* nothing, if it becomes itself, not in *history*, but in eternity?' If Christ's act of redemption simultaneously wipes out the 'nothing' and assumes the 'something' into itself, lifting the temporal up into eternity, then the two acts can be taken to have one and the same meaning: the morphing of created reality qua innocent bystander into eternity *is* the nullification of *evil*. Roberts writes that, 'The overcoming of sin in Jesus Christ is the overcoming of "nothingness" or non-being and its replacement or "fulfilment" by the reality of revelation. The assertions . . . cohere with Barth's polemic against natural theology.' The problem is, however, that 'sin

[80] See Chapter 1, section 3.

[81] Richard Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time: Its Nature and Implications', in Stephen W. Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 121, quoting *Church Dogmatics* II/2, p. 183.

[82] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 87.

is in danger of being identified with the natural order as such which only becomes positively real as it is realized in the sphere of the analogy of faith'.[83] As Neiman remarks, 'Giving up the problem of evil means giving up the opposition that created it': that is, the 'contrast between the ideal that evil should not exist and the reality that reminds us that it does'.[84] Roberts thinks that Barth has set aside the 'inductive' or real side of the 'opposition', sidelining singular, dateable historical acts of wickedness and of salvation, in favour of the ideal or eternal.

Roberts' overall disagreement with Barth's method turns on the fact that, as he sees it, Barth merely 'inverts the Hegelian doctrine of the Trinity'. Where Hegel 'resolves the Trinity into historical process', he considers, Barth 'extinguishes' the 'natural order' within 'the trinitarian abyss of the divine being'.[85] The necessary coming forth of finite spirit from God *is* then the fall: 'We find in the Bible a well-known story [*Vorstellung*]', which, Hegel says, is 'abstractly termed the *fall*. This representation is very profound and not just a contingent history but the eternal and necessary history of humanity'.[86] The point of Roberts' comparison between Barth and Hegel on *evil* is that, for Hegel, the created, finite realm *as such* is evil, the necessary evil of the moment of self-differentiation of the divine. But Hegel did not venture so far into melodrama as to ascribe evil to the immanent Trinity.[87]

Jenson supplies a second interpretation of Barth on evil. It goes further toward indicating that, if we do not address the problem of evil within a metaphysics of *creation*, Christian theology has no other recourse than to make it logically necessary for God to overcome evil, that is, to affirm that God's overcoming of evil in Christ's passion and death is a logical necessity. Modern theologians have said more about the problem of evil than Thomas did in his reply to the first objection. What they have to say concerns the suffering of Christ on the cross. If the crucifixion enters our theology as a means of resolving the logical or deductive problem of evil, it carries all of the deductive force of logic into the salvation-historical story. It makes the conquest of evil a logical necessity for God, part of God's 'Poetic Justice', and, by the same token, it makes the act of triumphing over evil, and thus the existence of the opponent, a necessity of the cosmic story. When Irenaeus exposed the errors of Valentinian Gnosticism, he deprecated both

[83] Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', pp. 119–20.

[84] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 221. Neiman is referring to Nietzsche.

[85] Richard Roberts, 'Karl Barth', in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland (eds.), *One God in Trinity* (London: Samuel Bagster, 1980), p. 88.

[86] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* II, p. 527.

[87] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 143 and 132.

its attribution of passibility to God *and* its 'hyperbolic' commitment to impassibility.[88] The discussion below is not about divine passibility, which is coming up in later chapters, but about evil.[89]

Theologians have long debated whether, if Adam had not sinned, the Incarnation would have happened. If we say no, we seem to make it an 'emergency measure', a divine afterthought; if we say yes, we seem to be forced to imagine a blissful, deathless incarnation.[90] Jenson's solution is to weave the story of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection into God's identity. Barth was convinced that it is only in Christ that we know what evil is: 'The true nothingness', he wrote, 'is that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross, and that which he defeated there. Only from the standpoint of Jesus Christ, his birth, death and resurrection, do we see it in reality and truth.'[91] Within the Trinity, in the Father's eternal election of Christ, evil is overcome. Jenson avers that, since, for Barthian method, we only *know* evil in Christ, it follows that evil or the nothing only *exists* in and through Christ's victory over it. Evil exists *because of and through* Christ's vanquishing it on the cross. Christ causes it by destroying it. It follows, according to Jenson, that evil is a part of the reality of the Trinity: 'a mystery of suffering, of an interplay between created regularities and evil, must belong to the plot of God's history with us and to the character of its crisis and fulfilment'.[92] Within an optimistic melodrama in which good absorbs evil, the teleological emergence of God's character becomes the force which compels human beings to suffer. As David Hart notes,

> if God's identity is constituted in his triumph over evil, then evil belongs eternally to his identity, and his goodness is not goodness as such but a reaction, an activity that requires the goad of evil to come into full being. All of history is the horizon of this drama, and since no analogical interlude is allowed to be introduced between God's eternal being as Trinity and God's act as Trinity in time, all of history *is* this identity: every painful death of a child, . . . all war, famine, pestilence, disease, murder . . . all are moments in the identity of God . . . aspects of the occurrence of his essence: all of this is the crucible in which God comes into his own elected reality.[93]

[88] O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, pp. 155 and 200.

[89] See below, Chapter 6, section 9 and Chapter 7, section 9.

[90] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, pp. 72–3.

[91] Quoted in Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, p. 102.

[92] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, pp. 73–4.

[93] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 165. For an apology for, and perhaps a withdrawal of, these remarks, see David Bentley Hart, 'The Lively God of Robert Jenson', *First Things* 156 (2005), 28–34.

Jenson works out the implications in spatial terms. In Lutheran tradition, saved man is *simul justus* and *peccator*, simultaneously justified and sinful. We are, he affirms, *raised* up into God as justified sinners: 'By Jesus' Resurrection', he says,

> a sort of *hole* opens up *in* the event of the End, a space . . . for the church . . . either the people must become sinless also in this age or God must be a sinner. In the identity with and difference of the Risen One and his community, the antinomy between these possibilities is overcome: as the individual Christ, the *totus Christus* is sinless; as the community related to the one Christ, the *totus Christus* is sinful. God as the Christ *of* the community is 'the chief of sinners'; as the one before whom the *totus Christus* stands, he is the righteous judge of sin.[94]

This is not quite the same as saying that there is an eternal tragedy within God, a Lamb slain from before the foundations of the world and an eternal comedy, a Eucharist: it is like claiming that there is an everlasting disaster in God, like a man who eternally drives a nail into his own hand, and thereby causes all of the disaster areas in this world, from Melos to Darfur.

7. The Unknowability of God as a Methodological Principle

Stephen Clark has noted that a pantheistic reverence for 'Nature' is a weak way to proceed in achieving responsible care for nature: for if 'Nature's Way is to be our guide, it is pointless to complain of mass extinctions': 'seeing it all as evil', he says, 'and seeing it all as good amount to the same thing: if it is all good, then our acts in it are good as well (whatever they are); if it is all evil, then our own affective responses are unreliable'. An ethic of nature requires, rather, 'a reawakening of something very like theism in its Jewish, Christian, and Muslim guise'.[95] Theism can only have such a moral dimension if it harbours a sense of analogy. With this sense stand and fall comedy and tragedy. As we envisage it, analogy requires a certain self-censorship.

Censorship has a bad reputation because totalitarian governments silence their citizens. In that form, it gave rise to the Soviet *joke*. The dissident *joke* is a way of getting back at an unanswerable regime. Like God at the end of Miles' biography, the agency of justice behind a totalitarian government performs an act of 'occulation'.[96] According to David Burrell, Aquinas had his tongue in

[94] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, pp. 85–6.

[95] Stephen R. L. Clark, 'Is Nature God's Will?', in Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (eds.), *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1998), pp. 129 and 133–4.

[96] Miles, *God: A Biography*, p. 239.

his cheek when he argued that creatures reflect their Creator 'by an analogical similarity like that holding between all things because they have existence in common. And this is how things receiving existence from God resemble him; for precisely as things possessing existence they resemble the primary and universal source of all existence.'[97] Burrell comments ironically that, 'So if we could know what it was like for anything to exist, we would have a proximate lead to what God was like. Then we would be in possession of one of his proper traces, like Friday's footprints. This statement can only be taken as a joke. A useful joke, no doubt, perhaps even a deliberate joke like a Zen koan, but a joke no less.'[98] Thomas' idea of analogical language must, according to the grammatical Thomist, be a satirical one, not a purgatorial or paradisial and eucharistic one.

Grammatical Thomists spontaneously respond to the problem of evil by reference to the divine unknowability.[99] The most accessible statement of this position, known to many students of philosophy of religion, is Brian Davies' argument that God is not a 'morally good agent'. God is not morally good in our sense, since a transcendent being is not playing our language game; there is no 'context' in which he could be beholden to duties or moral obligations.[100] One might find this easier to believe if one considered that moral good has no analogical or shared reference as between human beings and God.

Lash states the thesis of divine unknowability with perfect clarity: 'If we are to speak some sense of God, to say something appropriate, we can only do so under the controlling rubric that whatever can be depicted in words or images, stories or ideas, is not God. We do not know what "God" means.'[101] Or, as Burrell has it, 'Aquinas manages to employ the identity "to be God is to be to-be" to help him to go on to make the grammatical points he does about "God". And he does this without presuming that we know how to use this substantival form of "to be". That is, none of the statements he makes using "to-be" are empirical or informative.'[102] That the God of Thomas Aquinas is unknown and unknowable attained its current status amongst Thomist grammarians in Burrell's *Aquinas, God and Action*. In its description of the *method* by which Thomas arrives at 'names' for God, such as good, Burrell's

[97] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 3.
[98] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 51.
[99] Karen Kilby, 'Evil and the Limits of Theology', *New Blackfriars* 84 (2003), 13–29.
[100] Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 3, 'God and Evil', pp. 32–54, pp. 48–52.
[101] Lash, *Believing Three Ways*, p. 21.
[102] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 54.

book fixes upon the *process* of 'remotion', that is, the process by which Thomas eliminates materiality from the 'names' which he will ascribe to God. It may be that the process is somewhat reified, or that the methodology of increasing abstraction from created likeness takes the place of the concrete Being of whom Thomas is speaking. The principle that God is unknowable is as definitive of grammatical Thomism as its 'performative' idea of religious language—because *performing* a 'remotion' or elimination of materiality from the divine names is what grammatical apophaticism comes down to. Once the process sets off, there is no logical place to stop. Grammatical Thomism takes the idea that we know nothing about God as a methodological presupposition. The logic of its non-informative enquiry is that God is unknowable. It is not that we affirm that God *is* a mystery, but that it runs against the rules of our procedure to ascribe existential content to our affirmations about God. As Turner puts it, 'Theological speech is subject to a sort of *programmed* obsolescence.'[103] The rules of our procedures require that we purify religious language of content. Such an unknowability has meagre *aboutness*; it's not something we *discover* about God. The procedure may recall the game of not stepping on any cracks in the pavement; there's nothing *about* the cracks which compel us to shun them; it's a rule we have decided to follow, testing and developing our skills in noticing little cracks and leaping over slabs which are perforated with them.

This procedure does some violence to the content of Thomas' theology. Thomas does say that 'the ultimate that man can know of God is to know that he does not know God, since God's essence exceeds what we understand of him'. But in the body of his reply he adds the crucial comment that, 'the understanding of a negation is always founded on some affirmation . . . Unless the human intellect knew something affirmatively about God, it could not negate anything of him.'[104] In the *Summa Theologiae*, the discussion of God's simplicity is in q. 3, following on from the proof of God's existence in q. 2. Unless we knew something about God, we could not engage the process of 'remoting' or excluding from him matter and form, membership of a genus, accidents, and composition, which occurs in q. 3. Every negation we make about God is 'always based on an affirmation', in the simple sense that one is denying embodiedness, composition of matter and form, genus, accidents and so forth to *someone*, and, in the stronger sense that each argument for a negation assumes knowledge of God's being; 'every negative proposition is

[103] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 186.

[104] Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 5, ad 14. We owe this reference to von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, pp. 100–1.

proven by an affirmative'.[105] So, for instance, Thomas argues that God is not 'a body', that is, not material, because, 'it has been already proved that God is the First Mover, and Himself unmoved. Therefore it is clear that God is not a body.'[106]

It is not a special feature of language about the supernatural God that one has to know something about one's referent before one can deny anything of it. Suppose, for instance, one posited an agnosticism like Burrell's in reference not to God but to physics. One would then say, like Thomas Kuhn, that, on the one hand, every era has its own physical paradigm, like Aristotle's 'natural' movements and Galilean gravity, and that, on the other, it is impossible to supply extra-paradigmatic information about the universe of physics, for all of our observations are paradigm-laden. Since all the paradigms are incommensurable, and it is impossible to get at reality and describe it from outside a paradigm, there is according to Kuhn no progressive deepening of scientific knowledge, no deeper knowledge of what the verities of physics *are*. But even, or *especially*, supposing that this negative or apophatic approach to scientific knowledge has some ultimate veracity, it would be impossible to make the case for the failure or incommensurability of all paradigms without considering the paradigms from the outside, or extra-paradigmatically. 'Kuhn himself', as Anthony O'Hear remarks, 'does just what the thesis supposes one is unable to do. He describes the content of various paradigms in a way which presupposes the truth of none of the paradigms concerned. And he also describes the phenomenon to be explained in a way which does not presuppose any particular explanation of it.' Kuhn tells us that, ' "since remote antiquity most people have seen one or another heavy body swinging back and forth on a string or chain until it finally comes to rest" '. ' "Heavy body swinging back and forth on a string or chain" may be a theoretically loaded description, but not in the sense that the truth of either Aristotelian or Galilean explanatory dynamics is presupposed.'[107] The theological narrativists picture religious language like a Kuhnian paradigm, inescapable, and yet eventually false to the realities. But one cannot know that a paradigm belies the realities, or even that one is using one, unless it has also been the medium of true knowledge, or 'affirmation'.

[105] Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar: Being as Communion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 35. This book has a fine analysis of Thomas on analogical language.

[106] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 1.

[107] Anthony O'Hear, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 84, citing Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 127.

The 'metalinguistic' understanding of Thomas on language for God turns on his distinction between the *res significatum*—the thing signified—and the *modus significandi*—the way of signifying the thing. Narrative theology takes the distinction as an opposition, as if it meant that our way of signifying must always back away from the signified thing, in the constant reappropriation of the *signifying* process. It's as if, sighting the process of remoting embodiedness, materiality, genus membership and so on, it takes this *process* as an end in itself. Zubiri notes that what 'Scientific rigor' is after is not 'so much the possession of the internal *necessity of things*, but rather the objective precision':[108] what grammatical Thomism is looking for in its 'negative naming' of God is precision or logical perfection. Discussing George Lindbeck's ascription of 'agnosticism' about God to Thomas, Colman McNeill notes that Lindbeck refers to each of his three approaches to theological language (expressivist, propositional, and cultural-linguistic) as 'models'—on the analogy of scientific hypotheses:

> By using the term 'model', which properly belongs to the method of the empirical sciences, and by applying it to all three approaches, now understood as theological, he tacitly reduces them all to the level of his own explicitly empirical method. Whatever may be the case for experiential-expressivists, this . . . will not do for those who claim . . . truth for doctrinal propositions. They do not make the claims they do except from a context of faith. . . . To the degree that a claim is made to truth, the term 'model' does not apply since it denotes, by definition, a reformable hypothesis . . . [109]

As Zubiri remarks, scientific method gains its rigour 'by *substituting* for so-called empirical things (things as they appear in our daily life) others which behave in a way related to the former, and are so to speak limiting cases approximating to them. Whereas the Greek *episteme* tries to *penetrate into things so as to explain them*, modern science tries . . . to *substitute others which are more precise for them*.'[110] Thomas himself considered that precision or perfection matters less, in this case where it is unachievable, than the acquisition of *some* positive affirmation: 'each of these terms', he says in the *De Potentia*, 'signifies the divine essence, not comprehensively but imperfectly'.[111] He did not fall victim to the theologian's 'occupational hazard' of imagining 'that concepts and symbols are all that enters into the act of faith'.[112] The fact that the paradigm one has substituted for God is contentless hardly seems to stand up as a response to the problem of evil.

[108] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 63.
[109] McNeill, 'The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth', pp. 427–8.
[110] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, pp. 63–4.
[111] Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 5.
[112] McNeill, 'The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth', p. 434.

It may seem unjust to apply McNeill's criticisms of *Lindbeck*'s denotation of Thomas as an agnostic to the thought of men like Burrell. It can readily be detected, however, that the grammatical Thomists' conception of the 'process' of naming God as repeatedly 'remoting' items from the agenda played the Popper to Lindbeck's thorough-going Kuhnian agnosticism. Karl Popper considered that a scientific theory cannot be shown to be *true* or to conform to reality: the best for which a deductivist can hope from such a theory is, not truth, but falsifiability. For the grammatical Thomists, 'learning' to 'name' God is like Popperian falsification, 'learning' 'more and more' by 'knowing' that one 'knows' less and less. Popper was offended by the degree of scepticism which Kuhn extracted from his theories. Stove is nonetheless able to show five commonalities between the two thinkers: the denial of increase of knowledge about the way the world is, the confusion of the logic of science with its history, the concomitant sabotaging of logical expressions by replanting them amongst epistemic statements, the neutralization of 'success words' like 'discovery', which lose their ordinary meaning in Popper as in Kuhn, and deductivism. The outstanding legacy of Popper to Kuhn, as of the grammatical Thomists to Lindbeck, is the reconception of 'discovery' as falsification or negation. The fact that Popper understands 'scientific theories and laws as mere denials of existence' or remotions from reality is shown by his statement that

> The theories of natural science, and especially what we call natural laws, have the form of strictly universal statements; thus they can be expressed in the form of negations of strictly existential statements, or, as we may say, in the form of *non-existence statements* (or 'there-is-not' statements). . . . the law of conservation of energy can be expressed in the form: 'There is no perpetual motion machine', or the hypothesis of the electrical elementary charge in the form: 'There is no electrical charge other than a multiple of the electrical elementary charge'. In this formulation we see that natural laws might be compared to 'proscriptions' or 'prohibitions'. They do not assert that something exists or is the case; they deny it. They insist on the non-existence of certain things or states of affairs, proscribing or prohibiting, as it were, these things or states of affairs: they rule them out.[113]

The procedure of beginning from remotion or negation, rather than affirmation, treats its object, not in relation to its reality but from the perspective of its knowability to us. This is the perfect framework from which to regard unintelligible mishaps as *unreal*. Unless one is willing to *affirm* something about evil before one *denies* something of it, one may be making the assumption that evil is only real in so far as it is *intelligible* to us.

[113] Stove, *Popper and After*, p. 91.

Job's friends dismissed his complaints because he had the wrong kind of suffering, one that did not fit the paradigm. Evil then becomes a sort of lacunae or 'social surd', as Lonergan called it, discounted in its *reality* because of its *unintelligibility* or irrationality.[114]

If, as Neiman says, evil 'shatters our trust in the world',[115] it is likely to trigger a retreat to foundational certitudes: if *someone* has an overview of it all, everything will not merely *be* right but be *known* to be right. Although it is not his only theodicy, Augustine sometimes chose epistemic invulnerability. He contends, for instance, that prelapsarian Adam was less happy than we, for 'it has been revealed with the certainty of truth' that we will possess 'the endless enjoyment of God . . . whereas that first man, in all that bliss of paradise, had no certainty about his future'. Moreover, as Augustine claims, from God's eternal vantage point, our worldly history looks *perfect*: for a 'picture may be beautiful when it has touches of black in appropriate places; in the same way the whole universe is beautiful, if one could see it as a whole, even with its sinners, though their ugliness is disgusting when they are viewed in themselves'. Here Augustine engages in a *grammaromachia*, pitting a Christian explanatory paradigm against the melodramatic narratives of the Manichees. The Sunday afternoon painter who views the aerial fire-bombing of civilians as a touch of black necessary to complete his canvas must be extraordinarily fixed upon an immutable aesthetic goal. Within this epistemic approach to evil, it is precisely the divine Painter's *detachment* from our petty notions of what constitutes moral good and evil, his disengagement from our rules of moral obligation, which makes him the transcendent foundation to which we can fall back from an untrustworthy world. If one advances into actual, existent and thus contingent history, one meets both the terrifying sadness of its near misses and the equally scary joy of narrow escapes, wars hardly won, and souls barely saved. A non-foundationalist realism will propose that our history reflects something *dramatic* in God, something both tragic and comic. This aesthetic and sacramental conception requires that our notion of good really is analogous to the goodness of the Trinity. Such an idea invigorates the other side of Augustine's theodicy. 'There is', he writes, 'a scale of value stretching from earthly to heavenly realities, from the visible to the invisible; and the inequalities between these goods makes possible the existence of them all.'[116]

Referring to the Fourth Way, from perfections, which will prove of some interest in the following chapter, Thomas argues that 'It is impossible that

[114] Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 699. [115] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 9.
[116] Augustine, *City of God* XI.12; XI.23; XI.22.

matter should exist in God . . . because everything composed of matter and form owes its perfection and goodness to its form; therefore its goodness is participated, inasmuch as matter participates the form. Now the first good and the best—viz. God—is not a participated good, because the essential good is prior to the participated good.'[117] This defines the nature of the 'predication' in question: analogical predication with reference to God runs by the way of *perfections*. After proving, by dint of the creaturely perfections within nature, that a transcendent God exists, one may say that, while we are 'removing or negating everything finite, we must simultaneously affirm that whatever perfection is found at the finite level exists supereminently in God'.[118] Or, in other words, the names are analogical. What we negate is the *modus significandi*, our way of signifying; what we affirm is found best, or supereminently, in the *res significatum*.

Thomas would not refer to God, in this context, as the *res significatum*—the thing *signified*—if he considered that no actual signification takes place. Thomas is, McNeill argues, relying upon the already established argument that

> some of the *concepts* we draw from sensible experience (we have no other source to draw on) may be 'properly' applied to God, though clearly they are incapable of expressing adequately his infinite perfection. Still, what they do express mediates a true knowledge of God. In logical terms this is called proper predication. This theory of knowledge . . . is based on a metaphysics which moves from the act of existence of, for example, Fido, to judgments concerning the divine act of existence. This appeal to the order of *esse* implies a most profound criticism of all concepts applied to God (I, qq. 2-12). This results . . . not in agnosticism, but in the assimilation of the whole tradition of negative theology into a higher synthesis. It is a higher synthesis because it allows St Thomas to claim that the *significatum*, the divine being, is just that: our *language* can *signify* because our thought is able to attain him.[119]

The 'higher synthesis' to which McNeill refers is one in which analogical language applies, or in which every negation implies a positive affirmation. Does the notion that God is perfectly good stand up any better than the opinion of the theological-deductivist that God's goodness is unintelligible to us?

8. A Jansenist Illustration of Analogy

God and the government are the only things about which it is difficult to be explicit. Until very recently, it was not possible to say much in public about

[117] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 2.
[118] Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, p. 31.
[119] McNeill, 'The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth', pp. 433–4.

sex either. When Van Morrison sang, in the only version of 'Brown Eyed Girl' accepted for radio transmission in 1966, '*Skipping and jumping* behind the stadium', or, four hundred years earlier, when John Dowland gave us, in 'Go Crystal Tears', 'I see, I touch, I kiss, I *die*', the italicized words seem to have more resonance than a mere univocal naming of the acts in question. Like analogy, linguistic repression simultaneously suppresses and extends meaning. Or, it expands meaning *by* suppressing it. Whilst the *voice* of the singer—the breathless ascending series ending on a high note on '*die*'—makes the connotation unmistakeable, the given words are left to expire into the unsaid. The mutual indwelling of 'die' and its analogates echoes with the surprising richness of reality itself. When we repress a word, we deflect it into another term, and this side-stepping may seem to make the word rebound even more forcefully toward the object it denotes. It carries the weight of not just one but two, or three or four verbal concepts—to see, to touch, to kiss, to skip, to jump, to die—this ascending scale of perfections now reverberates in our notion of the intended object. Our notion of the object thus becomes *moreish*, our appetite for the object expanding the more it feeds upon it.

Whereas the repression of erotic language makes the *object* to which it refers comic (making sex funny), what is comical in censored, Soviet-style jokes is the telling of the joke (making *dissidence* humorous), because it's a punishing of the government. With grammatical Thomists, analogy is *ironic*, issuing as it does from the most rational level of comedy, that is, satire. Behind the grammatical Thomist endeavours to respond to the problem of evil by occluding the divine goodness lies the opinion that the notion of the *analogy of being* was foisted onto Thomas Aquinas by baroque Thomists like Cajetan without any help from Thomas' own texts.[120] An historical or textual rejoinder to this would require a forced march through the thicket of the chronology of the Thomist family's interpretation of analogical language. But it is not our purpose to blame or, preferably, to exculpate historical figures like Cajetan. What we are looking for is a way of recovering aesthetic analogates like tragedy and comedy. The existential judgement affirms that a particular existent really *is*. The best expressions of the entrenchment of a particular existent state of affairs in the real and embodied world are the aesthetic ones. In relation to human beings, aesthetic objects symbolize the divine realm when such art works participate in the divine beauty or goodness. Hence, the base of the sense of analogy is *aesthetic*, the ability to dramatize the relations between God and creatures as tragic or comic. The locus of the loss of the sense of analogy is likewise aesthetic, the tendency to

[120] Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence', p. 17; Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 55.

imagine these relations as occluded, as in the pessimist melodramatist's response to evil, or as ultimately integrated into an undifferentiated whole, as in optimistic melodrama. Denys Turner observes that 'an uncreated *x* and a created *x* cannot differ in respect of what an *x* is, and so to say that the world is created makes not the least difference to how you do your science, or your history, or read your literatures; it does not make that kind of particular difference to anything. The only difference it makes is all the difference to everything.'[121] Taking a path *below* the quagmire of the meaning of analogy in Thomistic tradition, and straight into some pleasing middle-brow novels, our lowly purpose is to indicate that how we approach God and suffering *does* make a difference to how we imagine the world, and thus to how we read literature, for example, tragically and comically, on the one hand, or melodramatically, on the other.

I find the kind of analogy we are seeking in three of the novels of Piers Paul Read. These Jansenistic novels imagine our relation to God as something more than a joke which crept under the censorship of the divine radar. In Read's serious novels, a weak or positively wicked man brings about good through an inadvertent act, an act out of character. *Polonaise* recounts the story of a sexual pervert who ultimately does a good deed which does not follow from his story, murdering a man who is about to seduce a young girl.[122] The *Married Man* brings about his wife's murder through his own adultery, and yet, because of his misdemeanours, learns the Pascalian truth that he is a mystery to himself.[123] Somewhat as, according to Kant, we must not *calculate* that a *lie* might bring about a greater good, so, in these novels, we cannot calculate that evil intentions will bring evil in their train, for one's character might spring free of its story. This, one might say, is Jansenism fair and square. And yet, it does break out from the boundaries of 'story', into the 'ecstasis' of tragic drama, in which our ends are not sentimentally and humanly knowable, but a *mystery.* Thus speaks the *negative* side of our analogical language for God.

Read's thrillers end in happiness. The hero of *The Free Frenchman* persuades his father to employ a troupe of penniless anarchistic fugitives from the Spanish Civil War in his vineyards.[124] The old man becomes mayor of his village: no *résistant*, he applies the Pétainist laws paternalistically. The Spanish labourers quietly disappear into the hills as the war progresses. After D-Day, the Communists arrive from Marseilles to give the collaborator

[121] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 257–8.
[122] Piers Paul Read, *Polonaise* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976).
[123] Piers Paul Read, *A Married Man* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979).
[124] Piers Paul Read, *The Free Frenchman* (London: Pan Books, 1986).

revolutionary justice. As they commence to knock down the door of the *mas*, the Anarchists come down from the hills, with machine guns. To readers of *Homage to Catalonia*, this is one of the most viscerally satisfying closures in modern fiction. As each of the characters in *The Free Frenchman* is delivered a *complete* recompense, the cumulative impact *both* makes the perfect 'rounding' ridiculous, *and* 'unbelievable-believable'. This is the positive side of analogy, which reflects faith in the grace of comedy, or the comedy of grace.[125]

As thus conceived, analogy has both a negative and a positive edge. Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it like this: 'To be sure... *si comprehendis, non est Deus.* But here "incomprehensibility" does not mean a negative determination of what one does not know, but rather a positive and almost "seen" understood properly of him whom one knows. The more a great work of art is known and grasped, the more concretely are we dazzled by its "ungraspable" genius.'[126] Metaphysical reflection leads one to make the existential, contentual affirmation, that God *is* Unknown, or mystery. This can join hands with the theological, or faith-given proposition that for God to be is to love.

Do we want to say that God's goodness *is* like created goodness, our goodness is like the Creator's, because created, and leave it there? That would be to remain the logic of movieland. *Goodness in general* makes a smooth, narrative sequence, whereas particular good and bad acts are less susceptible to making a rounded *story.* We are looking for goods as particular causes, not for the overall causality of 'goodness in general'. For example, interpreted as making ethical ends meet, the recent execution of a man who had murdered eight women, is, one writer suggests, 'a story, with a purpose in the way the story goes'. As a causal sequence, a narrative foretells its ending in its beginning, and

> taken that way, the execution of Michael Ross works more or less as we demand from such stories. It has a completeness, a satisfaction, a narrative arc. It gives the feeling of rightness and a sort of balance restored to a universe gone wrong with the taking of innocent life. It aims, as satisfying stories must, at what we used to call poetic justice: the killer killed, the blood-debt repaid with blood, death satisfied with death. Unfortunately, it is also, in its essence, a *pagan* story, and Jesus—well, yes, Jesus turned all our stories inside out. Especially the old, old ones about blood and blood's repayment.[127]

In overturning our *stories*, Jesus made himself the source of dramatic analogies. There are analogies between the goods exhibited in particular human lives or actions, and the good Creator, a stream of diverse analogies as perpetually

[125] More about this in Chapter 7, section 8. [126] Von Balthasar, *Glory* I, p. 186.
[127] Joseph Bottum, 'Christians and the Death Penalty', *First Things* 155 (2005), 17–21.

surprising and *dramatic* as resurrection and creation itself are. Good*ness* cannot cause anything, any more than causality causes anything. But one good can bring about another.

Like every free Frenchman, Étienne Gilson grasped that he had to choose between Pascal and Descartes, and waged his bet accordingly. But what did this Pascalian Thomist mean when he said that, for Aquinas, analogy is a mode of *equivocity*?[128] The idea has been seized eagerly by grammatical Thomists. They understand it to mean that calling God 'good' is not *ascribing* a certain value to him; it is *describing* how we use the words 'good' and 'God'. Otherwise, according to Burrell, we will find ourselves entangled in the problem of evil. Within Burrell's definition of 'good', as that 'which is logically even if not consciously desired in desiring whatever one desires',[129] this focus on the *sign* rather than the signified exhibits a powerful potential for narrative expansion. If every thing really is a *sign*, then the logic of desire requires that every *thing* must be a sign—every object must be made meaningful. Every thing stands for something, or is a coded meaning. Equivocity doubles back into univocity. In the novels to which the melodramatic theatre gave rise, the novels of Henry James and Balzac, for instance, the 'reader is hammered at, harassed with solicitations to respond to the implications of everything'. The novelist can *integrate* his 'scenery' or visual spectacle and his dialogues into a total description of his society. For Peter Brooks, the evolutionary successors of nineteenth-century French stage melodrama were the socially realist novels of Balzac, Henry James, and Charles Dickens. In such novels, scenic colouring is never there for its own sake; rather, 'Balzac's descriptions reiterate . . . the effort of optical vision to become moral vision . . . Everything in the real—facades, furniture, clothing, posture, gesture—becomes sign. . . . As in melodrama, we are summoned to enter the world of hypersignificant signs.' In the dramatic understanding of analogy, meaning enters the world and takes flesh, in creation as in Christ. Analogy is the creative giving of being and thus meaning to particular existents, good things. Since he was a Pascalian, anti-rationalist Thomist, perhaps all Gilson meant to do by aligning analogy with equivocity was to import a certain empirical or contingent cast into our appreciation of the term: it is not 'being in general', the abstract concept of goodness or of *esse* which is analogous to God, but particular existent facts, this tree or that stone. The *story*-maker, on the other hand, wants to assume *everything* within meaning. Balzac's hero, Louis Lambert hoped that, 'one day the reverse of *Et Verbum caro*

[128] Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence K. Shook CSB (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961), p. 105.

[129] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, pp. 30–1. The remarks about evil are on p. 30.

factum est will be the summary of a new Scripture proclaiming: *And flesh will be made Spirit, it will become the Word of God.*'[130] It was thus perhaps an ill-judged move on the part of Hans Frei, in explaining his method of biblical interpretation, to propose that the 'kind of understanding . . . involved . . . is perhaps best exemplified by what goes on in the nineteenth century realistic novel'.[131] David Kelsey thought, likewise, that Barth treated the Bible like 'one vast, loosely structured non-fictional novel'.[132] One might think that the *descriptive* quality of the realist novel, as applied to Scripture, would deliver a greater *concreteness* than is found in traditional metaphysical theology. But, *description* brings along with it all too much meaning. A descriptive theology has more power over the biblical content than imaginatively laconic modes of approaching revelation.

If we shall approach neither genuine tragedy nor 'the problem and mystery of evil' which lies at its 'core'[133] by gripping *God* as a univocal idea, then, perhaps, the same task requires us to loosen the grip of logic on *humanity*. We cannot fully apprehend the tragic effect unless we think it little exaggeration to say, with Ortega y Gasset, '*Man . . . has no nature; what he has is . . . history*.'[134] In fine studies of the Greek and Shakespearian plays, Gellrich has shown that the tragic theories of both Hegel and Aristotle cannot really be made to fit the texts. Oedipus, for example, 'is a being that no logic can embrace in a self-consistent definition'.[135] This is like Pascal's interpretation of each human creature as a being of contradictions whose 'greatness is to recognize his wretchedness'; 'You are not in the state of your creation', the great Jansenist said.[136] One may recall that

every important element of Pascal's analysis of man must be defined historically. There is no human nature separable from the story of a mankind that was created sane, just, and free, and which lost those attributes through Adam's Fall. . . . In an age of philosophical systems, and a physical mechanism that destroyed time, Pascal more than anyone in his age and society—even among his Augustinian friends—upheld the Augustinian vision, not only against the Jesuits, but against Thomists and Cartesians, scientists and mathematicians: '*Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacob, non des Philosophes et des savants*.' The revelation of Christianity is . . . a Sacred History, and the events of that history . . . are, for Pascal, more . . . enlightening than any philosophical system . . . [137]

[130] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 125–7 and 141–2.
[131] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, p. 32.
[132] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 48.
[133] Exum, *Arrows of the Almighty*, p. 10.
[134] Gasset, *History as a System*, p. 217.
[135] Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, p. 76.
[136] Pascal, *Pensées and other Writings*, ch. 11, p. 182.
[137] Jan Miel, *Pascal and Theology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), pp. 182–3.

Thus, for instance, against the Calvinist idea of an *eternal*, extra-historical predestination of some to salvation, others to damnation, Pascal defended a 'temporal' divine election, one which takes place only after the fall of Adam, conceived as an historical fact.[138]

A second obstacle to Aristotle's penetration of the tragic character is that he avers that the hero must be 'morally innocent', and hence could only err out of ignorance; but, if it's about mistaken identity, then *Oedipus the King* is indeed just a fiasco. As Gellrich says, Sophocles' own idea of good and evil is more complex than Aristotle's: 'Sophocles' tragedy holds in balance irresolvable oppositions between goodness and criminal contamination that derive partly from an archaic notion of pollution, which Aristotle's ethical thinking had . . . superseded or implicitly discounted as primitive.'[139]

This gives us a couple of ways of bypassing the melodramatic imperative, and of achieving a reasonable approach to evil which does not make it disappear into *rationality*. Consider again what Heilman called the inner 'dividedness' of the tragic protagonist. What does it show us, and, can it *show* us anything, without making tragedy rationally meaningful? As Cassandra walks towards Agamemnon's palace, where she will be slain alongside her captor, she sees 'ugly little rivers' in which float the bodies of murdered children, 'ancient memories' of human sacrifice, reminders to the audience of 'shared communal guilt'. Tragedy exists, Louise Cowan argues, in order to bring us to the point of seeing this: 'as a ritual conveying the sudden intuition of outer darkness,' tragedy 'surprisingly reveals that shadowy realm to be, not chaos as uncreation, as one might think, but a *ruin*, creation after the fall'. If tragedy communicates 'a recognition of the harm done by some primordial event', it considers that event, not externally, but from *within*. As both Barth and Pascal saw, it is only

> from within the deep chiaroscuro of the divine, in the perspective of eternity, that this culpability can be apprehended. . . . human beings have a secret but unexamined awareness of an imperfection in the frame of things and of their own implication in it—along with the intuition that they will be held accountable for it. Tragedy dramatizes this potential judgement—a dreaded experience that in actual life can only be intuited. . . . Humanity is viewed from outer darkness, as in his *Comedy* Dante portrayed his characters from the outer light. But his view of them, being comic, was external, from observation and conversation. The view of tragedy is internal; through its agency one is made to see from within the soul a potential experience as though it were taking place.

[138] Blaise Pascal, *Écrits sur la grâce* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), pp. 120–8.
[139] Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, pp. 143–4.

If the 'experience that lies behind' tragedy is 'the dread of eternal loss', it occurs 'along with the simultaneous recognition of one's full value'.[140]

If we interpret the tragic hero's 'inner dividedness' as original sin, it may seem that we too have awarded a rational meaning to tragedy. Tragedy seems to be roped into the Christian story about original sin. But, reference to a disastrous 'primordial event' can be of two kinds, as Gordon Graham shows by comparing the free will arguments used by Alvin Plantinga and Augustine.[141] Where it is party to a *theodicy*, it will explain that Adam, or Satan, fell through their free will, and that this freedom was accorded to creatures by God *because* it was *better* that they had it than not. Plantinga gives us a story which provides a rational meaning for the fall. Conversely, *The City of God* simply states that it is a *fact* that Satan, and Adam after him, fell—and here one merely has a '*defence*'. With Augustine, the evil will in the fallen angels has no prior cause. The primordial event is one of the historical givens of our situation. Like the 'Protestant wind' of 1588, or Culloden or the Battle of Britain, it did not happen because it belongs to some higher rational scheme—it just happened. Albeit it is a merely contingent fact, it is still reasonable to take a certain aboriginal failure into account. To say that human beings are living in a potentially tragic situation, bearing that potential within themselves, is thus no logical theodicy, but an inductive, 'history-based' account of the existent particulars.

It was Job who recognized his *value* as a *created* being, and it is to him that we turn to close this chapter. Job's story is prototypically tragic, in that 'his very goodness made him the object of God's admiring gaze and therefore the target of the Accuser'. If God had not so admiringly 'boasted' of his scion, Satan would not have laid down the challenge. One seems to empty tragedy of its meaning if one suggests that it carries with it a certain reconciliation: but, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy does so, and Sophocles' *Oedipus* is a two-parter, concluding at Colonus with the blind man as an agent of purification. The point is not to *square* suffering with ultimate harmony, but rather to show the two *hanging together*, in suspension. Perhaps, in order to do so, we need a notion more concrete and specific than the *goodness* of God; we may need to speak, rather, of the *love* of

[140] Cowan, 'Introduction: The Tragic Abyss', pp. 11 and 16.

[141] Graham, *Evil and Christian Ethics*, p. 201; Augustine, *City of God* XII.1–3, 6–7: 'If you try to find the efficient cause of this evil choice, there is none to be found' (6).

God. The point from which suffering and sense are suspended is the *love* of God, as Daniel Russ suggests in his analysis of the epilogue to *Job*:

> the epilogue is not a happy ending; it is a just ending that reflects God's love of Job. God is the creator of this world, he created it as a good world, and he promises good things to good men in this life. . . . Like Lazarus being raised from the dead, Job's restoration is a mixed blessing, for he cannot know that he will not lose everything again. He must live the rest of his life, one hundred and forty years, knowing what it is to lose everything. Yes, he knows as never before that he can trust God, even if God kills him. But he also knows that the love of God does not preclude untold suffering. Perhaps the final mystery is that the love of God is both the source and the abyss into which Job fell in his affliction.[142]

[142] Russ, 'Job and the Tragedy of Divine Love', p. 102.

5

A Close Run In with Death

A long and broad marble table, that stood at one end of the room, had been drawn into the middle of it, and thereon burned a great fire . . . —a fire of flowing, flaming, roses, red and white. . . . and the shape that Curdie could see and not see, wept over the king as he lay in the fire, and often she hid her face in handfuls of her shadowy hair, and from her hair the water of her weeping dropped like sunset rain in the light of the roses. . . . then Curdie . . . saw and knew the old princess. The room was lighted with the splendour of her face, of her blue eyes, of her sapphire crown. . . . she stooped over the table-altar, put her mighty arms under the living sacrifice, lifted the king, as if he were but a little child, to her bosom, . . . and laid him in his bed.

George Macdonald, *The Princess and Curdie*

When that the Eternal deigned to look
On us poor folk to make us free
He chose a Maiden, whom He took
From Nazareth in Galilee;
Since when the Islands of the Sea,
The Field, the City, and the Wild
Proclaim aloud triumphantly
A Female Figure with a Child.

H. Belloc, 'Ballade of Illegal Ornaments'

1. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Jacques Louis David

The French Revolution was once described as 'a lyrical drama, verse by Chénier, music by Gossec, setting by David'.[1] The role taken by Jacques Louis David (1748–1825) in relaying the aesthetics of the Revolution helps us to appreciate the origins of the melodramatic imagination. David's

[1] Unattributed citation in David Lloyd Dowd, *Pageant-Master of the Republic: Jacques-Louis David and the French Revolution* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1948), p. 98.

Oath of the Horatii and his *Brutus*, exhibited at the Salon in 1785 and in 1789, expressed a common impulse to launch the Revolution from Roman history and myth, and their attachment to gestures of solidarity in the face of death. In his paintings and in his stage management of the revolutionary festivals, David orchestrated the key imaginative moments of the years 1789–94. The revolutionary government used fêtes to educate its people in the ideals of liberty and fraternity: the 'festival, the occasion when people come together, must . . . be a source of enlightenment: "a numerous, and therefore less superstitious people," one commissioner for the département of the Rhône wrote'.[2]

The neo-classical *Oath of the Horatii* is innovatory in making not just the face, but the entire body express passion. In his article on *Geste* in the *Encyclopédie* (1754), De Cahusac had deemed gesture an 'exterior movement of the body and the face'. For the *Encyclopédist*, gesture is the aboriginal, pre-linguistic language, 'the primitive language of the universe in its cradle'. It is therefore 'the language of all nations'. Gesture is the *natural* language of all humanity, comprehensible to all because identical in all: 'nature . . . was and always will be the same'.[3] Other *philosophes* took the same line: Rousseau ranks gesture as the *first*, immediate (or unmediated) language. Because it has not undergone the cooling process of conventionalization, the primal language of gesture can speak to emotions too deep to be entombed in verbal form. The aesthetically, and politically 'revolutionary corporal aesthetic' which David uses in his paintings was summed up by his friend Diderot, '*il y a des gestes sublimes que tout l'éloquence oratoire ne rendra jamais*'.[4]

Diderot insisted that 'pantomime is a portion of drama'; so 'gesture will often be indicated in place of speech'. Diderot presented a new idea of drama, the '*drame bourgeois*'. It would differ from classical tragedy and comedy in that it would be part 'silent', part 'talkie'; in it, 'significant pantomime is juxtaposed with declamation, and silent "tableaux vivants" alternate with spoken scenes'.[5] The *philosophes*' conception of the value of gesture carries over into the nineteenth century 'How to' manuals, from which an aspiring melodramatist could learn that 'Pantomime is the universal language; it makes itself understood the world over, by the savage as by the civilized man: because physiognomy, gestures, and all the movements of the body have their eloquence, and this eloquence is the most natural.' The nineteenth-century 'tableaux vivants' developed their own repertoire of conventionalized visual

[2] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, pp. 200–1.

[3] Cited in Dorothy Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 19.

[4] Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David*, p. 14.

[5] Ibid., p. 19.

references: 'as when in *La Fausse Mère*... the swearing of a pact at the end of Act I is supposed to mime David's canvas of *Le Serment des Horaces*'.[6]

The *philosophes* took pleasure in pantomime because they thought it non-theatrical. Diderot regarded the eighteenth-century theatre as a 'dark little place'. The *philosophes* saw straight through the histrionics and stage mechanics of opera and theatre; the 'century that was to end in a blaze of spectacle at first acquired a profound distaste for it'. This is why the 'collective imagination' of the revolutionaries expatriated itself to Rome, where, 'far back in the mists of time, a festive assembly had been held in which the participants found their satisfaction simply in the fact of being together'.[7]

David designed the millennial rites of the Revolution, from the pantheonization of Voltaire's relics in 1791 to the fête of the Supreme Being in 1793.[8] David's work in the procession for the re-interment of Voltaire in the Panthéon set the mould for festivals managed by other hands. David designed a vast 'Roman' style chariot for the funeral procession, drawn by a dozen white horses led by toga-clad grooms. A tremendous visual propaganda statement of the rights of man, this funeral over which no cleric presided was not only Voltaire's apotheosis, but the beginning of the exorcism of older liturgies.[9] A week later, the National Guard created martyrs to the Revolution by firing on a turbulent crowd. A new, enlarged chariot by David would carry a statue of Liberty at the fête which celebrated the death of these 'patriots'. By the time he directed the festival in honour of the Châteauvieux Regiment, the artistic director had grasped that the salient factor in the new festivals was mass participation, and how to make use of it.[10] The festivals with which the revolutionary years were punctuated 'rejected theatrical spectacle to take the form of a procession, a form that embodies the sanctifying act of occupying space and requires the connivance, perhaps even the identification, of actors and spectators'. What is sacralized, or *symbolic*, in the rallies is the act of collective participation. The totems of the revolutionary procession had to be, as David realized, large enough to be witnessed by a crowd separated from them by thousands of bodies, and clear enough to greet the eye with a literal statement: 'the classical doctrine of allegory' was of assistance in David's festival design. As distinct from symbols, allegories illustrate ideas rather than embodying them. For the Festival of Unity and Indivisibility of 10 August 1793, David intended a series of allegorical historic scenes, what he termed 'a vast theater in which the principal events of the Revolution would be

[6] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 68 and 61.
[7] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, pp. 2–3 and 5.
[8] Dowd, *Pageant-Master of the Republic*, pp. 43 and 85.
[9] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, pp. 79–80.
[10] Dowd, *Pageant-Master of the Republic*, pp. 52–4, 60, and 65.

represented in pantomime' in five acts. Although his plan was abridged, David helped to script a speech for the processional station at which the participants drank from the fountains gushing from the 'fecund breasts' of a towering, Egyptian-style Mother Nature.[11]

Diderot wanted the 'climactic' scenes in the new 'bourgeois drama' to be 'played without words'. The significance of such 'muteness' in pantomime and melodrama alike was 'to render meanings which are *ineffable*'. Pantomime gesture stood in for a 'catachresis, the figure used when there is no "proper" name for something'.[12] The point of gesturing with one's body rather than utilizing the artificialities of language is to evoke passions too extraordinary to be verbalized. Great painter though he was, David's political allegories convey meanings which are less many-sided than, say, Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*. At least, he was happy to explain his paintings in the blunt instrument of a monovalent phrase:

> David's presentation to the National Convention of his picture of Michel Lepelletier on his deathbed is a fascinating example of the reading of a painting by its author. To the father wishing to show this picture to his children . . . David suggests four steps, accompanied by four lessons. First, the child should observe the hero's 'serene features.' These they will read as meaning that one has nothing to reproach oneself for 'when one dies for one's country.' They will then pass to the sword: this will teach them of the courage that Lepelletier needed in daring to commit the regicide. Then to the wound, which might be the occasion for a negative lesson . . . : 'You will weep, my children, you will avert your eyes.' But this moment is soon saved by contemplation of the crown, which can be deciphered as the immortality that 'the fatherland holds in reserve for its children.' Thus the whole picture becomes translated into a series of statements.[13]

Just as David's pictures and his processions used inscriptions and allegorical symbols to aid immediate deciphering of meaning, so, in later melodramas like *Robert le diable*, we know that the hero's entreaties to the deity have been given the celestial thumbs-down when,

> the cross before which he has prostrated himself suddenly bursts into flame. Then, 'a column rises out of the ground; on it are written the words: *Crime, Punishment*' (I,ii). Somewhat in the manner of titles in the silent cinema, emblems and inscriptions of this sort and messages imprinted on banners are frequently used to clarify the informational content of the action.[14]

[11] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, pp. 80, 78, and 154–7.
[12] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 65, 62, and 72–3.
[13] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, p. 214.
[14] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 63.

The art emerging from the revolutionary fascination with pre-linguistic gesture can be more obviously verbalized than some other, less conceptual pictorial projects.

Our experience of a painting on canvas is a response to a static physical object. Paintings effecting to depict *motion* produce, therefore, a certain visual dissonance. 'In such pictures as the *Bonaparte Crossing the St Bernard*, by David,' Gilson remarks, 'the eternally rearing horse whose forelegs never touch the ground offers a rather disturbing contrast between the immobility of the painting and the frantic intensity of the action it attempts to represent.'[15] What David painted best was the motionless body. From *Andromache Mourning Hector* (1783), praised by the critics for the 'frightful naturalism of the corpse', to *Marat Assassinated*, David entered the pantheon of the modern imagination through his striking representations of the helplessly dead body, the body murdered by an assassin.

2. Marat Transignified

Although the revolutionaries 'dreamed . . . of a festival where . . . there would be nothing to see', they took statuary to be the most sacralizable art: 'Sculpture', said Falconer, 'has only one word to say, and that word must be sublime.'[16] In distinction from this trans-linguistic, unmediatable sublime, the pre-linguistic beliefs of dogs refer to such objects as cats up trees, and the pre-linguistic communications of 'domestic' dolphins to frisbees and surfboards. Whether animals have beliefs, or the capacity to communicate them is a moot point. MacIntyre notes that both the Wittgensteinian tradition in analytic philosophy and the Continental tradition have demarcated the animal from the human too rigorously. Both traditions make language use, ascribed to humans alone, the frontier. For instance, Heidegger claimed that, because animals do not use language, no animal can perceive an object *as* an object. Since 'words world the world', the animal is 'poor in world'; and so, 'in a fundamental sense', the German existentialist felt, 'the animal does not have perception'.[17]

It is debatable whether Thomas Aquinas can be placed with these authors of a sharp difference between animals as bundles of sensations and humans as rational. It is true that Thomas often batted on a methodological distinction or comparison between the animal-as-senser and the human as thinker.

[15] Étienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 21.

[16] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, p. 206.

[17] Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, p. 259, cited in MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, pp. 43–4.

Objectors to Thomas' opinion that animals exist for the sake of humans have noted that it follows from a schematic contrast between animals as irrational and humanity as rational; there is thus no community between beast and man, and no duty to respect the animal creation.[18] Accepting this schematism as Thomas' objective account of the facts, Herbert McCabe speaks of animals simply as 'non-linguistic'.[19] On the other hand, and despite the deficiencies he can see in their positions, MacIntyre draws on the contentual 'resources' of Aquinas and Aristotle to argue that animals hold 'prelinguistic' beliefs. He claims that if *both* human and nonhuman animals were not capable of perceptually ascertaining that something is the case (that it is true that a cat is up a tree) on a '*prelinguistic*' level, we could not attain the knowledge of truth *linguistically* either.[20] It's a bit like Anthony O'Hear's argument that we could not know we were reasoning paradigmatically unless we could also think outside of the paradigm.[21] Stephen Clark put the point about the necessity to humans of an animality which reasons prelinguistically like this: 'how do individuals come to speak without having thought before they spoke? Must we suppose some doctrine of eternal souls who never need to learn to speak... ? It seems easier to believe that... unspeaking creatures, creatures that can't speak our tongues, can think and plan.' For Clark, 'all' animals are 'potentially, our friends',[22] whereas for McCabe, friendship and thus community requires the capacity to transcend our animal, bodily individuality.[23] A 'romantically pessimistic'[24] attitude toward animals has consequences for our understanding of the Eucharist.

McCabe built a defence of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation around a notion of what it is to think and to use language. He intends to show that the transubstantiated host, conceived as a 'language', *is* the presence of the Kingdom, and thus of Christ. The Kingdom is the eschatological company of the friends of Christ. The possibility of a kingdom which includes *all* human beings turns, as he sees it, on our capacity not only to speak in the local 'dialect' of poetry—or, in languages in which the physical sounds and rhythms of the words are inextricable from the meaning—but also in the translatable, and thus scientific language of concepts. Whereas 'poetry is language trying to be bodily experience', McCabe argues, 'science is language

[18] Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1997), p. 7.

[19] Herbert McCabe, *God Still Matters* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 129.

[20] MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, pp. 33, 41, 12, 7, and 35.

[21] See above, Chapter 4, section 7.

[22] Stephen R. L. Clark, *Animals and their Moral Standing* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 145 and 8.

[23] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 132.

[24] Clark, *Animals and their Moral Standing*, p. 149.

trying to be universally available regardless of particular languages'. The thought behind this is that, if human beings were just their *own*, particular sensing bodies (as 'non-linguistic' animals are said to be), they would be bereft of a capacity to transcend themselves and make rational contact with other minds. Speech that functions on the level of 'poetry', or body-speech, does not quite achieve this, because all bodies are different, and sounds which are pleasing to me may be jarring to you: although the 'sensations' of any two humans may be '*similar*', they can never be identically alike, just because of the interposing two bodies. It 'is not so with linguistic meanings' proper, McCabe thinks: here two or more persons can have '*identical* meanings in mind'.[25] The first plank of McCabe's defence of transubstantiation is thus that humans have a conceptual language through which to transcend their bodily particularity. Our discussion of allegory may have helped to explain what McCabe means by a universal concept. Studying 'the official accounts' of the fêtes, 'we should not believe too readily that popes' were 'whipped', and 'Capets . . . guillotined': 'it was not so much a pope that was being thrashed as Fanaticism, and not so much Louis XVI as Monarchy. Fanaticism and Monarchy, but also Abundance, Liberty, Justice—the lesson of the Revolution was conveyed by a swarm of allegorical figures.' The revolutionary government used festivals to control popular turbulence: a 'certain conjuration of violence was at work', which is 'why allegory was the favourite form of representation in the Revolutionary festival. Unlike the simulacrum and the symbol, allegory is . . . concerned more with substitution than reproduction. Allegory . . . cultivates . . . allusion.'[26]

Although, according to McCabe, the Thomist doctrine of the *conversio ad phantasma*—the turn to the image which precedes conceptualization—indicates that we use our brains when we think, brain and bodily sensation are for him the tools or instruments of thought, not its medium.[27] He states that Thomas' epistemology was quite different from that of Averroism, which conceives of each act of thought as a participation in a universal mind. He considers that the human understanding of conceptual meanings

> comes about by a power of the human soul, which is always the substantial form of an individual human body. For Aquinas, concepts, unlike sensations, are not the private property of individuals but do arise from individual material animals transcending their individuality and hence their materiality. As Aristotle knew, thoughts, unlike sensations, have no corporeal organ. Brains do not think; they are the co-ordinating centre of the structure of the nervous system which makes possible the sensual interpretation of the world, which is itself interpreted in the structure of symbols, language . . .

[25] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 131.

[26] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, p. 212.

[27] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 130.

McCabe *co-ordinates* the human being's thought and physical brain, in good Aristotelico-Thomist style, but he simultaneously aligns what is *unique* or idiosyncratic in each person with her bodily sensations, and what surpasses this bodily particularity with the concept. 'The understanding of meanings is', he affirms, 'the work of human intelligence, by which we transcend our individuality.'[28] It follows that the body does not *mediate* to thought what is valuable and useful to it—for what thought is *for*, here, is simply the transcendence of individuality. The goal of thought is *immediate*—or non-mediated—interface with the collectively comprehended concept, and its detour through the body is effectively profitless. For linguistic theology, *vision* is more interesting than tongue or touch: as with the *philosophes*, 'sight' is the 'sense by which man is educated, by virtue . . . of the immediate character of the information gathered in the eyes. . . . "What the painter shows," wrote Diderot, "is the thing itself; the expressions of the musician and poet are merely hieroglyphs of it." ' Supposing that Diderot was not quite right about this, and that, even or especially in a painting, meaning is incarnate in canvas and oil, then one might have to say that, not only pictures, but also human beings, are 'hieroglyphs', in that being an individual of a particular shape is part of what it is to be human. Our body-poetry is not there to decorate our souls; being, for example, six-foot six, bald and bearded is intrinsic to being *a* human. Conceived as a concept-forming machine, the human has nothing in it to divide her self or her ideas from another's ideas. 'When, in Pluviôse Year VII, the minister of the interior wanted to play down the manner in which the Festival of the Sovereignity of the People would be celebrated, he invited artists to suggest "images"—or rather, he corrected himself, "ideas." ' The clearest vehicles of immediate meanings are neither symbols nor sensations, but ideas, expressible in the explanatory and exhortatory placards carried by the demonstrators: 'So the Revolutionary festival referred to a world of perfect intelligibility, order, and stability.'[29]

McCabe is very clear that, as a *language*, the Eucharistic Kingdom is a society to which particular, and thus opaque, individuals do not belong: 'Sensations remain my private property or yours. Thought, however, transcends my privacy. . . . in the creation of language we reach beyond our private, material individuality to break into the non-individual, not-material sphere of linguistic meaning.' Once thinking has been divested of the hedges and privacies constructed by particular bodies, *multiple*, different individuals will naturally have no contribution to make:

[28] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, pp. 126–7.

[29] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, pp. 211 and 205.

In principle, nobody could have my sensation; but in principle everybody could have my thought. For the meanings of words are their roles not within the structure of any individual body but within the structure of language, which is in principle (in order to be language at all) shared by all. . . . For St. Thomas, what is bodily and material about me constitutes my privacy, my individuality.

What could an individual add to this single, unanimous and collective thought except a violation of transparency and universality? McCabe states that 'the sacraments which centre upon the Eucharist are the language which makes a certain "society" possible',[30] but the question is how it will be a *society* at all, given that the otherness of persons one to another does not go into its perfection? Such a utopia would be monological and dialogue-free. It would be, not many *different* persons—a society—but a single, collective mind: like the 'neo-classical symbolism' of the revolutionary fêtes, McCabe's defence of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist is 'in the service of the myth of unanimity'.[31]

The ideal of the National Assembly and its local delegates was the 'detheatricalized festival', that is, a festival of total participation, with no distinction between actors and onlookers. Rather than acting out pantomimes to an admiring audience, as David wanted them to do, the organizers of festivals encouraged the communes to engage in historical re-enactments, 'a great collective game, which would exorcise the evil temptations of separation that the theater encouraged . . . At Charmes, for the festival celebrating the retaking of Toulon, the citizens were invited to gather at night, in open countryside . . . ; then, when the alarm sounded, an assault would be launched on two mock cities.'[32] As with the *philosophes*' notion of gesture as a universal language, this gives us the naked presence of communication, communication triggered by the spontaneous interaction of raw identities, rather than the mutual presence of communicants to the really communicated. McCabe seems to envisage a naked presence when he affirms that 'the body of Christ is present in the Eucharist as meaning is present in a word'.[33] As he conceives it, scientific language must be carried by physical sounds, but a universal meaning can be extracted from it because sounds and meaning are not so far interwoven as to make the meaning multivalent.

McCabe draws on the real distinction between essence and existence to flesh out his doctrine of Eucharistic presence. He reminds us that, according to Gilson, no Aristotelian, that is, no pagan philosopher, can make sense of

[30] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, pp. 25, 127, and 132.
[31] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, p. 65.
[32] Ibid., pp. 206 and 209.
[33] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 124.

this distinction. Gilson said, 'The world of Aristotle owes everything to its divine maker except its existence.'[34] As McCabe sees it, to maintain the difference of *esse* and essence, one must hold, not only that God continually keeps natures going, but also that he creates them out of nothing. Just as, for the Thomist and Christian, God creates for the cosmos an existence out of nothing, so, a Christian can reasonably extend this to affirming that the transubstantiation of the consecrated *bread* into *Christ* is a new creation of existence. No *change*—or evolution of a given substance—takes place at the consecration, but rather the supplanting of one *esse* by another. What had been the created '*esse*' of bread is made new as the uncreated '*esse* of Christ'. Transubstantiation 'is a change which, rather like creation, takes place neither at the level of accident nor of substance but of existence itself'.[35] As every Gilsonian Thomist can tell us, every essence or nature is a '*habens esse*'; no *esse* or existence, no nature, *and vice versa*: 'The attempt to express... *that* something is cannot be made without stating *what* it is.'[36] Catholics believe that, in eating the consecrated host, they consume the divinized flesh of the man Jesus Christ. I am not sure where to locate the human nature or the flesh of Christ in Fr McCabe's depiction of the real presence; it seems to have disappeared into the *esse*, the existential '*that*'. Some may wonder to *which esse* McCabe refers. Gilson contended, rather fiercely, that there is only one *esse* in Christ, the *esse* of the Logos or person of Christ.[37] Other Thomists count on two, one human, one divine. If McCabe considers that the Eucharist is the *human esse* of Christ, his essays do not bite on the human *nature* which this *esse* 'habet'. If he considers the Eucharist as the *divine esse*, he has decapitated it from its human body.

As McCabe understands it, the bread that we see and taste and the consecrated host belong to different languages: 'It is not that the bread has become a new kind of thing in this world', he says, but rather, 'it now belongs to a new world. ... what we have is not part of this world'; when the Council of Trent affirms that 'the substance of bread does not remain' it means that the accidents 'belong to another language'.[38] Although McCabe treats the linguistic hold on concepts as a mark of transcendence, he cannot orient language toward the Trinity, because he does not perceive the personal idiosyncracy or bodily poetry of the human creature as intrinsically *good*, and

[34] McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 146; Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 72.

[35] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 126; *God Matters*, p. 149.

[36] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* I, p. 106.

[37] Étienne Gilson, 'L'Esse du Verbe incarné selon saint Thomas D'Aquin', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moyen âge* 35 (1968), 23–37; reprint *Autour de Saint Thomas*, ed. Jean-François Courtine (Paris: J. Vrin, 1983).

[38] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, pp. 119 and 121.

thus intrinsically analogical. The plurality of human persons, their theatrical difference from one another, such that every partner in a conversation is audience and spectator to another, is a requirement for each person's communication with other persons, and thus of their love one for another. In grammatical Thomism, difference is antithetical (animal *or* human, body *or* mind, individual *or* society). This bi-polarity is ultimately washed away into unity. A dramatic theology, conversely, can observe that it is not that in which human beings are presumed alike or 'identical'—the mind—but that which underscores their distinction—their bodies—which makes their social relation possible. My body makes me distinct from others *and* unites me to them. It is my being a *body* which, bumbling about in the world as it does, banging into other people, propels me into transcendence in their direction. It's because it 'externalizes' me that my body enables me to make contact with others as others,[39] not as unanimous thoughts within a collective mind. Dialogue requires a bit of distinction, and a bit of similarity, or that continual interchange of similarity and otherness which is analogy. Because there is no dramatic *analogy* between the communion of the Trinity and human community on earth in McCabe's presentation of the Eucharist, there is no drama in it, and thus neither any likeness between human audience and divine actor, nor any means of distinguishing them. His theory of the Eucharist presents a raw or totalizing presence, rather than a real presence, the presence of one person to another.

It may seem perverse to find in this doctrine of the Eucharist a minimalization of the bloody death of Christ. For one of the most often quoted sayings of the Dominican is, 'Of course he was crucified: he was human wasn't he? . . . Jesus died of being human. . . . all humans die, but he was so human he had to be killed.'[40] This is sentimental, in the way in which some persons are blamed for being 'sentimental about animals'—giving them a devotion beyond their natural capacities to receive and return it. The plaintive emotion drains into the dying humanity of Jesus, and is exhausted in it. It trivializes violence by exalting the *instant* of death over the *life-long* sufferings and pleasures of human life. Severely physically or mentally scarred people do not suffer for a day, but all their lives. When Father McCabe's observation is recounted to me, I recall a paraplegic man, to whom I used to take the Eucharist, who told me he could never quite appropriate the *Salve Regina*, which would have him 'mourning and weeping in this vale of tears'—he had too many spots of enjoyment. Suffering, and pleasures, live in us, as we live bodily, *over time*: it is through our physically ingathered *temporality*, our own

[39] Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, pp. 68–9 and 271–2.
[40] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 96.

time-worldedness, that we find such meaning as there may be in the multiple stages of our life. Melodrama deals in *suspense* rather than in temporality.

The Revolutionary Festivals were intended to replace the liturgies of the Church in France in the heart of the nation. But how to purge their memories and imaginations of the old religion? The '"spectacle that first struck one"' on entering a church was

> 'a young, naked man, attached with nails, through his feet and through his hands, to a cross bespattered with blood, his head leaning to one side and crowned with sharp thorns, expiring in the most horrible torments....' Michel-Edme Petit, who drew this picture during the period of the Convention, even doubted whether the shock thus produced could be offset by the teaching of the Constitution.[41]

After Marat's assassination, in 1793, his body, and the bath in which he was murdered, were exhibited to an unfestive crowd. The speaker at his funeral proclaimed, '*O cor Marat, O cor Jesus*.' This has naturally given rise to scholarly wrangling as to whether the 'cult' devoted to Marat was specifically religious. The procession carrying the bier included images of Voltaire, Rousseau, Jesus, and Marat himself: but this may exhibit 'the humanization of Jesus rather than the deification of Marat'. Neither body, bath-tub, nor funeral bust were touched by the crowd, indicating that 'the essential element' of a relic was missing from these objects—'sacralizing protection'.[42] Later that year, David presented to the Convention 'one of the world's most skillfully executed propaganda pictures'.[43] In this picture of the sprawling martyr, his arm dangling helpless, the revolutionaries could see as in a mirror the melodramatic image of that act of victimization, that act which lacks all poetic justice, the act with which they most identified—their own most human death. It is in the seizure of his life by villainous death that man triumphs and comes into his own as man: this victimization is the apex of the melodramatic imagination. A justly renowned book has described the Eucharistic devotion of early modern theology since Duns Scotus, and modern culture as a whole, as 'necrophiliac'.[44] Perhaps it was not until 1789 that such necrophilia achieved its full potency. The Cartesian art of the Revolution was 'religious' in a Durkheimian sense, of paying devotion to human collective cohesion: their object was 'to demonstrate to man the transcendence of mankind and to establish mankind in his humanity'.[45]

[41] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, pp. 204–5, citing Michel-Edme Petit, *Opinion sur l'éducation publique* (1793).

[42] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, p. 266–7.

[43] Dowd, *Pageant-Master of the Republic*, pp. 105–7.

[44] Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 101–5 and 134.

[45] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, p. 281.

3. The 'Why' Question Revisited: The Ontological Distinction

The preceding section helps us to see why, taking the form of a driving question, the 'grammatical' argument for God's existence is focused in the capacity of *human* reason to point beyond itself—the power of one question to elicit another. Denys Turner states that,

> at the heart of my argument . . . is a proposition about the nature of reason which I have extracted from the thought of Thomas Aquinas. And the proposition is that we are animals who know God and that reason is *how* animals know God. . . . for Thomas humans are 'essentially animals', and . . . our animality is essentially rational. We are not animals *plus* rationality. Rationality is the form of our animality . . . as our rationality from one side is rooted in our bodily animality, so, on the other, reason has in its nature the capacity to surpass itself, for . . . reason exhausts itself as reason in its fulfilment as intellect. . . . reason thus 'abolishes itself in its self-realisation' in its entertaining a certain kind of question, for reason reaches its limit . . . in a final answer-stopping question. Proof comes into it on the one hand as the characteristically and centrally rational activity of demonstrating the necessity of that question . . . [46]

One may see here, not only the foundationalism which is rational *about reason*, but also a sentimental assumption that this finite human foundation must be requited.

We will briefly review the grammatical Thomist argument for the existence of God, in order to observe, in the following section, that its anthropocentricity slots into the poetic justice of resurrection. In Chapter 3, the 'why proof' as such, the drive to *question* was centre-stage; here we highlight the distinction between essence and *esse* which attends it. McCabe encapsulates the issue of this section when he says that it is 'the *esse* of things that leads us to speak of God'.[47] A tight summary of our counter-argument runs like this. If one makes the *difference* between *esse* and natural essences carry all the weight in proving God's existence, the burden falls on to *esse* rather than nature or essence. It falls there because one can more easily conceive of my existence than my human nature as contingent. This is because if *my nature* were otherwise, I would be someone or something else, whereas if my *esse* is contingent, the only alternative to my being is my *nothingness*. The former hypothesis, relating to *my nature*, is not an imaginative or a logical possibility, since if I were someone else, *I* would not be *me*. Nor does it expose that flank, necessary to the argument, of *finitude* as *absolute* contingency: one can conceive an infinite rearrangement of the extant pieces. Focused in *esse*,

[46] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 232–3.
[47] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 24.

the distinction is localized as *my* contingent existence, hanging in the balance between life and death, being and nothingness.

Our own defence of the proposition that we can *know* that God exists, at the end of the chapter, will, of course, draw in the distinction of *esse* and essence. *Esse* or existence is crucial to any realist theology, because of its resistance to being digested into a philosophical narrative: von Balthasar speaks of the 'adamantine factuality' of existence, 'which thought can never bend to its own purposes', and of its 'plenitude, which equally eludes exhaustive possession, that mocks the intellect's every attempt to master it through thought and control'.[48] He affirmed, with Gilson, that 'the real distinction . . . of St. Thomas is the source of all the religious and philosophical thought of humanity'.[49] But neither of these existential Thomists considered that 'splitting the difference', 'driving' a 'wedge between being and being-this-sort-of-thing',[50] is enough to make a proof of God's existence.

Woody Allen gave an approximate definition of the real distinction when he remarked, 'I am at two with nature.' There must, as Turner says, 'be a real distinction between *what it is* that exists and *that by virtue of which* it exists'.[51] The nature, what it is, substance, essence, '*quod est*' or quiddity of a thing is, on this analysis, something other and different from the thing's existing. We have various ways of distinguishing things: as by genera and species, for instance, so that a dog goes into a different species box from a giraffe, a human into a different generic box from a wasp. But there's also a difference between, say *no* giraffe, and an actual giraffe, and a difference between a living Marat and a Marat who is no longer with us. So we can draw a line between *actually there* things and items which are not there. Actual thereness is a box used to file-divide existent things from non-existent ones. Grammatical Thomists call this file divider existence, *esse* or the 'existential quantifier'.

Aristotle invented a naturalist metaphysics into which the *existence* of the cosmos does not enter. As Wilhelmsen puts it, 'If being is identically substance or nature, then it follows that "to be" is "to be the world" or "to be in and of the world." This self-enclosed universe which wheels perpetually upon itself was the world as experienced by our pagan forefathers. . . . Metaphysics then had to be, for them, a . . . super-philosophy of nature.'[52] Many neo-Thomists have considered that the idea of a *real distinction* between a form and its *actualization* in *existence* did not get going before the (revealed)

[48] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* I, p. 188.

[49] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect* [no trans.] (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 112.

[50] McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 150.

[51] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 177.

[52] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 20.

doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo*. Herbert McCabe thinks that, for Thomas, the notion that essences or natures exist only by divine fiat, or by creation is the very idea of the real distinction. To begin a new conversation after Aristotle and to speak of *esse*, 'the gratuitousness of things' is, according to McCabe, spontaneously to touch upon the real distinction: in 'thinking of the *esse* of things we are trying to think of them in relation to their creator. So in all created things . . . there is the polarity of createdness (based on a distinction of essence and existence).'[53] Étienne Gilson was more cautious. For *every* philosopher who is also a Christian believes the world is created by God, and thus believes in a difference between created nature and divine nature: but few medieval Christian theologians thought much of the real distinction, and many Christian thinkers, Descartes for instance, and some Thomists, such as Suarez, have denied that there is a real distinction between essence and existence in created things. This indicates that 'the distinction of essence and existence is' both 'an altogether different problem' from that of distinguishing the Creator from the creature, and that it is 'a purely philosophical problem, which consists in determining whether or not, within a created being, after it has been created and during the very time when it is, there is any reason to ascribe to it a distinct act in virtue of which it *is*'.[54] In short, talk of the real distinction is not necessitated by maintaining the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation, and vice versa.

Within grammatical Thomism, the notion of a 'real distinction' is linked to the question of God's existence because an inner schism between a thing's nature and its *existing at all* is a strong indicator of the *contingency* of the item. If one may assume that *every thing* suffers the same divide, God enters the gap between being and not-being. 'The force of the word "actual" by which *esse* is said to "actualize" is that which stands in contrast to there being nothing whatsoever', Turner says: 'You get at Dolly's *esse* in its character as created by contemplating the difference between there being Dolly and there being nothing whatever. . . . If for a created thing to exist is for it to be created, then 'to be created' gives us the fundamental meaning of *esse*.'[55] It is, thus, the real distinction which generates the 'why not nothing argument' as set forward by Thomist grammarians.

Turner acknowledges, of course, that it was not Thomas but Leibniz who made the argument take the form of the words, ' "Why anything?" ' He notes the problem that argument to a necessary being 'from the contrasting contingency of the world' falls victim to the many objections laid against it since the

[53] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, pp. 20–1.

[54] Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 63.

[55] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 179 and 184.

eighteenth century, as particularly Kant's opinion that it requires the validity of the ontological argument—and thus ultimately assumes rather than proves the existence of a necessary being. But he thinks he can elicit a different kind of contingency in Thomas' thought. In Mackie's critical reading of Leibniz, a thing's *contingency* turns on dependency on its environment, such that, had environmental conditions been different, that particular thing would never have come about. For Leibniz, that is, 'a thing's existence is contingent if it depends upon how things are, such that, had things been otherwise, that thing would not have existed'. Whereas, as Turner understands Thomas, a thing is contingent 'if it might not have existed' at all. The 'Leibnizian' view would then take contingency as 'conditionality upon a particular framework or environment', in the Thomist view, the contingent 'might not have been at all'. For Turner, it is the fact that any given thing, and thus every thing 'might not have been at all' which raises the question of God.[56]

It may be, however, that the second kind of contingency is dependent upon the first. For no thing *exists* except as *this* thing, this particular dog of this particular colour, breed, size, and state of health. This is why one says that every essence or nature is a '*habens esse*', and vice versa: no particular entity, no existence; no given existence, no particular dog. The '*reason*' why any particular dog 'might not have been at all' is that an entirely different environment (like that on Mars) would have produced no dog, and a small variant (an ice-age) would give us a different kind of dog—a dog which would not be *this* dog. Dog-owners are prone to such sentimental precisions. What is immediately contingent about a dog is its material and concrete thisness,[57] its individuality. One cannot make a case that an entity 'might not have been at all' without backing up into, *because* a different environment would have produced a different dog, or none at all, or an item too wonky to be a living animal. To make it work, one needs, not only the 'vertical' argument to existence but the 'horizontal' arguments from movement and cause, all based, not in *esse* but in essential nature or quiddity.

Different geographical environments produce different flora and fauna, so we know that the latter are conditional upon the former. But it's a stretch from this kind of 'contingency' to Turner's absolute 'might not have been': that the world in its entirety could have been a different sort of place is not the same as its being existentially contingent, contingent in its being, or created. Mackie's criticism of that line of argument runs like this: 'though we have some ground for thinking that each part . . . of the world is contingent in this sense upon something else, we have . . . no ground for thinking that the world

[56] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 237–8.

[57] A point recognized by McCabe in *God Still Matters*, p. 20.

as a whole would not have existed if something else had been otherwise; inference from the contingency of every part to the contingency of the whole is invalid'.[58] Turner may dismiss this point too quickly ('be that conclusion as it may'), for, if the 'force of the word "actual" by which *esse* is said to "actualize" is that which stands in contrast to there being nothing whatsoever',[59] the very notion of *esse* requires the possibility of nothingness. Nearly all the Christian 'theologians' who deny the real distinction, Gilson says, perforce 'admit'

> that there is, between any given creature and its being, what they call a distinction of reason. The actual thing *is*, but . . . it does not contain in itself the sufficient reason for its own existence, so that we can abstractedly conceive it as a non-existing thing. Such a statement does not necessarily imply that the thing in question is itself composed of its own essence and of its own existence; it merely expresses the relation of effect to cause which obtains between any creature and its Creator.[60]

The grammatical argument turns on a certain sort of *intuition* of the kind of reality which being is, one which is especially communicable to believers in *creatio ex nihilo*. To found this intuition rationally and thus to stretch his argument from the conditional state of any thing at any given time (its 'could have been otherwise' character) to the absolute contingency of all things, the grammatical Thomist needs an overview of the cosmos in its entirety. Martin Heidegger saw that 'the real difference between Being and beings can come to light only if "beings" are experienced as a *totality*'; and that one achieves this transcendent surveillance of beings and Beings by 'plunging' into one's own historical 'finitude'.[61] To experience *oneself* as temporally finite, as subject to death, is to recognize that the other side of being is nothingness. For the German existentialist, 'authentic man knows that he is a "Being towards Death" (*sein zum Tode*). The light of death can illuminate the life of man, giving an absolute and irrevocable meaning to every act he does, a light which is non-light because it is the light of Nothing. This Nothing appears within the dynamism of man, not only as closing his possibilities but also as making possible a life that is truly human.'[62] One can stretch the intuition still further, back to the millennialist deductions from Scripture which prompted it within German philosophy. The 'impact' of Heidegger's question, *Warum gibt es überhaupt Seiendes—und nicht viel mehr nichts?* ('Why is there something and

[58] J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 85, cited in Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 238.

[59] Ibid., pp. 238 and 179.

[60] Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 64.

[61] Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, pp. 298–9.

[62] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, pp. 72–3.

not nothing instead?'), Robert Jenson says, 'will be experienced only by a being who wants *reasons*—that is, by man in his search for the point of his own existence. They will be experienced by the eschatological being, by that being who is what he is only as he becomes it—and that in the radical sense that he receives his reality from a future not in his own hands.'[63]

The *being* which Heidegger sets in relation to death, is *Dasein*, being in human perspective. *Da-sein* is being 'being humanly', or being within the 'perceiving as' structure enabled by language; being *as* understood and acted upon by humans. For Turner likewise, *esse* is not a collective adjective, like blueness, a quality in its own right. It is, rather, a way we have of 'quantifying' things: we quantify things as existent or non-existent. In other words, when a sentence contains the word *esse* or 'being', neither functions adjectivally, as a quality ascribed to or predicated of a particular noun. For it can be 'analysed out' of the noun, in any sentence which carries it. 'Just as "cows exist," bears the analysis, "some things or other are cows" so', Turner says, '"God exists" bears the analysis "something or other is God".' To define 'esse' or being not as a universal quality of things, but as what Turner calls an 'existential quantifier'[64] is to affiliate it with the Heideggerian *Dasein*, for as a general quality, *esse* exists largely in the perspective of the human dynamism (Heidegger) or as a functional tool of human sentence construction (Turner).

Gilson would not wholly disagree with Turner on this: the existential Thomist saw that, taken as a common noun, *ens commune*, or *esse is* a being of reason, an *ens rationis*.[65] No philosopher thinks of being as a dense but invisible fog enveloping all actual entities, detectable by special metaphysical fog detectors. Taken as a generalized, universal object, 'being' *is* a human, mental abstraction. Gilson did consider, however, that each particular thing *is* through an act of existing. Taken as the individual, and individuating, act of being of any particular existent, *esse* does of course have extramental existence; and it is difficult to see how a grammatical Thomist could deny this without making the real distinction a distinction of reason alone, as Suarez did, for example. Von Balthasar sees no difficulty in aligning the sense which 'Being' and the ontological distinction have in Thomas Aquinas and in Heidegger. Both Gilson and von Balthasar concur with the grammatical

[63] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, pp. 67–8.

[64] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 172–3.

[65] Étienne Gilson, 'Propos sur l'être et sa notion', in *Studi Tomistici*, vol. III: *San Tommaso e il pensiero moderno*, ed. Antonio Piolanti (Citta Nuova: Pontificia Accademia Romana di S. Tommaso D'Aquino, 1974), p. 10: 'Common being ... only exists as common in the intellect, it is no reality outside of actually existing things: "Multo ergo minus et ipsum esse commune est aliquid praeter omnes res existentes, nisi in intellectu solum" (Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, I, 26, 5).'

Thomists that there is one sense in which, *taken as a general rather than as a particular term*, 'Being' or *esse* is inherently related to a human mind.

But then, they did not take a running jump from the real distinction into the existence of God. One reason for not doing so is that, given this integral relatedness to the human perspective, one thereby creates an argument which comes back to *experience*. Experiential arguments remain where they start from, within the field of the humanly experienced. If one does not want an argument which backs up into one's own experience, but launches forward into that which transcends experience, it is better to mention particular extramental objects which are *substantially* outside of one's experience. One could begin, for example, as Thomas does, by noting the energetic growth of animal life forms. Heidegger, says von Balthasar, 'offers us no information regarding the underivability of the interrelation between essential form and Being; in his work, sub-human Nature receives . . . little metaphysical interpretation'. Therefore, in Heidegger's work, being takes all of its meaning from human being. 'And this question is then so loaded with meaning that the original question as to why there should be something rather than nothing is finally submerged, and metaphysics must yield its place to a phenomenology of Being in the realm of the distinction.'[66] Heidegger did not *aim* at giving us more than a phenomenology of human existence. But the grammatical Thomists do. They therefore have to make death, or *nothingness* the motor to an argument which will take them to God by dint of the 'sufficient reason' that it would be poetically unjust to hang suspended over the void dividing *esse* and essence, look down, ill-advisedly, and touch *nothing*. The distinction between *esse* and essence takes on its impact when seen as running through human being. Because the 'why' question is essentially experiential or phenomenological, it asks, why do I have to die? The logical answer returned by our story Thomist is supplied by the Resurrection: I don't.

4. Resurrection as Poetic Justice

Thomas Aquinas speaks of two sorts of virtue, the *supernatural* virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the *natural* virtues of prudence, courage, temperance, and justice. He argues that religion belongs in the context of natural virtue. For, when we perform religious acts, our immediate target is precisely doing something religious, whereas, say, in an act of faith, our object is God himself.[67] So religious behaviour accrues to the humane virtue of justice, not

[66] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 621.

[67] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 81, a. 5.

to the supernatural virtues. Along the same lines, but less temperately, Barth speaks of religion as a projection of human aspirations. In the English language, it is not perhaps the word *religion* but 'religiosity', with its connotation of the counterfeit, which captures the disaffection which Karl Barth tendered toward this item. A basic methodological axiom, and a sound methodological point in Barth's theology, is that one could penetrate ever deeper into human religiosity without striking one's spade against the true diamond of Christ's self-revelation. Drawing on the Barthian principle that religion is at odds with the Gospel, Robert Jenson argues that *religion* is created by the human desire to transcend *time*. If the object of religion is eternity, Jenson rightly says, the subject of the Gospel must be something else.

Consider Stanley Cavell's contention that movies present us with 'immortality', by exhibiting a 'world' entirely disengaged from our reaction:

> A world complete without me which is present to me is the world of my immortality. This is the importance of film—and a danger. It takes my life as my haunting of the world, either because I left it unloved (the *Flying Dutchman*) or because I left unfinished business (Hamlet). So there is reason for me to want to deny the coherence of the world, its coherence as past: to deny that the world is complete without me. But there is equal reason to want it affirmed that the world is coherent without me. That is essential to what I want of immortality: nature's survival of me. It will mean that the present judgment upon me is not yet the last.[68]

The idea that immortality is 'nature's survival of me' is more Stoic than Christian—an impersonal immortality, evoked by the nothingness of the viewing-self in relation to the objective story which goes on without me. The Christian idea of the resurrection and the new Jerusalem is unlike this.

For Jenson, 'religion', as opposed to Christianity, 'is the cultivation of some *eternity*'.[69] He indicts, not only Plato and Aristotle, but also the Ionian philosophers for divinizing 'timelessness', not only the African ancestral cults, but also existentialism, not only Origen but also the Barth of the Romans commentary, for going in search of eternity.[70] More Barth*ian* than Barth in this, Jenson finds at the root of such religious eternities the self-divinizing erotic drive of humanity. The Socrates of Plato's *Symposium* is Eros incarnate, 'an icon, of life as the journey from time to eternity'. Since 'the projected eternity... is but a negative image of time', 'so is born Eros, time's striving to become eternity'.[71]

[68] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 160.

[69] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 54.

[70] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 59; *Systematic Theology* I, p. 55; *God After God*, pp. 13–14 and 19–20.

[71] Jenson, *God After God*, pp. 12–13 and 25.

What the deifier of 'eternity' is after, according to Jenson, is a perfectly *extrinsic* perspective, from which their life can be viewed as a complete story. Eternalizers, that is, want to be able to see their life from without, and thus to view it timelessly, for it is only thus, as the non-believer takes it, that it can make sense as a rounded story.[72] Religion is a hiding-hole from human *historicity*, and thus from what time brings to all humans: 'Overcoming—or evading—death by positing a timeless reality set above our stories in time has remained the structure of what we have in the West called "religion." '[73]

For Heidegger, human beings get a sense of the 'totality' by facing into the death which lies temporally ahead of them, and likewise for Jenson, 'essential time is future time. It is because we face a future that we experience ourselves as temporal beings.' It follows, he thinks, that, 'religion is either refuge from time' in a bogus eternity 'or confidence in it'.[74] If Jenson's theology is phenomenological throughout, that is because he has taken it upon himself to respond to Martin Heidegger's dynamic and historical metaphysics. For Heidegger, what qualifies man as human is neither the possession of an immortal soul, nor the yearning for eternity. Rather, to grasp one's humanity is to immerse oneself in the historicity of human *Da-sein*. Jenson believes that if one thinks Heidegger's intuition through, one can salvage it, or, by the same token, shore up Christian faith from its implications. He writes,

> It has been Heidegger's endeavor to think man's historicity . . . through to the end. Whether that end is better, whether the outcome of historical understanding must be absolute relativism, nihilism, remains to be seen. It has been Heidegger's conviction that if the thought of man's historicity is thought through to the end, nihilism will be transcended. Whether *theological* language would be rescued thereby is another question: our question, and one we must pose to ourselves . . . against the radical knowledge of man's historicity maintained by posthistoricistic continental philosophy.[75]

The key phrase here is 'whether the outcome of historical understanding must be absolute relativism, nihilism, remains to be seen': Jenson thinks that he can rescue Heidegger's 'radical' sense of human temporality from making nothingness the far side of being.

The God of the Gospel cannot be eternal in the religious sense. 'If what happens with Jesus in time is the central event in the eternal existence of God, then that existence must be *historical*. God must have a history. God is not a timeless Being': for, citing Barth, 'The theological concept of eternity must be

[72] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, pp. 1–2; *Systematic Theology* I, p. 55.
[73] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 12. [74] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 4.
[75] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, p. 21.

freed from the Babylonian captivity of an abstract opposition to the concept of time.' But if, as Heidegger believed, 'our temporality is *constituted* by our mortality', how can one ascribe temporality to God without pulling off the death of God? This is where the resurrection enters the scheme of things: 'Temporality can be attributed to God,' Jenson writes, 'only if temporality is itself understood not only from our being-unto-death, but also from Christ's being-unto-death-and-resurrection.'[76]

In the mid-1920s, Abel Gance invented the technique which later inspired 'cinerama', films created by deploying several projectors at once. Gance's wonderfully watchable *Napoleon* (1927) makes the image of the child Napoleon's determined face return in later scenes, intercuts scenes of Napoleon in a boat in a storm with the scene in which he challenges the Convention, and, at the denouement, uses several cameras pointed at different angles to capture the triumphant entrance of the hero's army into Italy.[77] Gance's *Napoleon* creates a 'perceiving as' scheme: we simultaneously perceive Napoleon *as* boy and *as* man, and thus grasp his character. Somewhat as in Gance's 'cinerama' effects, in which Napoleon is made to appear and reappear to us perceived *as* he was in his youth and, simultaneously, *as* the heroic general he became, so, Jenson is able to perceive Christ *as* swooping-unto-death and, simultaneously, *as* rising into resurrection. Both shots occur, and are viewed, *at once*, in the sense that neither is supposed to cancel out the other, or subsume the other, as a later scene in a drama integrates the earlier scenes into itself.

For Jenson needs to claim, both that the definitive act in God's life is the *death* of Jesus, and that he is defined by *defeating* death: 'From first to last of biblical faith,' he says, 'God is death's *opponent*.'[78] The 'death and resurrection' couplet have a religious force in Jenson's theology. Narrative theologies have as a powerful motivation the need to find some feature of faith which is non-empirical, some land undreamed of in the positivist's philosophy, and to situate themselves on that plane. Thus, for Jenson, 'death-and-resurrection' does not speak of our hope of 'coming back from death' in a mere empirical sense. It is, as Wittgenstein would say, 'the mystical'. Jenson writes that,

> Only if the 'conclusion of the story of Jesus' and the 'issue of our lives' are both meant as ways of talking about *death*—and not some 'survival' after death—can they be meaningful expressions. Both are transcriptions of 'Death and Resurrection.'[79]

The fine point of Jenson's religiosity is an historical *beyondness* quality. Another word for it is 'futurity'. 'In that Christ's Sonship comes "from" his

[76] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 150.

[77] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, pp. 90–3.

[78] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 66.

[79] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, p. 153.

Resurrection, it comes from God's future into which he is raised',[80] he says. It is the lure of the future which wheels Christ toward his death-and-resurrection. It is poetically just that, like all human beings, God should have to die, and, that God, too, should be vacuumed into the black hole of the future ensures that the world is entirely 'complete without me'.

The run-up to question 2, article 3 of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* springs off with a rejection of the notion that the existence of God is 'self-evident': 'because we do not know the essence of God,' Thomas says, 'the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us . . . namely, by effects'.[81] The first article is commonly seen as giving the thumbs-down to Anselm's ontological argument. It can be regarded, more particularly, as dismissing the assumption that we know there is a divine Essence, and that the theologian's task is to add the character trait of existence to it. So, for instance, Anselm believes that God is 'entity (*essentia*)' and he thinks the problem to hand is to 'know whether entity, whose very definition is to be "what exists," can be conceived as not existing' and one of Bonaventure's proofs runs: ' "If God is God, God is; Now the antecedent (sc. God is God) is so true that the non-existence of God is inconceivable; it is, therefore, an inevitable truth that God is." ' In both *a priori* arguments, existing is traded off against non-existing. Gilson's comment is relevant to the foregoing discussion of experiential arguments for the existence of God: 'While in an existential ontology there is a strict opposition between being and nothingness, in an ontology of essence, . . . being and non-being mutually imply one another.'[82] We have repeatedly contrasted the unique *being* with the *essential* identity. A unique being is separated out from its opposite, distinct from it. An *essential identity*, on the other hand, is derived from *differentiating* characteristics: as the identifying act requires differentiation, so an identity is not self-sufficient distinctness, an inherently particular quality or character, but a difference from an other. The essential identity implies its opposites, because to identify someone is to distinguish them from others. Jenson's 'death and resurrection' is a colourful rendition of the 'being and non-being' which has preoccupied essentialist ontologists from Anselm to Heidegger. The meaning of the word and the act of resurrection is that of rebirth *from death*. So, for Jenson, the primary meaning of Christ, and what Christ himself is, must be being-toward death.

It's not always easy to pinpoint the *wonder* which, according to Aristotle, is the beginning of philosophy. There are three ways in which one can go wrong

[80] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 143.
[81] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 1 reply.
[82] Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 51, 53, and 49.

in addressing the 'authentic metaphysical question': '"Why is there anything at all and not simply nothing?"' The first is to refer the *wonder* to oneself, rather than to being, or to become so enthused by the fact that 'I am a wonderer' that one forgets about what is inspiring the wonder. Heidegger's phenomenology recognizes that it is 'astonishing that an existent being can wonder at Being' but loses track of the metaphysical fact that 'Being as such by itself to the very end "causes wonder", behaving as something to be wondered at, something striking and worthy of wonder.'[83] Jenson seems to phenomenologize the question in a similar way. For Jenson, the condition of the possibility of experience is narratability, and thus human lives *necessarily* require a beginning, a middle, and an end. A posthumous biographer can, he believes, round off the threads, looking at the story from outside, or ontologically. But, because each of us dies, and is out of control of this ending, no rounded story can be found when one considers one's life *from within*, or phenomenologically. As Jenson puts it,

> we experience our lives as incomplete *stories*, as dramas missing their climax and denouement. For that we are mortal means that the possibilities raised by our past, by the part of the drama we have experienced, can never *all* be brought to rest, even by disappointment, except by an event that we apparently cannot experience. I therefore can never experience the whole play. I can never, that is, experience my life as a meaningful whole—and yet I must.

It then becomes necessary to set the death and resurrection of Christ at the centre of one's picture of God. For Jenson, 'the destiny of life-out-of-death' which Christ

> enacted, is the content of our dramas—just *in* their essential incompleteness and mortality. Death and resurrection is the plot. To tell Jesus' story as the story about God is to tell it as the narrative of the climax and denouement of my story and your story. Vice versa, Jesus' story qualifies 'God' by giving it content. 'Godly' means appropriate to the career of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . thus all theological utterances can be compressed in the convertible sentence 'God is Jesus' or 'Jesus is God'—that is, in the doctrine of the Trinity.[84]

God talk is resurrection talk because the resurrection is the means or method by which we identify the Christian God. Jenson's God is resurrected because that is a necessity of Story as such.

Resurrection is thus deduced from its giving sense to the Story as a whole. If the first way in which one can 'get the phenomenon' of wonder 'wrong' is to phenomenologize it, or accentuate the wonderer at the expense of what causes

[83] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, pp. 613 and 614–15.
[84] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, pp. 135–6 and 140.

wonder in us, the second, related, way is to 'leap towards apprehension of the identity (of Being and meaning) in the very first step of thought'—rather than first passing through the needle's eye of particular existents.[85] The basic problem is that Jenson's 'God of the gospel' does not have any *metaphysical flesh.* He is a ghostly stipulation of the text of Scripture, not a metaphysically real Creator. Jenson only has scriptural deductions to work from, as he explicates the identity of God. This is a rather perfectionist way of tackling the question, in that no merely inductive statement is good enough to be included within it. D. C. Stove once argued that 'perfectionism', or the ' "only the best will do" thesis', requires that the deductivist must either say something he knows to be false or 'suffer painful under-exercise of his logical faculty'. The upshot of reality denying 'perfectionism' is what the animal behaviourist Konrad Lorenz called 'vacuum activity': 'The commonest case of vacuum-activity is that in which a dog, long deprived of both bones and of soil, "buries" a non-existent bone in non-existent soil (usually in the corner of a room). This behavior-pattern is innate in dogs, and if deprived for too long of its proper objects, it simply "discharges" itself in the absence of those objects. After a certain point, bone-free life is just too boring for dogs.' A Popperian dog might write, ' "I introduce a methodological rule permitting us to regard this as bone-burying" '.[86] Jenson wants theological propositions both to be empirically verifiable and to be methodological deductions. He digs up the Resurrection as the empirical consequence of the deductive necessity of the Story's coming to a rounded, logical conclusion. The methodological rule on which he relies is that the Story should make sense, or that 'Being and meaning' should be identical. That makes the Story itself *necessary*: if 'Being',—minus particular existents or inductively known events—has to carry the whole weight of meaning, then Being, or the Story must be *necessary*, in order to carry this burden. But why should we wonder at, or be *surprised* by a story which is *necessary* through and through? Once

> Being becomes identical with the necessity to be, and . . . this identity has been taken up by reason, then there is no longer any space for wonder at the fact that there is something rather than nothing, but at most only for admiration that everything appears so wonderfully and 'beautifully' ordered within the necessity of Being.[87]

The third way of mis-locating wonder is to allow it to lead us into description rather than into metaphysics. Empiricist philosophies have taken this path, as have those who take Scripture as a *description* of divine and human characters,

[85] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 614.

[86] Stove, *Popper and After*, pp. 94 and 96–7.

[87] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, pp. 613–14.

'with the omission of Being; as one could suppose if one were to interpret the Old Testament without recourse to philosophy'. In that case, where God is seen as a character within the Story, 'the personal God encounters man as one existent marked off from another existent', and God can and must have an *identity*, as must all other characters in the Story, but will not be a unique and free *Being*. The two characters or existents will be *different* from each other, perhaps sublimely so, but neither will be able to muster a distinct and unique being of its own. Moreover, the wonder drains away into 'the impulse to answer the astonishing question as to why things should exist at all . . . from the fact of their existing in such and such a way'.[88] It is difficult to see how story Thomism can resist falling prey to all three false versions of the question, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' the first phenomenologizing the question, or deriving the answer from the human quest for meaning in the face of death, the second projecting its need for meaning into Being, and thus identifying the two, and, since metaphysical transcendence is thereby lost, the third squarely back with Russell's 'the world is just there, and that's all'.[89]

5. The Natural Desire for God: 'Religation'

Gilson's reading of the first article of question 2 refers to Thomas' response to the *second* objection, the Anselmian affirmation that 'the existence of truth is self-evident', and so, since 'God is truth itself', '"God exists" is self-evident.' But, as Xavier Zubiri reminds us, the whole article is not taken up in refuting the ontological argument. The *first* objection comes from John Damascene's claim that 'the knowledge of God is naturally implanted in all'.[90] In response, Thomas accepts the truth of John Damascene's affirmation:

> To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching; for many there are who imagine that man's perfect goodness is happiness, consists in riches, and others in pleasures, and others in something else.[91]

Thomas' response to John Damascene has become an important part of discussion of the arguments for God in question 2, article 3, ever since de

[88] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, pp. 626 and 613.
[89] Russell and Coplestone, 'A Debate on the Existence of God', p. 175.
[90] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 1.
[91] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 1, reply obj. 1.

Lubac's *Surnaturel*, a great book about the natural desire for supernatural grace. Most recently, it has been taken by John Milbank as an indication that the Five Ways cannot be taken as discursive arguments, since they presuppose, as their basis, an original intuition that God exists:

One here finds confirmed the view that, for Aquinas, since *a priori* reasonings to God are refused, and *a posteriori* inductions are equally impossible, discursive reasoning about God must presuppose a disclosure of God to our *intellectus*, which enjoys a very remote participation in the divine immediacy of vision. ... Aquinas compares this remote glimpse to a first sight of 'Peter' in the distance before we know that it is, indeed, Peter who approaches. It is therefore clear that Aquinas ... associates our continuous approach to the beatific vision with ... the need already to know something before one can possibly come to know it—for how else will one in the first place seek to know it at all?[92]

Thomas presupposes that there *is* a single highest good for the human being. The reason why de Lubac considered it important to reassemble this preliminary thought is that, 'to the man of today it is not so obvious that someone is coming' as it was to Thomas' 'epoch and environs'.[93] Von Balthasar often speaks of the natural desire in terms of human religiousness.[94] This is not in the first instance a 'religious *sense*', that is, a sense or intuition of *God*, but a religious *placement*, provoking an awareness of the awkwardness of the human position within the cosmos. Zubiri calls it *religation*, our being tied to and 'implanted' within existence. Human beings are *religious* or *religated* through and through. Such primitive religiousness gives rise to the human sciences:

Mathematics ... got under way, in Greece, because of the cathartic functions attributed to it by the Pythagoreans; later it was the road of ascent from the world to God and descent of God to the world; in Galileo it is the formal structure of nature. Grammar was born in ancient India, when the need was sensed to manipulate with absolute liturgical correctness the sacred texts, to whose syllables a magic, evocative value was attributed; the necessity to avoid sin engendered grammar. Anatomy was born in Egypt out of the necessity to immortalize the human body. One by one the most essential members were taken and solemnly declared sons of the Sun god; this inventory was the origin of anatomy. In India, history was born of the necessity faithfully to set down the great past actions of the gods; fidelity and not simple curiosity engendered history in that country.[95]

[92] Milbank, 'Truth and Vision', pp. 36–7.
[93] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 309.
[94] For instance, von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 458; *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. IV: *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 151.
[95] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 10.

Within history *as it happens to stand*, historically, the Egyptians and Greeks created the sciences because they were '*always already* graced'. The gracious summons is 'dramatic' or unpredictable because that's the way history itself is. Grace 'cannot be deduced or constructed *from within* the drama'[96] because the invitation, which, as Thomas says, is 'implanted in us by nature', is the very energy of divine love, and love is always *freely* given.

The basic human gesture of looking beyond oneself to see who is coming is a look of surprise. Religation is dramatic at both ends, not just because it presupposes human freedom but because it is in itself a unique articulation of the fact that humans are naturally free. The human being is on the look-out for a highest good or ultimate because he is himself a sort of ultimate, a self-determining or free being. Since they act out of freedom, human beings are oriented to freedom. As Zubiri puts it, 'Religation is . . . the absolute personal character of human reality actualized in the acts which it carries out. Man is religated to ultimateness because in his own character he is ultimate reality in the sense of being something "of his own." ' Religation is this paradoxical symbiosis of being a free person who nonetheless did not freely plant himself in the cosmos, a free person to whom 'existence is sent': 'In his primary religation, man acquires his freedom, his "relative absolute being." Absolute, because it is "his own"; relative, because it is acquired.'[97] Were it an argument for the existence of God, this would be entirely circular. In his phenomenology of human implantedness, Zubiri does not supply 'a *rational demonstration* of the existence of God', but attempts 'to discover the point at which the problem of God arises and the *dimension* in which we find it: the constitutive and ontological *religation* of existence'. Because it arises in the dimension of personal freedom, the 'problem of God' involves human decision, as well as reflection: one can, as Thomas notes, decide that the ultimate is money or having a good time. Within the drama of the relation of human nature and divine grace, marking out *who is coming* engages us on the most personal level, in the dimension of our own personhood:

> Man can freely choose which freedom he prefers. He can choose the freedom of being his own origin, in which case he must pay the price of never being able to find any . . . satisfying goal for this self-manufactured freedom . . . ; or he can choose the freedom of continually acknowledging his indebtedness . . . to absolute freedom—which has always anticipated finite freedom by providing it with scope within which it can fulfil itself, namely, '*en Christoi*'.[98]

[96] David S. Yeago, 'Literature in the Drama of Nature and Grace: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Paradigm for a Theology of Culture', in Ed Block Jr. (ed.), *Glory, Grace and Culture: The Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), p. 94.

[97] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, pp. 312, 326 and 344.

[98] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 36.

Zubiri's examples of the ancient sciences indicate that secularity is secondary to religiousness within human nature. Human beings would not give proofs of God's existence if they were not religated.[99] It's because he recognized human beings to be religated to God that Thomas' five proofs each conclude, 'And this is what everyone calls "God"'—that is, the vaguely intuited 'Peter'. David Yeago remarks that, 'Nature must have a meaning of its own that is not simply "read off" grace so that grace can relate to nature in genuine dramatic freedom.'[100] The natural desire provides the dimension in which the *proponent* of such arguments can stand, whilst remaining within the natural order, or, simply being fully human. A Christian philosopher is neither solely a Christian ('graced') nor solely a natural philosopher: she is standing on the ground which *she* knows to be grace and her interlocutor may not, reclaiming it for her interlocutor by an informative discussion of *who it is that is coming*. Milbank's reading of question 2, article 1, leaves this level of articulation out of the bargain. But the idea of 'graced nature' gives us some room for movement between nature and natural argument versus grace and aversion to human religiosity *per se*. People who speak from a conscious awareness of the meaning of our odd implantedness may give more convincing, humane arguments than those who attempt to stand on the ground of pure nature for fear of tangling themselves up in circularity. This is why, as von Balthasar says,

> we need to go beyond the simple juxtaposition of the natural and supernatural domains and to posit a third domain of truths that genuinely belong to creaturely nature yet do not emerge into the light of consciousness until they are illumined by a ray of the supernatural. Could we not include in this sphere Vatican I's teaching that natural reason suffices 'to know with certainty the one true God as our Creator and Lord through creatures' (DS 3026)? After all, to attain this knowledge would be to achieve what the pagan religions of the past could not, namely, the synthesis between a personal mysticism, . . . and an impersonal mysticism of unity . . . Could we not also say that this same kind of theological light falls upon Thomas' teaching that man, finite though he is, yearns already by nature (hence, without a supernatural existential) for the vision of God . . . the option not to rule out *a priori* such a 'third domain' of truths is much more unbiased than a method that from the outset assumes the impossibility of supernatural revelation.[101]

All the third domain of graced nature gives us is an openness, within which to make a free decision about the meaning or goal of human personality. Milbank seems to divest the natural desire for heaven of its great humanistic potency when he wields it against discursive argument for God's existence.

[99] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 328.
[100] Yeago, 'Literature in the Drama of Nature and Grace', p. 95.
[101] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* I, p. 13.

When we pass on to question 2, article 2 ('Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists'), we read that, 'to the extent' that God's existence is not self-evident to us, we must turn to *a posteriori* 'effects'.[102]

6. An Argument and the Analogy of Natality

In an interesting Christmas meditation, Giles Fraser recalled that Hannah Arendt countered Heidegger's 'being unto death' with a philosophy of 'natality'—birthedness. 'What', he asked, 'if we were to prioritise birth rather than death?' 'A faith premised on natality would', Fraser imagines, 'have little place for an indifference to the physical. The thought that human beings are souls trapped beneath a veil of flesh makes no sense to a mother caring for her child.'[103] In the section entitled 'The Miracle of Being and the Four-Fold Difference' in the fifth volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, Hans Urs von Balthasar gives his own argument for the existence of God. The perspective which his argument takes is that of 'natality—birthedness'. He does not call it a Thomistic argument, and one has to study it quite carefully to perceive that it is a creative re-presentation of Thomas' proofs. The drawback in giving us a twentieth-century re-reading of Thomas, which responds to Hegel and to Heidegger, is that it is more difficult to comprehend than the traditional 'Five Ways'. Many different projects have thus been drawn out of 'The Miracle of Being and the Four-Fold Difference', including even a Schelerian ontological argument.[104] The yield of the case which von Balthasar actually makes is nonetheless pretty good. In the first place, it invites us to attend to reality rather than to our own reason or to our own faith. Secondly therefore, the upshot of the argument is a metaphysical sense of the *analogy* of the created world to the Creator, and, in particular, the analogy of created freedom to divine freedom. Moreover, on a methodological level, the arguments make a creative use of the temporal quality of human life. Since our discussion of the Five Ways has hitherto taken the form of breezy references to causes, moves, and designs, and because these elements are woven into von Balthasar's argument, we will begin by reviewing Thomas' proofs. Having then stated von Balthasar's own case, we will conclude by mentioning the way in which this argument is englobed within faith, and in fact Eucharistic faith. Like the

[102] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 2.

[103] Giles Fraser, 'Birth—The Ultimate Miracle', *The Guardian*, 20 December 2003.

[104] Francesca A. Murphy, 'The Sound of the Analogia Entis: An Essay on the Philosophical Context of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology, Part I and Part II', *New Blackfriars* 74/876 (1993), 508–21 (Part I) and 74/877 (1993), 557–65 (Part II).

Five Ways themselves, von Balthasar's argument is a set-piece demonstration of Christian philosophy in operation, the 'third domain'.

I may have unduly annoyed the reader by calling Thomas' first *a posteriori* argument a proof from 'moves'. The more obvious English word 'motion' has been avoided because it is an abstract noun, and hence directs us away from the sense observation upon which Thomas' argument draws. We do not see motion in general, we perceive moving things: 'The concrete reality of motion is the moving thing itself.'[105] Thomas calls this the 'first and most manifest way', manifest because it is 'evident to our senses that in the world some things are in motion'.[106] As Thomas uses it, the argument from motion comes from Aristotle, from the *Physics*, Books VII and VIII, and from Book IX of the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle (and Thomas with him) use the word 'motion' to refer to the fact that things change: he is looking for the motivation of changes. As the actress said to the director, 'What's my motivation?'—what's moving me? The actress expected the 'motivation' to be homogeneous with her personae; but, as is well known, the director referred her to a motor heterogenic to her on-screen character: 'You're getting paid.' Nothing moves unless moved or motivated by *another*. The motion of which Aristotle is speaking is *organic* change, the growth of living things: 'as all change is motion, the order of the living is the order of motion'. A *living* being is a system of heterogeneous parts which act on one another as 'motives' or catalysts. For the Greek philosopher, 'That the living being moves itself entails as a consequence that it is composed of heterogeneous parts. Indeed, to move oneself consists in having in oneself the cause of one's movement. The living being is at the same time cause and effect, but it cannot be the one and the other in the same way.'[107] This is the heart of the First Way: since, for instance, a DNA code is not, as the unscientifically minded tend to picture it, a miniature Platonic form of an eye, but just a 'recipe' for an eye,[108] what *motivates* this part of an organic system to progress into eyedom? Since it is 'not yet' the eye which a scan could see it 'become', this part of the heterogeneous system cannot be the bit which is bringing about, or motoring, the change *toward* an eye: something energetically real, rather than a potency or recipe, is required, for, in Aristotelian terms, 'nothing can be brought from potency to act except by something that is in act'.[109]

[105] Étienne Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 66.

[106] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3.

[107] Gilson, *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again*, p. 3.

[108] Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 52.

[109] Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, p. 67.

Aristotle's First Mover did not create the world *ex nihilo*; and thus, the argument, translated without alteration by Thomas from the Greek philosopher, takes us to a Mover that is 'really in the realm of physics' or 'cosmography'[110] (bearing in mind that, for Aristotle, the cosmos is a living thing). Therefore, the First Way, as Gilson interprets it, does not strike immediately at the Christian, transcendent God, but rather, staying close to home, indicates, as a first premise upon which the later arguments will build, that something more *real* than anything else, that is, more energetic, is moving all the rest. We are still moving around and around *within* the crystal spheres, with Aristotle, or rocking in the cradle of mother nature. The First Way is not about the *origin* of things, but about what sets off or 'motors' changes in living things which are simply, really, there, and thus moving.

As we mentioned above,[111] question 2, article 3 of the *Summa* repays reading as a dramatic *sequence*. When we reach the Second Way, from causes, the fact that things exist or are there at all, becomes the staple of the proof. As Gilson puts it, 'While the first brings us to God as the cause of cosmic motion and of all motion dependent upon it, the second leads us to Him as the cause of the very existence of things. We knew that God was moving cause. We know now that He is cause of being.'[112]

As with the First Way, one does well to avoid the abstract notion of 'causality', and to refer directly, as Thomas does, to causes. Here Thomas begins to doctor Aristotle's proofs. For while Thomas cites the second book of the *Metaphysics*, the causes which Aristotle speaks of there are the material, moving, formal, and final. But this is an argument from the *efficient* cause—that is, a 'starter' cause to the chain of causes we see about us. The reason for putting 'causes' rather than 'causality' before the readers of the argument is that 'causality' implies the *reason* for things, the passive 'because' which we employ to *explain* a sequence of events. In their efforts to make the Second Way deductive, Thomists have been wont to make it turn on a 'principle of causality', not on mere causes. The argument itself mentions, not explanations, but active, operative *causes*, which we ourselves can *perceive*. The 'relationship of efficient causality', or the impact of one object upon another, 'is given in sense experience'.[113] The argument is that, however great the number of effective causes we can determine upon in the world about us, observation does not indicate an *originary* efficient cause, that is, a cause which is outside the sequence. But that is what it takes for the causes which we can see occurring, to occur.

[110] Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 66.
[111] See Chapter 4, section 1.
[112] Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 67.
[113] Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, p. 75.

Denys Turner reads the Third Way as pertaining to the *non-necessity* of created things, as against, or perhaps as proving, the *necessity* of the Creator.[114] Gilson interprets it somewhat differently. It is an argument which could convince a hypothetical pagan, who Thomas thought would, like Aristotle, naturally consider that the cosmos is eternal. Avicenna (980–1037), from whom Thomas lifted this proof, was for him as much of a 'Gentile' as Aristotle. According to Thomas, faith in *sacra doctrina* is logically indivisible.[115] So he did not think of Muslims and Christians as sharing part of a single faith tradition which includes Genesis. He saw them as humans living in the same world and thus making similar sense observations. Avicenna knew of the *Kalam* argument, the medieval Arabic version of the contemporary 'What caused the Big Bang?' argument, invented by a sixth-century Alexandrian Christian, John Philoponus.[116] The Kalam argument purports to prove the existence of God by demonstrating the finitude of *time*. Believing as he did that the world *necessarily* emanates from God, Avicenna did not envisage the cosmos as the upshot of a divine act of free creation. He rejected the Kalam argument because he preferred to bypass the issue of a temporal beginning. Avicenna developed, instead, an argument that there must be a being which is necessary *per se* (God), in addition to beings which are necessary *through* another (the cosmos).[117] Thomas says, toward the end of this Way, that 'every necessary being either has its necessity caused by another, or not'.[118] That supposes that there is *more than one* necessary being. If the proof turns on a contrast between *non-necessary* beings and *necessary* being, one must fiddle around to explain whence a multitude of non-divine necessary beings appeared in the middle of the discussion; some logicians have, for instance, suggested that Thomas is covering logical or mathematical entities. This is a mistake. Arguing as he is, *alongside* his Gentile friends, Thomas assumes as they do that the cosmos in its entirety is *somewhat* necessary.

Every thing in the universe is *somewhat* necessary. But no pagan is fool enough to think the world around him or her is necessary through and through (*per se*): one can see that everything which *is* is necessary *for as long as it is*. This is an insight available to pagan as to Christian, to anyone who uses their powers of observation; and likewise that nothing *is* forever. Thus, since all things must pass, everything that is (temporally) necessary, *also*

[114] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 237–8.

[115] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 1, a. 3; q. 5, a. 3.

[116] William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 8.

[117] William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), p. 90.

[118] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3.

could not be, and, one day, will not be, and, in fact, once was not. Thomas states that the 'third way is taken from possibility and necessity'. The proof hangs on the observation that *everything* we can see is *both* possible *and* necessary. That everything is *possible* is shown by the ordinary facts of birth and death, or 'generation and corruption'. Anything which gives evidence of its mortality by dying *could* never have been born, or 'generated'. 'Possible' here means 'could possibly not be'. If everything *could* possibly not be, then, in the eternity of time which could be stretching behind us, at some point, nothing was: 'if everything is possible not to be, then at a time there could have been nothing existing'. But in that case, there would be nothing here now, 'which is absurd'. It is here, building up steam, that Thomas alludes to the fact which was so obvious to Russell: it looks like 'the world is just there, and that's all'.[119] Thomas' answer to this is the phrase: 'every necessary being has its necessity caused by another, or not'.[120] He is arguing that there must be something which is not just necessary *and* possible, not just *somewhat* necessary, but which is simply and solely necessary. And 'this is what', Thomas sagely remarks, 'everyone calls God'.

So far was Thomas from subscribing to the formulaic principle that everything is *either* contingent / possible *or* necessary that he ascribed a certain 'eternity' to created things. Drawing on Wisdom 1.4 ('God has created all things that they might be'), Thomas affirmed that the 'being of the creature cannot wholly come to an end; the creature cannot be termed, *simpliciter*, transient at all', that, 'even if it is transient—the creature will never fall back into nothingness' and thus that 'all the works of God will remain to eternity (either in themselves, or in their causes)'.[121] The French Revolution is an example of the anti-historical impulse to revoke the calendar and begin again, from year zero. Pieper remarks that, 'No one can say there is no end of history in the absolute sense, unless he believes in the Creator.'[122]

In the Third Way, Thomas is standing close to Russell, Avicenna, and Aristotle. He sees relative necessity as more likely to prompt the pagan to concede that God exists (Avicenna was convinced by this), than absolute contingency (which left Russell cold). The problem he is discussing is not 'Why not nothing?' but how the universe gets its 'just there' modality. With the former question, faith helpfully supplies the contingency of things. The

[119] Russell and Coplestone, 'A Debate on the Existence of God', p. 175.

[120] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3.

[121] Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the *Liber Sententiarum*, 1.8.3.2; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 65, a. 1, ad 1; *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, 4.4, cited in Josef Pieper, *The End of Time: A Meditation on the Philosophy of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 62.

[122] Pieper, *The End of Time*, p. 65.

necessity of the cosmos (more apparent to an intelligent pagan than to some thoughtful Christians) proves that it needs a necessary Creator. As Gilson says,

> The third way does not consist in establishing that a necessary being is required in order to account for the possibility of the beings subject to generation and corruption, but rather in order to account for what they have of necessity (i.e., of being) while they last. . . . The proof intends to show that one cannot go on to infinity in 'necessary things' which have 'their necessity' caused by another. . . . Thomas affirms the existence of a first necessary being causing in others *their* necessity.[123]

Thomas' proofs go from like to like. They are too simple and too prosaic to give us an inadvertently pagan religiosity of an Unknown God. With the Third Way, the Mover, and First Cause becomes recognizable as 'a necessary being'.[124]

Thomas goes on to suggest that there is a 'gradation' in things, indicated by the fact that some things are called more 'good, true, noble' than others, and thence that such 'predication' is used according to the degree that they 'resemble' a 'maximum', and the 'maximum in any genus is the cause of all that is in that genus'; 'for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being'.[125] In the days before the discovery of Thomas' participationism led some narrativists to believe that all of Thomas' reasoning is circular within faith, the Fourth Way was a standing embarrassment to modern Thomist philosophers.[126] Peter Geach confesses that 'I have sometimes suspected' this 'proof' 'of being one of the least defensible remnants of Platonism in Aquinas' thought.'[127] An anonymous commentator has written on the bottom of this page in Professor Geach's book, '*it is the basis of analogical predication*'.[128] The only proof Thomas gives that relies, not on sense observation but on how we speak about things, on the 'predication', as Thomas calls it, of a greater or lesser perfection to things, that is, upon our use of 'evaluative' language, has little value in the eyes of this Wittgensteinian Thomist and stalwart Christian apologist.

[123] Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, p. 80.

[124] Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 70.

[125] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3.

[126] Turner defends it as a use of reason, as against Milbank's use of it to indicate Thomas' radical fideism, remarking that 'whatever one thinks of the validity of such an inference . . . the argument is clearly presented *as* an inference, moreover, to a *cause*, "which we call God" ': *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 198.

[127] P. T. Geach, 'Aquinas', in G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), pp. 68–125, p. 116.

[128] This defacement of public property can be viewed in my own, smallish, archive of illegally photocopied library books. I am no palaeographer but the neat penmanship is perhaps an indication that our commentator went to school a *very* long time ago.

As an argument from the degrees of perfection in beings, the Fourth Way is Platonic, and thus a first hurdle to appreciating it is its sheer abstraction. We need a concrete analogy to get the hang of a 'scale of perfection'. One can bring the Fourth Way back down to earth from the Forms of Goodness and Nobility, by returning to various objections to Thomas' attitude to non-human animals. One of these is that he assumes that, since animals do not have linguistic reason, they exist only to serve human ends: or as Thomas himself puts it, animals are 'naturally subject to slavery'. William French responds to this charge by considering Thomas' theological vision as a whole. Thomas, he says,

> also employs another model of reasoning to generate descriptions, one which describes a being via an examination of its multiple relations with other created beings, with its species, with the common good of creation as a whole, and with God, the cause and final end of all. . . . Thomas' project stands out as a deeply ecological one in that our relations (and God's relations) to the rest of the natural cosmos are central within it. The Great Chain of Being is a multivalent metaphor. The same metaphysical model Thomas uses to stress hierarchical gradations of value linked to the scale of being, also, at other points, leads Thomas to highlight continuities and linkages throughout a conjoined cosmos pulsing with life and sustained by God's energy and love.[129]

In addition to that, however, both Kant and Thomas himself have been criticized for arguing, not that it is *inherently* immoral to mistreat animals, but wrong because a person who abuses animals becomes a worse *human being*, and thus liable to repeat the offence against fellow humans. Matthew Scully objects to the diminishment of the *intrinsic* moral value of animals in Thomas' remark that 'If any passages in Holy Scripture seem to forbid us to be cruel to brute animals, for instance to kill a bird with its young, that is either to remove men's thoughts from being cruel to other men, or lest through being cruel to animals one becomes cruel to other human beings.'[130] Pouncing on a similar argument in Kant, Mary Midgley comments that, it is as if the German philosopher had argued that it is wrong to pull the heads off plastic dolls because that could be a slippery slope to a career as a guillotinist.[131]

[129] William C. French, 'Beast-Machines and the Technocratic Reduction of Life', in Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (eds.), *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 37.

[130] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.112, quoted in Matthew Scully, *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals and the Call to Mercy* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2002), p. 339. My point is not that Thomas formulated his ethical attitude to non-human animals with due refinement, but that the idea of a scale of perfection, as used by the Fourth Way, requires an analogy in being within the created cosmos.

[131] Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 16.

Thomas' line of moral reasoning does not make sense without an *analogy* in kind between non-human and human animals. Torturing the former could not make us worse humans unless, unlike dolls, they were analogous to humans in some way. This is what we mean when we say that the Fourth Way refers to a *single* 'scale of perfection' within and beyond the natural world.

Looking outside the *Summa* to get the sense of the Fourth Way, Gilson considers the discussion in the *De Potentia* of whether a being could exist that is not created by God. Thomas gives three arguments against this hypothesis. The first is that whatever many things have in common must be traced back to a single being as the sole cause of its multiple products (as when medical scientists track an evidential trail back to the origins of a virus). Thomas refers this argument to Plato. The second argument cites the same passage in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Book II, which is quoted in the Fourth Way, to the effect that 'those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being', and contends that everything must sit somewhere on the scale of perfection in being, that is, within a single *created order*, because everything is more or less existent, depending on how close it is to the maximum of existence. Thirdly, and giving closure to the scale, 'because all that which is by something else is reducible to that something that is by itself': ' "It is therefore necessary that all the other beings, which are not their own being, should hold it from this unique being by mode of participation." '[132]

Von Balthasar comments that, 'Behind Heidegger, and behind Thomas, there stands not Aristotle but that Plotinus for whom Being remains a supraconceptual mystery.'[133] The argument from perfections in beings is Neoplatonic in two ways. For Aristotle, there could be *more than one* Prime Mover.[134] Related to the principle that there can be no uncreated objects because, as *self-subsistent being*, only God can create, this argument shifts us toward seeing that *Creator* and *created* are different orders of existence, and thus that there can be only one Creator, who is the pure act of Being itself. Historically, this notion of self-subsistent being is said to derive from Plotinus. In the second place, the argument is in the tradition of Neoplatonism because it is about 'participation', or the communication of being.

As one of the scholars who rediscovered the participationist element in Thomas' thought, Lindbeck saw that an idea of the participation of beings in God's being is at the back of Thomas' notion of analogy.[135] On the

[132] Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, p. 83, quoting Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 5.

[133] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 235.

[134] Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (London: Sheed & Ward, 1936), pp. 43–9.

[135] Lindbeck, 'Participation and Existence', p. 114.

supposition that there is a narrative progress in the arguments, Thomas could be said to be approximating closer to a Creator God known analogously through his creation. Thomas is not using the fact of analogy as evidence of the existence or character of God; it is just that the analogous quality of created things becomes increasingly apparent as one lays an informative trail toward the existence of God. All of the Five Ways examine precisely to whom human religation binds us. By virtue of its Platonism, the Fourth is perhaps most explicit in its religiousness. This is perhaps why those who would prefer Thomas to think like a natural philosopher, not a graced one, have skirted it. John Milbank's contention that Thomas sets off from an original vision of the divine perfection turns this analytic or Wittgensteinian evasion on its head. He sees clearly that Thomas' references to the degrees of goodness in things reflects a sense of the analogy of being:

> Aquinas is quite explicit: names stand for ideas in the mind which refer to things, and our minds can only grasp finite things by the mediation of the senses. Thus, unless things themselves can be read as signs of God, names cannot be used analogically of God. . . . But things can only be signs of God if the divine perfections are remotely visible in created perfections—or rather, if to see a created thing as possessing any perfection is to grasp its faint conveying of a plenitude of perfection beyond its scope. . . . the metaphysics of participation in Aquinas is immediately and implicitly a phenomenology of seeing more than one sees, of recognizing the visible in the invisible.[136]

Although Milbank is close to the mark on this point, Turner is able to criticize him for transforming Thomas and Bonaventure's teaching that we know *all else* in the light of the first principle into the idea that we see the divine perfection itself.[137] Thomas' conviction that we *can* evaluate things by reference to a highest good runs wider than the Fourth Way. It is apparent in his claim in the *De Veritate* that 'all knowing things know God implicitly in everything that they know'. Milbank's mistake here is not unlike the neo-Thomist reading of the Second Way as if it were about *causality*, a passive pattern of explanations, rather than about effective *causes*—energetically bouncing events into reality. Just as causality cannot cause anything, so the 'evaluableness' of nature, its capacity for being scaled from worse to better, cannot evaluate it. Just as we need a *Cause*, not causality, to make operations happen, so we need an *Evaluator*—someone who judges the quality of things and events—for the world to contain a scale of perfections. The Fourth Way is not to a top perfection but to the Perfecter. One could picture an architect

136 Milbank, 'Truth and Vision', p. 47.

137 Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 95.

deciding to place an oval at just this spot in his building. As von Balthasar remarks, commenting on this passage in the *De Veritate*,

God's being stands to self-consciousness as the measure stands to the measured, and not as a kind of more intense form of the same. Nor is it an extension of the object, but rather its transcendental presupposition. It follows . . . that truth is . . . disclosed to the subject, and, because it is truth, it always touches upon the sphere of the absolute, the infinite, and, therefore, the divine. . . . [So] . . . any immediate knowledge of God or immediate intuition of divine truth is out of the question. Only the finite subject's insight into its own contingency is immediate.[138]

Rather than seeing it as a 'Platonic' argument, moderns may more naturally respond to the Fourth Way as an 'aesthetic' argument, given that, 'Thomas himself speaks of perfection as being a basis of beauty, which is the object of the aesthetic experience. For the Angelic Doctor, *perfectio* means not simply being, but the fullness of being. . . . it is through its act of existing that being tends to the fullness of its perfection, for the very perfection of all perfections is the act of being.'[139] In the text from the *Summa* which Wilhelmsen cites here, beauty is designated as 'perfection or integrity'. We use evaluative language because the cosmos makes up an integrated, or 'aesthetic', whole, a unity or oneness (a common scale) which reflects the beauty of the Maker. The Fourth Way is like that turning point in a Jane Austen novel when, having experienced various adventures in the world, the author turns her protagonist around to look at herself. Having been out and about in the world, the character can wonder, 'how is that I, a contingent being, seldom remain a value-neutral spectator, but ineluctably make judgements of truth, goodness and beauty?' Even the aesthetic Fourth Way is not about direct intuition or seeing with the eyes of God, but turns on a causal inference:

because this contingency brings home to the subject . . . that it is not God, its insight into contingency can disclose, by means of an (implicit) causal inference, the existence of a sphere of absolute identity on which all reality and truth in the world are necessarily based. All knowledge of God is mediated through the contingency of the world, yet there is no knowledge of God that leads more immediately to him than this. If we did not have this implicit recognition of God's transcendence, we would never be able to draw any inference from this world to God.[140]

The final expression of this perspective can be seen in the Fifth Way, the argument from targeted arrows to an archer. The argument begins from

[138] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* I, p. 52, discussing Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* 22, a. 2, ad 1.
[139] Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, 'The Aesthetic Act and the Act of Being', *The Modern Schoolman* 29/4 (1992), 277–91, pp. 277–8, citing *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 39, a. 8 ('Nam ad pulcritudem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem integritas sive perfectio').
[140] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* I, p. 52.

Aristotelian premises, Aristotle being unlike 'modern professor[s] of philosophy' in telling 'his students' about 'the teeth of dogs, horses, men, and elephants' or indeed in writing a book called the *History of Animals.* The contention is that we can see forms in things, or better, see form-ation in operation; 'the governance of things', as Thomas calls it. We cannot see 'forms' in the sense of intuiting the Forms of dogs and dolphins, but we nonetheless 'perceive splotches of color given shape by the forms which the intellect knows to be vegetable, animal, or human. Likewise for the effects of final causality. There is no essential difference between seeing that a being is organic [*organisé*] and seeing that it is a dog. Intellectual induction from sensible perception is the same in both cases; it is the same case.'[141] Somewhat as Guardini's phenomenology of sense perception noted that we sense no 'secondary qualities', but rather forms, physically seeing 'the life of plants in their kind of coloration', the 'vitality of the animal', the human 'soul in its gestures, expressions and actions',[142] so, in

Aristotle's mind it was less a question of a process of reasoning than a matter of fact. We see teleology, for we see beings constituted according to a certain order and a certain plan, with the result that species exist whose characteristics are constant, as if the future of these beings had been predetermined in the seed from which they are born. However, as soon as one thinks about it, the notion of the end becomes obscure. One asks oneself how it could be that something which does not yet exist could direct and determine that which already is, though it be only to conduct its operations or direct its growth.[143]

Aristotle's nature works teleologically, or toward achieving a pre-designed 'picture', 'on plan'. Aristotle's energetic nature is like art in operation, and what 'comes first in the operation of art is the presence in the mind of the artist of a certain image or notion of the object to be produced. From that point of departure the artist begins by choosing material adopted to the structure of the future work. These would be, for example, heterogeneous parts: canvas, colors, and so on.' As a 'philosopher of nature' and a 'scientist' it is impossible for Aristotle to *name* the artist whose thought is evidently being expressed by nature: 'If', as he considers, 'nature operates in view of ends', he does not deem himself capable of saying 'in what mind these ends are first conceived'. The oddity of the business comes down to the fact that nature has no mind, and yet acts mindfully or artistically; even to twentieth-century naturalists, the 'notion of a teleology without consciousness' and yet 'immanent in nature remains mysterious. Aristotle does not think this should be a reason to deny

141 Gilson, *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back*, pp. 1 and 124.
142 Von Balthasar, *Glory I*, pp. 390–1.
143 Gilson, *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back*, pp. 7–8.

its existence.' We know that art-works originate from an artist 'external' to them; with nature, on the other hand, the 'end' achieved is 'consubstantial' with the producer: 'The embryo *is* the law of its own development.'[144]

The analogy which Thomas uses in the Fifth Way relates to 'directed flight toward a target': 'whatever lacks intelligence cannot move toward an end unless it be endowed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its target by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end.'[145] Whereas Aristotle stays within the limits of what can be known from the argument from motion, Thomas recoups everything contained in the First Way, and relates the flight of cosmic movement to a 'governing' cause. Everything that moves within nature is brought to do so in formations by an 'archer'. Movement is *thoughtful*, designed, and we can *see* the thought in operation, in that living things do not only *grow* but their growth also subserves functions within their organisms. The 'intelligence' inbuilt in subconscious nature can only be there as a reflection of, or as caused by, a mind. Thomas calls this an 'argument from the governance of the world', and in, for instance, his political writings, the government of the human king is a pale reflection of the government of God.[146] The Five Ways thus conclude to a God whose visible works reflect the unseen mind of a monarch: 'The thought interior to things is explained, as are the things themselves, by their distant imitation of the thought of the provident God who rules them.'[147]

Thomas' Five Ways have gone beyond Aristotle without going outside human reason. It's as if Thomas takes Aristotle's notion of nature and reflects it back to 'The Philosopher' in a mirror; as with a two-way mirror angled to show *both* what one can see from where one is standing, *and* further on, round the corner. Aristotle's picture of nature is as anthropomorphic as *The March of the Penguins*: he conceives nature as if a human artist were working within it, albeit 'unconsciously' (for he 'knows' that no such free human intelligence is there, within nature). This may be defended on the grounds that, 'In knowing himself, man knows nature in a unique way, because in this unique case the nature that he knows, he is. In and through the knowledge which man

[144] Gilson, *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back*, pp. 6–10 and 125.

[145] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3.

[146] Thomas Aquinas, *On Princely Government*, Bk. I, ch. 2: 'The bees have one king, and in the whole universe there is one God, Creator and Lord of all. And this is quite according to reason: for all plurality derives from unity. So, since the product of art is but an imitation of the work of nature, and since a work of art is the better for being a faithful representation of its natural pattern, it follows of necessity that the best form of government in human society is that which is exercised by one person.' Thomas was not, for instance, Swiss in his conception of good government.

[147] Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 76.

has of himself nature knows herself directly; she becomes conscious of herself in him, self-conscious one might say, and there is ... nothing else that man can hope to know in this way.'[148]

And yet, Aristotle does not make the inference to a *free*, intelligent designer external to nature. This is what Thomas shows him, in his mirror: 'without going beyond the letter of Aristotle', he 'strives to make him say that all motion and all nature depend upon the First Mover, not only as upon a final cause', moved by its desire for the Mover, 'but upon a *will*'.[149] Thomas' arguments are indicating that the same *natural* hypotheses concerning moves and causes which an Aristotelian can make indicate, not only that nature external to us has a *human* tint, in moving toward intelligent ends, but a *hyperpersonal* cause. We can make 'anthropomorphic' assumptions about nature, because, behind or beyond it, and reflected throughout it, are the free personal choices of a transcendent God.

Each of the Ways concludes with a phrase such as 'and this is what everyone understands to be God'. Our description of the Five Ways sets aside Robert Jenson's opinion that the 'everyone' to whom Thomas refers are 'of course, those whom Thomas expected might read his writings: Jews, Christians, and Muslims, who all worship the biblical God'.[150] It is only by denominating such writers as Aristotle and Avicenna as Gentiles or pagans, that, alongside them, Thomas can *prove* and not merely stipulate that God exists. Only thus can he generate an authentically analogical use for religious language, one which will fill out the content of the use of such terms as 'generation'[151] in the meditation on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which follows, a discussion in which, as a Barthian told me, without deprecation, Thomas 'approaches the Trinity as if he were cutting up a pie'.[152] It is only by catapulting over the defence of the existence of God which precedes it, or by sublating this narrative into the terms of the ontological distinction, that one can read Thomas' discussion of the Triune God as an exercise in negative theology. It is by leaving the real distinction in abeyance that Thomas gives the universe enough breathing space to *prove* that it breathes with created existence, existence communicated to it by the God of Genesis. 'It is in its very existence that the universe of St. Thomas is a religious universe':[153]

[148] Gilson, *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again*, p. 4.

[149] Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 79, my italics.

[150] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 6.

[151] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 27, a. 2. Perhaps the clearest place where Thomas discusses his use of analogical language in relation to the Trinity is q. 33, a. 3.

[152] I am pleased to take the opportunity to mention my gratitude to John Webster for many helpful comments about the content of this book, including this one.

[153] Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas*, p. 83.

the work of the saint is a world. It is even many worlds, one within the other. It is the world of the word of God: Scripture which to him is alone infinite. It is the world of the Fathers . . . It is the world of Aristotle and of philosophy, whose frontiers recede in the degree that one believes that one is on the point of reaching them. It is finally the personal world of saint Thomas himself, situated at the heart of the rest and opening upon all of them, but discreet, almost effaced, . . . so that one is at risk of crossing it without recognizing it. But one sign advises one of its presence . . . This is that after having enumerated two, ten, or twenty reasons in favour of a certain conclusion, and sometimes included within the series, saint Thomas writes the word *esse*, . . . This notion is with him a light which, above all in metaphysics and theology, illuminates all the rest.[154]

The 'Russian doll' idea of many worlds set within one another is a childish and therefore a poetic notion. It is also a gourmand's ideal—the *moreish* taste which serves to swell the appetite rather than merely to quell it. Overlapping worlds are analogous, and thus Aristotle was not confined by his limited categories to a different game but lived within the worlds of the Fathers and the Scriptures, because, in so far as they are real, his world, and the worlds of all pagans, are domiciled within worlds of which they know nothing. The touchstone of *moreishness* in Thomas' thought is *esse*, the *existing* of particular things.

The simplest way to make sense of von Balthasar's arguments is to read them within the existential Thomist tradition. This is why our interpretation of Thomas' Five Ways draws heavily, though not solely, on Gilson. I rely not only on the later, most existential Gilson, but also and simultaneously on the Gilson who had attempted to purge all traces of Leibnizian rationalism from his understanding of the thirteenth-century Dominican Master. One may, as I have done, designate writers like Herbert McCabe as heirs to the earlier, more traditionally neo-Thomistic Gilson, but not to the Gilson of the late 1950s and 1960s, the Gilson to whose reading of Thomas von Balthasar is indebted. It is no discredit to Father McCabe to say that, whereas he stayed with a single interpretation of Saint Thomas, Gilson recast his interpretation, slowly and patiently excising 'sufficient reason', 'causality', and the real distinction itself, as *proofs* of the existence of God. He defended these moves to fellow Thomists on the grounds that Thomas himself used more literal-minded means of proving the existence of God than they did.[155] He has been deemed an opponent of philosophical development for his insistence on sticking to the historical *words* of the Master. Is it odd that Gilson

[154] Étienne Gilson, *Le philosophe et la théologie* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1960), p. 225.

[155] These developments and the arguments provoked by them have been rehearsed in my book, *Art and Intellect in the Philosophy of Étienne Gilson.*

should be more attentive to the language which Thomas himself employed than linguistic Thomists? The arguments as Gilson presented them are closer to what Thomas wrote than 'How come Fido?' They therefore permit the development to be found in 'The Miracle of Being and the Four-Fold Difference'.

Von Balthasar's four 'distinctions' are the child's conscious awareness of its distinctness from its mother, the distinction of Being from beings, the distinction of beings from Being, and the distinction of God from all of the above. If one tabulated them alongside the Five Ways, the child's sense of its mother as a distinct reality from itself corresponds to the argument from 'moves', the distinction of beings from Being corresponds to the fact that everything within the world is caused (the Second Way), the distinction of Being from beings points up the 'somewhat necessity' in everything we can see around us (the Third Way), and the distinction of God from mother, beings and Being draws on the Fifth Way, the 'aesthetic' argument. As for the Fourth Way, it is implicit in all four of von Balthasar's 'distinctions'. The fact that he deploys it elsewhere on its own as a good single proof indicates that he regarded it as solid; this Neoplatonic proof is indispensable, and inductive.[156]

As we read Thomas' Five Ways, sequentially, one does not fully attain a transcendent God until the Fifth Way. It is only with the Fourth Way that one achieves a transcendent *ex nihilo* Creator God, and it is only from the vantage point of the last argument, from 'the governance of things', that one can see that the supernatural God is implicit in the 'one whom everyone calls God' of the first four. Von Balthasar makes it clearer that he is presenting us with an inductive *sequence*, an ascending series in speculative metaphysics, such that, while each step of the drama implies and contains the next, it *is* possible to drop off before the end. Thinking somewhat more historically than Thomas, he knows that, in fact, Aristotle *did* stop at Thomas' and his 'first' stage, Avicenna and Heidegger at his and Thomas' Third Way. And since his presentation of the argument for God's existence is a little more dramatic than Thomas', von Balthasar's four steps are open: you can stop, or you can go on ahead. His version of the argument thus takes '*liberty*, equality and fraternity' into account.

Openness is not absolute difference. It is dramatic, or creates links. It would not be dramatic if the ending was explicitly in sight in the first Act, and nor would it be so if the end was not implicit in the beginning. As Aristotle observed, a dramatic plot has 'the greatest effect' when its 'incidents' 'occur unexpectedly and at the same time in consequence of one another; drama is a mixture of the surprising and the predictable'.[157] As with Thomas,

[156] We discuss this proof below in Chapter 7, section 5.
[157] Aristotle, *Poetics*, ch. 9, 1452a1–5.

von Balthasar's 'distinctions' are also analogies; he is seeking to show that there are 'worlds within worlds', that smaller worlds somehow include larger and stranger worlds within themselves, and the smallest world of all includes the supernatural God. The more confined it is, the more analogically potent a world is, and thus the First Way, from the child rocked by its mother, contains in miniature all the rest: 'the four phases . . . were only the ever greater extension of the first act of consciousness of the awakening child. This first act, journeying towards transcendence, immediately touches the final end: there can be nothing more beyond the love which wakens me and shelters me . . . in the smiling face of my mother.'[158]

As the close of his analysis of 'the four phases', von Balthasar gives an overview of the entire argument. As we run through the four distinctions in sequence, it may help to have this in our mind's eye, as a hint of the completed picture in the artist's mind:

However excluded I may be, I remain primally someone who has been permitted entry. And then comes the second insight: we have all been permitted entry. Our mother too. And the animals with which I play. There is much that is real, and yet Being overarches everything . . . nothing of all this had to be as it is. Everything stands in an open light which is greater and more glorious than the essence of this world with all its terror and beauty. Thus there is the third point: what would happen to this light if none of us existed to see it? Does it stand in need of us? No, I, all of us, are 'accidental' with respect to it. Taken altogether, we are not a sufficient explication of being; it is free to manifest itself in an infinite number of other ways . . . Are we then both necessary to one another: Being to existents and existents to Being? . . . Is it serene only because it has been given entry—into us? Do we then both hover in oscillation, which is unconditioned? But how can this double dependence, and so mutual conditionedness, produce an absolute? And so, gingerly, almost against our will, we must posit the fourth opening of the distinction: beyond the still conditioned, mutually dependent freedom of the existent with regard to Being and the freedom of Being to shine unconstrainedly as a light within the existent: an unconditioned freedom, or one which is . . . conditioned through itself, and which is untouched by nothingness, an *actus purus* . . . [159]

It is unfortunate that Thomas' *Fifth* Way is the only one thought of as a 'design' argument, for the *First* Way, too, is about *directed* growth, the unfolding of potentialities into actualities. The argument from 'moves' is taken from the perspective of 'propulsion into movement' rather than that of the finished form, but both are about design, or the 'integrity, proportion and light' ascribed to beauty. Design arguments are arguments against *chance*

[158] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 635. [159] Ibid., pp. 635–6.

as the source of necessary interlockings of parts in an aesthetic whole. Von Balthasar's child is both certain that random chance could not have evoked such a necessary being as itself and amazed that the world is lucky enough to receive the one who is *me*:

From the infinite prodigality of an act of generation—prodigality in the male as well as the female organism resulting in a 'chance hit'—a new being is created which, reflecting upon its personal ego, cannot interpret itself in any way as a product of chance; for it possesses . . . the capacity to view the world as a whole, indeed Being as a whole, from its unrepeatable perspective . . . Nothing within (world-) Being indicates that this had the 'personal' intention of producing precisely this unique and as such irreplaceable person through the game of chance . . . Why it should have been me, I do not know.[160]

Rather than either situating itself with the impersonal mechanics of nature or assuming a strictly phenomenological or experiential attitude, this argument begins in the *metaphysics* of 'I-ness'. Whereas existential phenomenologists like Heidegger begin from my *experience* of 'I-ness' and existential Thomists like Gilson speak of a 'particular existent' which could be *any* existent, von Balthasar's first distinction links up with the metaphysical structure of that particularly particular existent which is the human person. The first distinction is that between an individual's freedom and the apparent necessity of the world. 'Freedom' means here the way in which *I* take up and possess my unique perspective on and location in the world. 'Necessity' means the way in which, from birth, an encompassing world is simply a *given* for the individual child. By starting with the child, the argument settles itself within the historical character of human life. Since Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, all authentic philosophies have begun in *wonder*; but presupposing, as they do, the perspective of an adult male, they tend to detemporalize it. Von Balthasar gives us a 'genuine beginning', by setting out from what is, within each human life, the historically *first* act of amazed delight in existing, and showing how it goes on.[161]

The inductive evidence for the distinction between the child's freedom, its self-possession, and the 'necessity' of its environing world of other selves is simply that its own reality is conditional on the help and sustenance of others. The child has or possesses a genuinely and wholly *given* reality, a reality entirely *actual* before the child itself comes into play. It takes another, a 'necessary being' in relation to the child, to bring the child's freedom into actuality: 'Its "I" awakens in the experience of a "Thou": in its mother's smile

[160] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 615.
[161] Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 38.

through which it learns that it is contained, . . . already actual, sheltering and nourishing. The body which it snuggles into, a soft, warm and nourishing kiss, is a kiss of love in which it can take shelter because it has been sheltered there *a priori*.' The mother's body, and her smile, which move the child first into being, and then into consciousness, are always already given. The child neither questions, nor 'intuit[s]' nor 'infer[s] that his mother's *love* is moving him into being; rather, that reality is simply 'present' in the 'movement of gift'.[162]

The child's dogmatic realism recognizes a distinction: the first 'phase' is a distinction because child and mother are 'at two'. Many distinctions hold between persons and amongst things. All may eventually look *analogous* to the real distinction. But it is important not to pass them by, or else one misses the point that this first distinction, like the others, is *good* and thus enjoyable. The child *enjoys* being the recipient of its mother's love. It enjoys its simultaneous 'at twoness' and at oneness so much that it

> glimpse[s] the Absolute (God) (Parzival, Simplicius) . . . first in its mother . . . It can awaken only in Paradise or in what Plato depicts as that Heaven which is the contemplation of the Ideas. The fact that it experiences Being (*Sein*) and human existence (Dasein) (why should it make a distinction between the two?) as the incomprehensible light of grace, is the reason why it engages in play.[163]

In von Balthasar's meditation thereon, there is a bit of 'Platonism' ('Simplicius') even in the First Way, captured in the child's acknowledgement of the fairy-tale ('Parzival') quality of existing in stable motion. The Fourth Way is tucked into all four of the distinctions. All of them aim at getting us to see something symbolical, that is, something *moreish*. The child, pictured swinging back and forth between its safely given environment and the heights of its exultant freedom, is a symbol of the transcending element of the human spirit.

This 'unity of the grace of love' remains '*before* and *after* the tragedy of its dissolution'.[164] The second phase in the progress of an individual's life-journey, is the recognition of contingency. It is symbolized by the tragic situation. The plane of the contingent is the tragic,[165] the single body line of wet on the floor left as the drowned sailor is dragged home, in Synge's *Riders from the Sea*. The child's 'narcissism' dissolves as it realizes that 'I am one existent among others'. Stepping beyond myself now, I realize that, not only *I* am contingent, but so is all else. Everything is caused by something else, and so contingent upon it, and, taken together, everything is contingent upon

[162] Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 38.
[163] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 616.
[164] Ibid., p. 617. [165] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, p. 18.

a 'whole', which is indifferent to its upshots. The recognition of the non-necessity of the persons, animals, and natural objects in the world about me is given by the fact that 'all existents partake in Being, yet . . . they never exhaust it'. Being is *more* than all existents taken together, and in that towering distinction of Being from everything which it causes and generates, lies the tragedy. Being is careless of its constituents, for it is ever-more than them. Matters are worse than merely depending upon a careless, self-subsistent Fate. Fate itself seems to be 'empty' handed. Being is experienced as a *light*, the light which shines in natural forms, or 'essences'. Looking at *Being* alone will not 'appease my primal wonder . . . that "something is" '; I have to look at the 'things' which 'participate' in it 'and thus exist'. But the heart of tragedy is *finitude*: just as no *form* can be known unless the light (of being) shines through it, so, no *light* can be seen without the form. No *esse* without a natural *habens esse*, and vice versa. This points to the dependency of essences upon Being *and* of Being upon 'essences', and thus to contingency. Looking at the *esse and* the '*habens esse*s' of natural forms,

my wonder is directed at both sides of the Ontological Difference, whether . . . construed in Thomist or Heideggerian terms, for the fact that an existent can only become actual through participation in the act of Being points to the complementary antithesis that the fullness of Being attains actuality only in the existent; but the fact that (Heideggerian) Being can only be interpreted within existence (Spirit) points to the complementary antithesis that existence (Spirit) grasps the dependence of Being upon beings and thus its nonsubstantiality.[166]

Contingency draws me out of myself, and throws me; but, *by* drawing me out of myself, it not only lays bare my 'thrownness', but also shows that the symbol characterizing Being and its entities is a sort of 'opening out'. For 'the unity' of Being remains constant, though it be contingent, and the recognition of *absolute* dependency is likewise a recognition that to be is to be linked up with, or caused by, and causing, others. To belong to an infinite causal chain is to be entirely open to acting and being acted upon. Here, as Wilhelmsen says,

The tragic meets the ecstatic. Falling into nothing even while he strives to be . . . man . . . must give of himself to the world of things and . . . of persons. The being of man . . . *is structurally a being with others.* . . . The ecstatic and the tragic meet in a paradox which is one with the being of man. The desire to give and the desire to be fulfilled, the need to throw myself away and the need to be sheltered, are one with human life; logically these drives are opposed; existentially they *are* the being of man.[167]

[166] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, pp. 618–19.
[167] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 21 and 23.

If the second phase, relating to contingency, comes to its head in tragedy, or human drama, the third phase takes us to the *necessities* at work in *sub-human* nature. What it has to say about the forms within sub-human nature is, von Balthasar says, 'a singularly illuminating touchstone for the value of a metaphysics'.[168] The third stage lets beings, or natures, have their say: it is about the distinction of beings from Being. Although it does not use words like 'Being', evolutionism, as an absolutization of natural *process*, does not care to consider that each dog and giraffe has its own integral *necessity*. The random process of nature is supposed to take care of that. And this, von Balthasar argues, does not work, for a process which is *its own end* or necessity cannot account for the *singular* things which are *ends in themselves* within it. It may show all the stages by which processes like selection and genetic transmission and mutation have generated sub-human nature as we know it, but it cannot account for the workings internally necessary to each natural form, dolphin and dog, within it. Since beings are distinct from Being, each form is a necessary system in its own right. So von Balthasar writes,

> A biological and evolutionary sequence of stages—if there ever could be such a thing as a self-sufficient system—would at best be able to allow the ascent of the individual essential form, say that of a bird, from its preformations in an earlier form, say that of the fish, but it would never be able to derive the inherent necessity of a single perfected essential form in which . . . *pulchritudo* and *perfectio* . . . coincide. . . . The entities, precisely the sub-intellectual art works of the *praktii*, of creative Nature, bear the mark of an unconditionally original imaginative power to which one must be blind if one—I do not say classifies their forms within the evolutionary process, but explains them entirely on the grounds of their position within this process.[169]

The symbol which emerges in the third distinction is the animal kingdom: the *moreish* quality of the animals is their comical refusal to be pinned down in a classificatory system intended to explain their particular natures. Most thinkers have a go at surrounding them: Neoplatonist and Idealist systems are especially guilty of attempting to subsume 'beings', or natural forms, into Being. With Descartes, Being is Mind, and, envisaging animals as material machines, he cannot elucidate either the *free* creativity of the artist within nature, who endowed his 'cosmic drama' with the 'humorous supporting character' of the panda,[170] or the *necessity* of the interior construction of this and every animal. The stubborn resistance of particular animal forms to being covered by a rational scheme comes back to the fact that each form, however silly, like the panda's thumb, has a necessity *intrinsic to itself*. Schelling

[168] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 621. [169] Ibid., pp. 620–1.
[170] Jonathan Witt, 'The Gods Must Be Tidy!', *Touchstone* 17/6 (2004), 25–30, p. 28.

and Hegel regard sub-human nature as Spirit in search of itself, not noticing that, Spirit must *already* have swum all the way home to sea-girt Ithaca to achieve the intelligent and 'playful' freedom exuded by the dolphin. With Erigina and Nicolas of Cusa, the One Spirit overflows into physical reality; but that misses the *particularity* of the forms: how should 'a divine abundance of Being ... explicate itself precisely in beetles and butterflies and not also in entirely different, unpredictably various, forms and figures'?[171] Why should the natural forms exhibit *this* particular necessity and not some other? In permitting necessity only to Being, the Platonizing and Idealist philosophies set their faces against natural *realities*, and 'this failure' to give reality its due 'is understood by those Materialists' like Lord Russell 'who reject such speculative systems as conceptual dreams'.[172]

The Third Way turns on the fact that 'every necessary being either has its necessity caused by another, *or not*':[173] it aims to show that *somewhat* necessary beings have their necessity through an unconditionally necessary being. Opening the distinction between 'beings' or natural forms and Being allows us to see that *both* sides of the ontological distinction have their freedom and their necessity. Heidegger halts here, 'making this fact' of difference 'the final mystery', which 'hardens for him into a kind of mathematical necessity'.[174] Being and beings are just there, for Heidegger, and that is all. But, if one really permits the at twoness of Being and natural forms, one may go further than Heidegger did. Once one can see that Being cannot subsume beings into itself (for if it does, one cannot make sense of nature), one can likewise see that Being has its own necessity beyond that of nature: 'Just as Being does not mould everything which is to itself, but lets it be, in the same way all that is must correspondingly allow Being to dwell in its imperturbability, in order that its light should rise over all.'[175]

Heidegger's option is still a possibility within the third phase, because we do not yet know whether we are talking about Being as it relates to human thinking (Heidegger's *Da-Sein* and Turner's 'existential quantifier') or Being as Being, that is, Being as it sinks deeper than human thought can follow. That is why it does not help us to know that there is a real distinction between existence, *esse*, or Being on the one hand, and natures on the other, unless we know whether it refers us to a pure act of being, or God. And thus,

[171] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 621.
[172] Ibid., p. 622.
[173] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3.
[174] Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 43.
[175] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 622.

In the space of the distinction which opens up when Being allows us to be and we Being, two things can happen: first, the elevation of Being above us can cause it to appear as something which is alien, indifferent and even fearful, and we can be tempted... to give precedence to non-Being, when the darkness of our human existence seems to authorize us to pronounce... a curse against Being itself. This fearfulness is no less when we become shudderingly aware of the nameless waste of individual and personal life through the whole, when not only Nature appears as the Calvary of life, but also history as a Golgotha of the Spirit (Hegel), and when man must trample down his own heart in order to justify, against his own self, the World-Spirit which lacerates him. And yet: in this same distance of letting be, Being can appear to us in its glory,... in a glory which excels in mysterious elevation all the beauty and order of the actual world...[176]

The fourth distinction arises by confronting the second and third distinction with one another. On the one hand, we know that natural forms could not create Being, because the second distinction exposed Being as distinct from them. As an ecstasy, Being is too *free* to be pinned down by particular beings which are tragically contingent upon it. But on the other hand, we know that Being is not solely responsible for the natural forms, and this, not by a direct intuition of God, but by considering the inherent *necessity* of the natural forms. The inherent necessity of the natural forms frees them from being dependent upon Being alone. The necessity-in-freedom of natural beings and of Being invites us to take a further step:

on the one hand, the freedom of non-subsisting Being can be secured in its 'glory' in the face of all that exists only if it is grounded in a subsisting freedom of absolute Being, which is God; and so, on the other hand, the dignity of an essential form evades being threatened by the encompassing act of Being and thus being swallowed up and devoured as an invalid 'stage of Being' only if its valid contour can be referred back to a sovereign and absolute imagination or power of creation.[177]

Von Balthasar's fourth distinction looks for the *one* Creator beyond the swelling mass of creative acts which is the cosmos. The '*unicum*', or single act of self-subsisting Being which he finds behind created *esse* and created forms, is an 'absolute freedom' which frees the inherent freedom of creatures to be. Both *esse*, or Being, and essence *are*, and thus are free, by participating in perfect freedom: 'Being arrives at itself as subsistence only within the entity and the entity arrives at its actuality (and thus at the possibility of its self-generation and *perfectio*) only within its participation in Being.'[178] The fourth distinction is the distinction between God and the created world. God

[176] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, pp. 622–3. [177] Ibid., p. 625. [178] Ibid.

'governs' the created universe by giving it its own playful freedom to be. Rather than legitimating human rationality through his arguments for the existence of God, von Balthasar has directed us into a mystery.

With his 'four-fold distinction', von Balthasar has, naturally, explicated the question, 'Why is there anything at all and not simply nothing?' He has crossed this minefield in a way that sidesteps detonating the two explosives which Kant believed lie in wait for those who attempt to prove God's existence: either demonstrating the existence of an *intra-cosmic* 'deity', such as a Designer who is just a human architect writ large, or misappropriating empirical vehicles to reach a 'Deity' who was supposed to be supra-empirical. As Kant has it, rational proofs always blow up in the face of the philosophical theist because they either repeat the intra-cosmic logic in an elongated but identical, intra-cosmic form, as one more link in the *same* chain of human reasoning, or else they launch themselves beyond the chain of empirically filled reasoning at the cost of achieving an empirically empty conclusion.[179]

The analytic Thomist John Haldane puts the Kantian objection like this: 'as a matter of logic we cannot reason from the conditions of the empirical world to the conditions of a transcendent super-empirical reality'. His response is that, after all, one can 'apply' terms derived from experience to fields beyond 'the range of our actual and perhaps our possible experience'. Haldane argues that, 'We are forever talking of entities and thinking of entities that we do not and could not experience, e.g. unrealized hypothetical situations, unobservable (but presumed to be actual) objects and events, infinitely large domains. ... We talk about the unrecoverable past and the as yet not existent future, about the spatially distant and the non-spatial and abstract realm of mathematics and philosophy.'[180] The problem with such a response, which is in line with post-Kantian Thomistic theism, is that an entity as empty as an 'unrealized hypothetical situation' or the 'abstract realm of mathematics' could not act on the world as Creator to creation. Kant insists on an empirical grounding for a theistic proof because he considers that an empirical referent is the condition of the possibility of human experience. Kant's conundrum, that a theistic proof must give us either an intra-cosmic deity or an empirically unattainable extra-cosmic 'X', is not unlike our complaint against grammatical Thomism, that it makes God either a character in a wider narrative, or the Story itself. One might say that narrative theism yields just the *possibility* of the Story, and, again, that the hypothetical possibility of a Story about the meaning of everything could not be actually creating any particular existent (Kant's 'empirical phenomena') in this world.

[179] See above, Chapter 3, section 5.
[180] J. J. C. Smart and J. J. Haldane, *Atheism and Theism* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1996), p. 149.

As the ultimate and thus closed 'possibility' of the narrative of the world and its characters, the Story-God would *necessitate* its members' actions. Anything a character within the story does would actualize a sub-virtuality of the system as a whole. Kant had a further objection to theistic proofs: if we could *know* that God exists, we would *know* the transcendent cause of all events, including the event of our belief, and hence these events must be determined, and not free. It is as a moral, noumenal, and thus *free* self that one essays to prove the existence of God, according to Kant, and *therefore* an achieved proof would undercut one's freedom, and thus one's moral personality, because one would have proven that one's *freedom* has a *cause*, and hence is no freedom at all. The only God who can be *known* to exist, as Kant takes it, is no supernatural freedom, but a hyper-necessity, a Celestial Mechanic. If the noumenal personality is as mechanically determined as the empirical self, even its act of believing in God is scripted by the Story. Because,

> if it were possible speculatively to demonstrate God's existence . . . 'from the consideration of created things' . . . then that freedom on which the possibility of morality depends would be cancelled thereby. For if causality *in* the world of appearances could be demonstrated to apply transcendently *of* the world— . . . what such a demonstration of God's existence would have to show—then, just as natural causality within the world of 'appearances' rules out freedom as an object of experience, so a causality supposed to have application in the transcendent realm beyond appearances would have to rule out freedom there too, and with it the possibility of morality.

It may not be enough to retort that when Kant '"found it necessary to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for faith"' he did not mean *faith* in the authentic, Thomistic, and Vatican I sense, as a gift of God, but merely faith as the exercise of moral freedom.[181] For Kant put his finger on a defect in theistic argument as he knew it, that its conclusions deny freedom both to creatures and to God. A purely rational argument, one not launched within Christian faith, is not likely to be redolent of the drama of the interplay of the biblical God, ever free to select and reject, and the biblical characters, ever free to accept or reject God's call.

The way von Balthasar selects to manoeuvre between the rock of an argument which is all too this-worldly and achieves a this-worldly deity and the hard place of an etherealizing argument which attains the contentless hypothesis of a supra-empirical Deity is the '*distinction*'. When we posit a *difference* we note an *opposition* between one thing and another. The act of *differentiation* ties the two together, as opposites. And so they eternally imply one another, like death and life. On the other hand, when we *distinguish* two things,

[181] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 6–7, citing Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason.*

we voice our recognition of what is unique in each, and what they have in common. A distinction is unlike a difference in that it both divides *and unites*. Each of von Balthasar's distinctions refers, neither to an empirical entity by itself nor to a purely supra-empirical reality, but to a *mediating* point between the empirical and the supra-empirical. Each of the distinctions opens the door on a *relation* between 'this side' and the 'other side'. A *connection* comes to light through each distinction. By showing how one 'side' requires or is conditioned by the other, each distinction takes us deeper into the created nature of the cosmos, its conditional or dependent character. Each distinction addresses some facet of the relation between necessity and freedom, such that, at the conclusion, the four mediating links are shown to symbolize the freedom of God.

The first distinction addresses that particular existent which is the individual person or child. The distinction is between the child's freedom and the necessity of other existents, the selves who nurture it. The child is free, or 'for itself', but not 'from itself', not necessary in and of itself, not self-sustaining. It knows that its environing world, its mother, is necessary to itself, and hence *more* than itself; it also knows them as absolutely and unconditionally given. And yet, as mediating the child's freedom to it, this necessity does not just *encompass* the child but expands for the child's benefit. The feel of the necessity within which the child finds itself, the givenness of its vital world, is not that of a prison which determines and forecloses its freedom: 'that which is "a matter of course"' for the child 'is not the "*de facto*" with its constraining and finite narrowness, but the graciously opened whole in which every space is granted to tumble around as much as one wills: existence as play'. The 'necessity' into which it enters is not merely factual, confining the child within a closed set of possibilities, but a positive enjoinment to be 'for itself', to self-possession. And so it knows that its own freedom 'overshoots' the necessity of its environing world and is distinct from it. Like the child I heard of, lying in bed with its mother, which nursed, finished, and turned over satisfied to sleep facing the other way, it can coolly take its enjoyment, knowing it has a right to belong. For the child, 'Existence is both glorious and a matter of course': that is, spanning its own overshooting freedom and the 'necessary' givenness of life, the child knows existence *both* as more than empirical, as 'Idea', and as a comfortable, empirical repleteness. The first distinction mediates between, or connects, the pull of the Being into which I am handed, with its necessity, and the 'opening of my spirit' beyond it: 'both are related to each other, but they do not coincide'.[182]

[182] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, pp. 617–18.

A 'necessity' charged with giving each child its freedom could hardly be necessitating itself: hence the recognition that the mother, all other selves, and its entire environment, are just 'beings' like the child itself, not 'Being'. The second distinction is between beings, or particular existents, and activating Being, that *id quo majus cogitari non potest* which causes each individual essence to be what it is. In comparison with Being, the individual existent merely 'hangs in the air', without any intrinsic necessity. Individuals exist because they 'participate' in this 'incomprehensible' and 'idea-like' act of Being. They are caused by it. But on the other hand, Being would put on a poor show without particular existents. The evidence is our inability to think about Being in purely conceptual terms. We can only think Being and refer to it through an image or phantasm, and thus by way of a particular existent fact: 'not only "concepts without intuition are empty", but the "idea" or the "light" or the "abundance" of Being remain so too'. This entails that, just as the world's givenness to the child implies something *more* than worldly necessity, so 'I cannot appease my primal and overpowering wonder at the fact that "something is" by gazing at Being.' My wonder is not appeased because Being does not cause itself. The second distinction links up Being with the facts it conditions, particular existents. The two are co-dependent. Existents are 'only a "reflection"' of Being, as the Neoplatonists 'right[ly]' aver, but the fact that human animals *think* in the light of Being does not prove that being is an unconditioned Idea. Rather, since the media of thought is images taken from physical bodies, the act of thought shows that Being requires the 'body' of particular existents so as to be. Because it knows Being only in particulars, human thought acknowledges the 'non-substantiality' of Being, its dependence on the specific, empirical case.[183]

The second distinction considers particular beings in the light of Being, and thus links the two in a way which puts Being in the foreground. The third distinction revolves the data round the other way, foregrounding the beings. The distinction between particular natures and Being points up the *freedom* of particular kinds of nature in relation to Being, that is, the apparent *creativity* of biological forms, the 'original imaginative power' within the forms of birds, and fish, and beetles. The evidence for the distinction between particular kinds of entity, like birds and fish, and Being is that the way in which matter becomes a bird or a fish cannot be explained by matter aiming to become the 'whole show' of Nature. The specific 'exhibits' within nature, the dog or dolphin did not evolve into *this* particular form in order to satisfy some grand Evolutionary purpose. Unless we wish to say that things evolve because they evolve, Evolution does not account for evolutions. Hence, 'it is impossible to attribute to Being the responsibility for the essential forms

[183] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, pp. 618–19.

of entities in the world' because the creative artistry evident from their design seems to aim at *this* kind of nature, this bird or fish form, and it takes a particular or unique mind to achieve particular or unique existents. It takes a *free* creativity, not a creativity like that of Being, which is *dependent* on the entities and thus bound by them, to make natural life forms. One has to be outside or heterogenic to a process in order to set off a new, innovatory move within it; so, as 'new' or unique forms, beings are distinct from Being. What mediates between the two, and guides the particular, natural life forms into the process of Nature, is some 'original', originating 'power', which is *more* than either beings or Being, more than particular life forms or the eco-system as a whole, and free with respect to both.

As in the first two distinctions, the *moreish* element in the third distinction, between beings and Being, is a freedom: the deliberate creation of forms requires the working of a free mind. 'Being' is just as it sounds, the impersonal *thereness* of all that is. Being is not self-aware, it is simply the 'actuality of all that is actual': such a necessity could not choose to 'generate' particular existents, for the third distinction indicates that this takes 'a conscious and free spirit'. Hence, Being itself has been shown to be 'hanging in the air as I found myself to be hanging in the air', and find all particular existents to be lacking an unconditioned ground. The fourth distinction is thus between the world and God. The guiding thread of the four distinctions is freedom: the child is free with respect to, or greater than, the givenness of its environment; Being is free with respect to particular things, since its greater light is what makes them knowable; the artistry within particular beings enters freely into the ecology of Being 'from above'. These mediating symbols indicate 'an *ultimate freedom* which neither Being (as non-subsistent) could have, nor the existent entity (since it always finds itself as already constituted in its own essentiality)'. This proof gives us a God who is neither intra-cosmic, a character confined within the internal necessities of the Story as a whole, nor a God so supernal he is beyond the legitimate reach of the world, and who is thus an extra-cosmic fate, the Story as external necessity. This is because, rather than showing one 'side' or the other, the empirical phenomena or the 'ideal', each of the distinctions shows the *relation* between one side and the other. By making the particular existent the catalyst to the discovery of an ever greater freedom, the argument comes home to roost in a particular and specific *content* or referent, and yet the 'ever-greater' to which each step points is entirely transcendent: the answer to Kant's conundrum is that 'God is the Wholly Other only as the Non-Aliud, the Not-Other', the transcendent Other who is wholly given in sensory, aesthetic symbols.[184] The four distinctions are

[184] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, pp. 625–6.

like 'scenes from metaphysical life', and in each one, the accent falls on the particular existent. 'Being' cannot account for the *moreish* quality of the particular symbols of the child, the tragic, the animal.

Von Balthasar discusses the mystery of 'why there is something rather than nothing' with an eye to the fact that the modern imagination perceives the human situation as what it calls 'tragic' (or what I have termed melodramatic), and that for this 'tragic' sense of life, tragedy consists in a *collision* between human freedom and absolute necessity. As Schelling wrote, 'The essence of *tragedy* is . . . a genuine conflict between freedom in the subject and objective necessity—a conflict that does not end with the defeat of one or the other but rather when both of them simultaneously become conquerors and conquered in the perfect Indifference.'[185] Since the Revolution of 1789, there have been many other revolts on behalf of human freedom against the God of necessity. A God who has a *reason* to create, like Leibniz's God, is the Supreme Reason. A slave to reason himself, such a God must enslave his creatures. Jenson sees that this God is an idol, and this is why he wants God to be, not a God of eternity and past time, but a God of futurity. He writes that, 'If God is to be at once God of history and changelessly eternal, he must be *the God of past history*, and this is what he became in the history of Christian religion. For of all the modes of time, it is the past which can be changeless, if it is not appropriated into a life lived from the future.'[186]

One is sometimes advised that, because its Scripture concludes with the Apocalypse, Christianity gave Western thought a 'sense of an ending'.[187] The strand of Western thinking in which the denouement dominates the horizon of history is 'apocalypticism'.[188] The *future* is the presiding genius of narrative theology. Such apocalypticism has had many avatars, both religious and secular. Secular apocalypticism was alive in the mind of the thinker who adapted his metaphysics to Newtonian physics: 'philosophy too', Kant said, 'may have its Millenarianism'. The usually pessimistic Prussian philosopher hoped that the Kingdom of God would emerge on earth through the progress in human rationality: he remarked that the 'gradual transition from ecclesiastical creed to the absolute sovereignty of pure religious faith is the approach

[185] Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, in *Werke*, vol. V, sec. 1, p. 693, cited from Szondi, 'The Notion of the Tragic in Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel', p. 45.

[186] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 22.

[187] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), ch. 1, 'The End'.

[188] See Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988): 'The tendency to find the all important end in an imminent crisis of the present world order and a decisive triumph of good over evil that is part of a divine plan may be termed "apocalypticism" ', p. 2.

of the Kingdom of God'. For Kant, 'pure religious faith' means faith in reason without the illogicalities of external, liturgical worship; published in 1792, Kant's *The Victory of the Good Principle over the Evil and the Establishment of the Kingdom upon Earth* was squarely aimed at the French Revolution.[189] The great symbols of the Revolutionary era, like David's *Marat Assassinated*, are melodramatic because, aiming to find unconditional meaning in events which do not rise to the occasion, their *pathos* is ultimately bathetic. Both tragic pathos and the grace which lifts the comic hero, like the narrator of Revelation, into heaven, require the wonder aroused by the *moreishness* of reality. This wonder is answered in the poet's gift of analogical symbolization. Analogical symbolization is a common human way of dealing with the experience of religation: most religions respond to the tension between finite and infinite with sacral or liturgical symbols.

Von Balthasar's analogies, from the delicious space which my mother gives to be myself, in relation to her, to the ecstatic dependence of beings upon Being, to the creative play of beings in their difference from Being, give us a mysterious God of freedom. The analogy of freedom, that '*analogia entis*' which appears, once the 'Four-Fold Mystery' is acknowledged, 'makes of the finite the shadow, trace, likeness and image of the Infinite'. The God of freedom is not an Unknown God, for, as Wilhelmsen observes,

> The universe of being *is* simply because God caused it to be. Why did God cause it? Because he willed to. Why did he so will? The question . . . is lost in the mystery of Divine Freedom. . . . the answer to this question is not a 'reason' but something transcending all reasons: love. There is being rather than nothing because there is love. Love is not a reason but it is a cause. . . . What being-*loved* makes being do is precisely *be*. . . . the metaphysically ultimate explanation for the universe of finite being is the love of God rather than His power.[190]

In von Balthasar's defence of God's existence, the particular defies the gravity of Being, and points to transcendent perfection. If there is anything more comic than embodiment, it is embodiment symbolizing transcendent perfection. When he claims that it took a 'slight touch of humour' for Ignatius to 'love' the Church, von Balthasar means, partly, the sense of black humour proper to infernal comedy; as also the 'wise patience' proper to purgatorial comedy.[191] The perfect analogy of paradisial comedy is attained in the Eucharist. The pious dictum that 'the Mass is like heaven' makes sense if one compares this ritual to eating a box of chocolates: once you eat one

[189] Quoted in Pieper, *The End of Time*, pp. 89 and 91. The latter became a chapter in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone.*

[190] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 138–9.

[191] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 110.

chocolate, you want to eat another, and another, and another.[192] The 'humor of the saints' is inseparable from 'the Catholic *and*'—the 'and' of analogy.[193] To find a Eucharistic feast in the Apocalypse is to read it as a paradisial comedy, in which the protagonist journeys into heaven. All types of comedies have paradisial thrusts—the Don Quixote to whom von Balthasar compares Ignatius of Loyola[194] achieves it by proxy when Sancho is helplessly tossed aloft from a blanket. The pilgrims in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* tell salacious stories on their way to Canterbury, or the new Jerusalem. The heart of paradisial comedy is the journey into heaven, and the lifting of the human *polis* heavenward—for it is *funny* that human life can thus be transubstantiated.

As paradisial 'analogy', the Eucharist mediates between heaven and earth. In the Eucharist, as comedy of revelation, temporal things are not vacuumed into heaven and neither is their human and physical reality vaporized. In Revelation, the New Jerusalem descends *from above*, and *so* one is immediately at home with its 'familiar' realities; its trees, fruits, and leaves grow with a fecundity to delight any gardener *because* they are 'transformed into heavenly realities'.[195] This will only sound like sheer paradox to those who have forgotten the perspicacious reader's comment on Thomas' Fourth Way, from the scale of perfections, '*it is the basis of analogical predication*'. Our ineluctable habit of evaluation by the mark of *perfection* exhibits our awareness of a paradisial aspect of reality, shining within the created world itself. For the believing Christian, the permanent marker of this analogical gradation between heaven and earth, the thing which sets everything in the cosmos in its place on an ascending scale, is the Eucharist:

> If Christ is the image of all images, it is impossible that he should not affect all the world's images by his presence, arranging them around himself. . . . what Christ brings with him is . . . the world of creation and redemption as a whole. His form imparts to the things of the world the right distance (to him and each other). The believer does not *believe* all of this; he *sees* it. . . . This his sensory environment . . . is . . . determined by the central image and event of Christ, so that . . . his . . . real and corporeal sense experience bring him into contact with that central point. . . . The reality of creation as a whole has become the monstrance of God's real presence.[196]

The Eucharist unveils the perfections in all things by allowing them to be themselves: 'the mystery of the Eucharist is able to disclose . . . the eschatological

[192] In a sermon by Fr Paul Watson, of the Maryvale Institute, Birmingham.

[193] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, trans. Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 306 and 303.

[194] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 174.

[195] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, p. 44.

[196] Von Balthasar, *Glory* I, pp. 419–20.

significance' of the stuff of human celebrations because it 'allows these realities their natural integrity in relation to God and thus in relation to the sacramental liturgy itself'.[197] Hence, in the heaven described and proleptically achieved in Revelation, 'the new world will remain *our* world', because of the very 'reciprocity of heaven and earth', their analogical relation.[198] If we read Revelation as paradisial comedy we can believe that, in heaven, our daily lives, including our animals,

> even what we call our 'drama'... will be *present*, not *past*. ... the One who sits upon the throne says, 'Behold, I make all things new.' Not: Behold I make a totally new set of things, but: Behold I refashion and renew all that is. And our faith tells us that this 'new' reality was already present in the 'old', in our drama, though in a hidden form: 'For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory' (Col 3.3 ff.) So what will be manifested in glory is the depth and truth of our present life. ... Our recalcitrance is sin, alienation and the lie; the core of the drama consists, not of such things but... of that interplay, that wealth of dialogic possibilities, that is found in the permanent, reciprocal relationship between finite freedom—once it has been finally liberated—and infinite freedom.[199]

We claimed, at the beginning of Chapter 2, that only *after* one has assimilated some information about God, has the time arrived when one can productively consider *how* one came to know this, or one's methodology. The method which we have followed is that of Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae*, as interpreted by Gilson and pushed on by von Balthasar. The practice followed by these authors is to begin from the given light of faith, in which a Christian knows all things, and, rather than looking back *at* the light (as the foundationalist does), considers all else *in* this God-given light. Thus, in the first question of the *Summa*, Thomas states that the operations of human theology are properly conducted in the light of God's self-knowledge, as imparted to us by revelation. The discussion of weak and sound arguments for the existence of God, in question 2, are what Gilson called 'Christian philosophy', reason investigating the *new world* which it is given by grace to see. By dint of faith, the believer is standing on a new territory, and by dint of reason he or she is able discursively to show it to a reasonable non-believer. As Gilson took it, Christian philosophy *believes* by *faith* in the God who called himself 'I am', in Exodus, and *proves* discursively that such a God exists. Other schools within the Thomist family have considered it perilous to contend that Christian reason operates in

[197] Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, p. 192.

[198] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, p. 413.

[199] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. V: *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), pp. 200–1.

the light of faith. They feel that a reason which sets off within *faith* begins by 'standing in the air' and can never touch ground. We think, to the contrary, that the method of 'reason plus faith later' is susceptible to preaching about contingency to fellow believers—that is, susceptible to foundationalist fideism.

Von Balthasar colours in the *factual* content of the acts of faith and reason. As his references to Simplicius and Plotinus attest, he was more open than Gilson to the idea that the acknowledgement of *uncreated being* proposed in the Fourth Way is available to non-Christian *reason*. His re-presentation of the argument is bolder at both ends of the spectrum of reason and faith. For, at the same time, what Barth calls an 'analogy of *faith*' is present throughout the argument. When reason oscillates between the sense of absolute contingency indicated in the second distinction and the problem of necessity proposed in the third, it has a choice. It could stay there, with Heidegger, facing the nothing. The fact which can yet haul the human animal back to the *real* is the ever-present anamnesis of the mother with her child. Faith is not dissoluble into an empty methodological act, for, with von Balthasar, faith *is* the personal, historical, and factual givenness of the mother's breast.

One of the most widespread images of Christian faith is an icon shared by East and West alike. As Hilaire Belloc once reflected, in a verse meditation on the *Salve Regina*: 'Prince Jesus in mine Agony / Permit me, broken and defiled / Through blurred and glazing eyes to see / A female figure with a child.'[200] It is the analogy of grace, the givenness of the mother's love, which nudges us not to abandon ourselves to a 'tragic' nihilism. It is this triumph of the comedy of existence which preserves, within itself, against the magnetism of melodrama, the world of tragedy. Like the Battle of Waterloo, choosing to wager on life rather than death is, as the Duke of Wellington remarked, 'a close run thing; the nicest damn thing you ever saw in your life'.

[200] Hilaire Belloc, 'Ballade of Illegal Ornaments.'

6

Cinematizing the Trinity

> But in that terrific tale of the Passion there is a distinct emotional suggestion that the author of all things (in some unthinkable way) went not only through agony, but through doubt. . . . He passed in some superhuman manner through our human horror of pessimism. When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God . . . let the atheists themselves choose a God. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God for an instant seemed to be an atheist.
>
> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

1. Introduction: Modalism, Tritheism, and Psychologism

Believing as it does in one God who is three persons, Christian theology has to steer clear both of modalism and of tritheism. Modalism merges the three persons into the one God. Tritheism so far differentiates the persons as to produce three deities. With its connotations of an Olympian pantheon, 'tritheism' sounds too colourful to be of great appeal to the unpoetical minds of academic theologians. But tritheism has recurrently emerged in the history of Christianity by dint of a conception of the Trinity which subordinated the Son, or the Holy Spirit, to the Father—leaving enough 'deity' to one or both to align them with the divine realm in some sense, but not enough to identify their being with that of the Father. Nicaea ruled subordinationism out of court by affirming that the Son is 'one in being' with the Father. From Augustine on, Western Trinitarian theology constructed a *Trinitarian monotheism* which harnesses the category of relation to ensure sufficient distinctness amongst the persons to avoid modalism, and which holds fast to the unity of God by reading the scriptural affirmations that God is One through a speculative metaphysics.

Two of the driving currents of modern Trinitarian theology have been, first, through Barth, a regrouping around the scriptural and descriptive motifs of

the Trinity, and, second, through Rahner, an intensification of the focus of Trinitarian theology on God's actions in history. The narrative theologies which have navigated these winds depart from Trinitarian monotheism in important ways. Since the writings of Karl Barth, the Scylla of tritheism has towered higher than the Charybdis of modalism in the thinking of modern theologians. Thus, it is not uncommon to regard deviations from Trinitarian monotheism, such as those apparent in the writings of Jenson, as tritheistic in execution if not intention. We disagree.

The cinema theorists like Rudolf Arneim who considered the 'arrival of sound as a misfortune because it removed film from the sphere of the purely visual'[1] may have been less attentive than the student to whom I showed his first 'silent': 'It's like an opera', he said. The movie was Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. In keeping with the low-brow tone of this book, we shall illustrate what we take to be the cinematization of the Trinity in Thomistic and Barthian narrative theology by reference to an Ealing comedy. We think that narrative Trinitarianism tends, not to tritheism, but to *modalism*. Dennis Price makes his entrance in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* playing Mazzini, an opera singer who captures the heart of a D'Ascoyne girl by singing an aria from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The pair elope, but happy married life is debarred when the Italian drops dead at the sight of his new-born son. Price's main role in the movie is as Louis Mazzini, vowed to avenge the D'Ascoynes' disinheritance of his mother, who becomes a 'Don Giovanni of murder, ... addicted to the open aesthetic of possibility'.[2] Kierkegaard made Don Giovanni a symbol of the aesthetic life, an outsider to ethics, and to faith. The musical aesthete's take on the Trinity is modalistic: *Kind Hearts* illustrates this theme because all of the D'Ascoynes are played by a single actor, Alec Guinness.

We will begin by examining Trinitarian monotheism, and its strategies for avoiding modalism. We will contrast this with the recent biblical-descriptive methodologies of writers such as Herbert McCabe and Robert Jenson. We have mentioned Karl Barth's doctrine that Christ is the plenal self-description of God—a notion which he developed in debate with Calvinist predestinarianism.[3] The *content* of this affirmation is not controversial; it only becomes problematic when strategically manipulated to entail that our *knowledge* of Christ in history controls Christ's historical acts. The upshot is a modalist cinematization of the Trinity. Concurring with Barth on the need to recoup biblical description, we think his *descriptive Trinitarianism* is necessary but not sufficient.

[1] Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, p. 111.

[2] Michael Newton, *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003): 'The aria that Louis's father sings, "Il mio tesoro intanto", is Don Ottavio's vow of revenge against Don Giovanni, for his treatment of Donna Anna', p. 64.

[3] See above, Chapter 1, section 3.

For the Barthian, with his principled proscription of metaphysical argument for God's existence, philosophical theism must be discounted as a human auto-projection. Unable to draw on the knowledge that *creation itself* indicates a single Creator, one must always be on the lookout for tritheism. At the same time, the unity of God must be carried by the 'biblical story'. The defect in descriptive Trinitarianism is that it has a psychological conception of what it is like for the Triune God to be *one*. Thinking it no slur on a theologian's reputation to be deemed a monotheist, we see no purchase in the recent trend of 'hyper-Trinitarianism'.[4] There is, as von Balthasar remarks, 'not much point' in

> throwing stones at the West, particularly at Augustine, accusing him of 'essentialism', that is, of regarding the processions as coming from the one divine essence; in his writings . . . he does nothing but expound the inner richness of this unity in its Trinity. How could a theologian, thinking in the biblical perspective, do other than start with the one God . . . ? He would have to do this in order to contemplate God's threeness within the unity, however inadequate his creaturely metaphors for it might be. . . . Augustine . . . recognized the limits of these metaphors; nor did they hinder Thomas from developing his doctrine of the Hypostases in the context of the one God.[5]

When Augustine or Aquinas prove that God exists, they simultaneously show that the infinite desire for 'something' which drives all human thinking and action is anchored to a *real* Author of human desire. Henri de Lubac's belief that human nature is always already graced, always already called, indicates that the infinite, Reepicheepian desire for heaven is provoked by heaven's desire for us; it responds to God's love. As von Balthasar presents the proof, it orients us toward a Creator whose *one* act of being is an act of love. He is cognizant of the fact that 'No religious philosophy invented by man could dare to make the bold Johannine statement that "God is love."'[6] His proofs

[4] Milbank, 'Truth and Vision', p. 53.

[5] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 216. For recent, historical, text-based defences of the Trinitarian theology of Augustine and Aquinas, see for instance, Lewis Ayres, '"Remember that You are Catholic" (Serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8/1 (2000), 39–82; Lewis Ayres, 'Augustine, the Trinity and Modernity', *Augustinian Studies* 26/2 (1995), 127–33; Michel René Barnes, 'De Régnon Reconsidered', *Augustinian Studies* 26/2 (1995), 51–79; Michel René Barnes, 'Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology', *Theological Studies* 56 (1995); Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985); Edmund Hill, 'Karl Rahner's Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate* and St. Augustine', *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971), 67–80; Gilles Emery, *La Trinité Créatrice: Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d'Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert Le Grand et Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin, 1995); Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Sarah Hearner Lancaster, 'Three-Personed Substance: The Relational Essence of the Triune God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*', *The Thomist* 60 (1996), 123–39.

[6] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, pp. 445–6.

are those of a *Christian* philosopher. They are the arguments of one who knows by faith which harbour he intends to find when his reason takes up the paddle. His arguments do not stem from deductive principles but from the 'endeavor simply to look at reality', in the hope that working through the evidence will enable us to 'see in the natural realm a breadth . . . and multiplicity that will prepare us to appreciate fully the work of grace, which uses this whole plenitude to exhibit itself'.[7]

The advantage of the tradition of Trinitarian monotheism is that it enables itself to draw upon created analogies. Building on more than a merely stipulated metaphysics of revelation, it can draw real metaphysical conclusions into its revealed, Trinitarian theology. The drawback in this more ancient, Western tradition is the reverse of that in descriptive Trinitarianism: it tends toward a psychological conception of what it would mean for the one God to be *three*. Augustine and the tradition which followed him took as their primary analogy for the Trinity the act of the single mind or memory which knows and wills itself.[8] Both the Western and the Eastern 'lungs' of Christianity have 'taken it as a datum of revelation that there are not three Gods', since Scripture states, in the Vulgate, that 'For there are three that bear witness in Heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one' (1 John 5.7). But, because of its psychological analogy for the Trinity, the West has understood the first member of this statement through the lens of the second.[9] Although he regards the Eastern criticisms of the Western tradition as 'formalistic', von Balthasar recognizes that their 'objections' call for a serious response: 'the name of "Love" given to God by John (I Jn 4.8, 16), a name that must presuppose, not numerical, but transcendental plurality, if it is to go beyond mere self-love (*dilectio*) and become *caritas*'.[10] To get here, one must do something profoundly 'Greek', and understand love not only as an inner volitional power, but ontologically, as the very energy of the pure act of God's being. What the 'Greeks' bring to the table is a non-psychological notion of love, an idea of love as sheer energy. For the West, 'love' tends to be understood as 'an aspiration of the soul, ascribed preferentially to the will', whereas the East, drawing on the most realistic side of Aristotle, considers it as 'the metaphysical basis of every activity, because essentially all being tends to perfection'.[11]

It is as one act of love that God is God in three persons. One cannot *know* philosophically, or without revelation, that God is Triune. But both desire and

[7] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* I, p. 14.
[8] Augustine, *De Trinitate* IX.1.4; IX.1.8; IX.2.14; IX.3.17; IX.4.18.
[9] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 373.
[10] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 217.
[11] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 373.

rational argument point us in the direction of a Being who is open to the idea. Confident in the knowledge of the one Creator God of love, one can draw in the content garnered via Barth's redirection of Trinitarian theology to the biblical descriptions of God, and thence the historic actions of the economic Trinity, without going in fear of tritheism. Just as we are created in Christ, so we are redeemed in him; the pattern of creation tracks the form of redemption. There is no reason to be so fearful of 'Creationism' that one makes the economic mission of the Son an alien expatriation and Incarnation a language foreign to a monoglot God:

> the incarnate Word comes into 'his own property' (Jn 1.11). ... he does not travel merely into a foreign land (as Karl Barth says) but into a country whose language he knows; not only the Galilean version of Aramaic he learns as a child in Nazareth, but ... the ontological language of creatureliness as such. ... Jesus is not a distorted image but the pure truth, because he gives the adequate exposition of the Father in worldly *Gestalt*.[12]

The chapter will conclude by outlining a *monotheistic Trinitarianism*. Just as we radicalized the efforts of the grammatical Thomists to prove God's existence by taking the issue back to particular empirical existents, so, here, we go to the roots of the story Barthians' desire to speak descriptively of the Trinity. In both cases, the aim is to have something concrete, perhaps even poetical, to say about the God whom Christians worship.

2. What You See is What You Get: Herbert McCabe

In the *De Trinitate*, Saint Augustine refuses to identify any sole person of the Trinity with any one of the events described by the Christian Scripture. So as to prevent us from imagining that we can physically see 'more' of any one person of the Trinity in any temporal phase of the biblical history, Augustine claims, for instance, that what some of his predecessors had taken to be the manifestation of the Son 'in a flame of fire from the bush' in Exodus could have been achieved by the divine 'requisitioning' of 'some created thing ... to appear visibly for the business of the moment, and to produce audible voices which would convey the presence of the Lord by creature control as needed, even to a man's physical senses'.[13] Augustine finds it preferable to think of miracles as operated by remote control than as material manifestations of the divine.

The result is that what the Bible actually *describes* is not God but the miraculous *history* engineered by God. David Kelsey contrasts two ways of

[12] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 84.

[13] Augustine, *De Trinitate* II.4.20.

'authorizing' or giving a methodological basis for theological ideas: 'One way is to construe the narrative as historical recital, and the other is to see it as a story rendering an agent.'[14] Where Augustine's method can be aligned with the first, narrative theology goes with the second. The 'agent' presented by the biblical story is taken to be God; story theology uses the Bible to deduce the interactions of Father, Son, and Spirit. This could explain the difference between the manoeuvres Augustine took to avoid thinking of the scriptural history as a description of God with Herbert McCabe's approach to the matter. For Father McCabe, the biblical history 'projects' the eternal life of the Trinity. This grammatical Thomist writes that,

> the doctrine of the incarnation is such that the story of Jesus is not just the story of God's involvement with his creatures but . . . is actually the 'story' of God. There is one sense in which we must say that God has no life-story . . . but there is also a sense, the only sense, in which God has or is a life-story, and this is the story revealed in the incarnation and it is the story we also call the Trinity. The story of Jesus is nothing other than the triune life of God projected onto our history, or enacted sacramentally in our history, so that it becomes story. I use the word 'projected' in the sense that we project a film onto a screen. If it is a smooth silver screen you see the film simply in itself. If the screen is twisted in some way, you get a systematically distorted image of the film. The story of Jesus—which in its full extent is the entire Bible—is the projection of the Trinitarian life of God on the rubbish dump we have made of the world. The historical mission of Jesus is nothing other than the eternal mission of the Son from the Father; the historical outpouring of the Spirit in virtue of the passion, death and ascension of Jesus is nothing but the eternal outpouring of the Spirit from the Father through the Son. Watching, so to say, the story of Jesus, we are watching the procession of the Trinity. That the missions in time of Son and Spirit reflect the eternal relations is . . . traditional teaching. What I am venturing to suggest is that they are not just reflection but sacrament—they contain the reality they signify. The mission of Jesus is *nothing other* than the eternal generation of the Son. That the Trinity looks like a story of (*is* a story of) rejection, torture and murder but also of reconciliation is because it is being projected on, lived out on, our rubbish tip; it is because of the sin of the world.[15]

For some, what will seem problematic in this metaphor is that it is difficult to say that the biblical history projects the life of God, without asserting that it *is* the life of God, and thus that God *becomes* as a movie does, through a sequence of slides. That is, the Augustinian may be concerned by the apparently dramatic quality of McCabe's description. Others will find it imaginatively captivating to consider that 'the whole set of stories narrated in the Bible is nothing other than the interior life of the triune God visible (to the eyes of faith) in our

[14] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 32.

[15] McCabe, *God Matters*, pp. 48–9.

history'.[16] We will take neither position: our contention is that the cinematic metaphor effaces all trace of personal drama from the Triune life.

3. Three Strategies in Trinitarian Theology

Each Christian theologian has developed different sets of tactics, aimed at strategically circumventing what strikes him as a worst-case Trinitarian scenario. A tactic is a *means*, open-ended and capable of being used toward achieving a variety of different results. Having a strategy entails knowing what one would like the game to look like at the end of play: it hypothetically includes its target or end. Whereas similar tactics can be used to achieve different results, having a strategy requires knowing the *target* of one's endeavour.

For the Western tradition since Augustine, a basic strategy has been to avoid modalism, or the reduction of the Trinity to a single substratum, out of which Father, Son, and Spirit emerge in that chronological order. Conversely, there are those who have seen the 'Other' to authentic Christian theology as tritheism, the expansion of God into three separate deities. More recently, the enemy to a full-blooded Christian acknowledgement of the Trinity has been perceived as the occlusion of the three-personed God of the biblical history into a vanishing metaphysical eternity. Each of these positions has developed its own intellectual manoeuvres, tactics by which the strategic error is set out of bounds.

In the early days of Trinitarian theology, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus drew on various Old Testament scenes to prove to the Gnostics that the Son and the Holy Spirit make their first, walk-on appearances to the Jews, in the Old Testament. Irenaeus thinks it was the Second Person of the Trinity who gave Noah the measurements for the Ark, and who spoke to Moses from the Burning bush.[17] The ladder of which Jacob dreamed ascended to *Christ*, for 'all visions of this kind signify the Son of God, in His speaking with men and being with them; for it is not the Father of all, who is seen by the world, the Creator of all . . . it is not He who would stand circumscribed and speak with Abraham, but the Word of God, who was always with mankind . . . and acquainted man with God'.[18] It was appropriate, Irenaeus imagines, for Christ the Son to appear to the Patriarchs, because *visibility* is of his *character*, just as the decorum of invisibility is proper to the Father: 'the Father is the invisibility of the Son, and the Son is the visibility of the Father'.[19]

[16] McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 51.

[17] Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity*, p. 48.

[18] Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 45: 'Theophanies are of the Son'.

[19] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haeresis* IV.6.6.

Because God the Son is most imaginatively apparent in the New Testament, these Apologists' efforts to secure the Old Testament for Christianity, and their defence of the Creator God against the Gnostics, gave the unfortunate impression that the Father of Jesus Christ is the 'God of the Old Testament'. One then has a sequential *trio* of divine agents: the Father has the Old Covenant, the Son comes on screen for the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit is allotted the times of the Church. Such a series of agencies seems to imply that each divine person disappears after his Act is done, or that each is absorbed into his successor. Back of the historical *Trio*, however, there could yet be a single, personally undifferentiated Deity.

Hence, Irenaeus' approach to the Trinity inadvertently gave birth to the idea of Father, Son, and Spirit as *modes* of the One God, experienced in different time-phases by us, but actually one and the same, within the higher unity of the divine being. Tertullian (160–220) led a counter-attack against modalism. In the *Adversus Praxeam*, he tried to restore difference between the divine persons by anchoring it in their historical actions. But the path which patristic and medieval theology ultimately trod was not that of Tertullian: it belonged rather to Augustine. It was to be the eternal processions and the relations to which they give rise which defined what is irreducibly unique to each person of the Trinity; the historical sendings are said to *reflect* these eternal processions and relations.

We can ascribe the *tactic* which we have already seen Augustine employing in the *De Trinitate* to his strategy of avoiding *modalism*. Augustine thought that theologians like Irenaeus had been led into modalism by thinking that the greater or lesser visual definition of the Trinitarian persons has theological significance, or that it serves to define the persons metaphysically. He would proceed differently. The insight of the seventh book of the *Confessions* had been that psychological efforts to *imagine* God fail because, metaphysically, God *is* not in space or in time. *The City of God* argues that pagan dramaturgy and cult incited worshippers to regard the divine as an Image, and mocks the polytheistic consequences, such as battles amongst the members of the Roman pantheon:[20] because imagination cannot indwell the transcendent divine, it is psychologically incapable of knowing that God *is* One. The tactical deprecation of imagination on display in the *Confessions* and *The City of God* is drawn into the *De Trinitate*'s strategy of preventing one divine person from visually upstaging the others, at any given point within the biblical history.

It was in order to take Trinitarian tradition beyond the modalist impasse that Augustine mocked the idea that different Trinitarian actors can

[20] Augustine, *City of God* II.25; VI.6; VIII.5.

be espied in the various scenes of the Pentateuch: he cannot tell how one could see which of the three persons appeared in human 'guise' to Adam, or to Abraham, or to Moses.[21] Augustine interprets theophanies, like that to Moses in the Burning Bush, or the guidance of the Israelites '*in a pillar of cloud by day, and by night in a pillar of fire*' as stage-effects, whereby God uses a physical object to symbolize his presence. No one could be 'crazy' enough to apportion the smoke, lightning, and the trumpets to different Trinitarian actors: for such material, changeable things cannot be 'the very substance of the Word and Wisdom of God . . . or of the Holy Spirit'.[22] For Augustine, the material facts of history cannot serve as markers of the distinctness of the three persons in God, because, even though 'the Lord Spoke to Moses face to face' (Exod. 33.11), nonetheless, 'whoever saw God the Father with his physical eyes? And who ever saw with his physical eyes the Word . . . And who ever saw the Spirit of Wisdom with his physical eyes?'[23] Augustine makes the divine persons appear anonymously in Old Covenant history so that we don't 'type-cast' the Trinitarian persons in terms of how they 'look' on screen. Resolutely rejecting the descriptive qualities of Irenaeus' Trinitarian theology, Augustine thinks that 'material analogies' are precisely what makes us imagine the divine 'persons as somehow limited and the divinity as infinite'.[24] For Augustine, the tactic of preventing visual close-ups of the divine persons from garnering theological significance serves the ultimate design of bypassing modalism. Because, as he thinks, visibility doesn't secure a genuine metaphysical differentiation of the persons, *seeing* God as three separate actors, each presiding over a distinct block of covenant history, will give us a deity in whom tri-personality is subsumed into Unity.

Augustine's intuition is that what we *see* can be deceptive: think of how Alec Guinness plays eight members of the D'Ascoyne family in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. In *modalist* conceptions of God, a single divine Unit dresses in a sequence of costumes, expressing diverse 'modalities' of himself as he goes. The single bearer may draw out differing motivations in his various roles, but they all conceal one and the same strolling player. Like Alec Guinness himself, the modalist God has a 'chameleon character'[25] under which lies an anonymous or faceless 'personality'. Augustine reads the scriptural affirmation that there is only one God in and through a metaphysics of unity. This

[21] Augustine, *De Trinitate* II.4.17, 19, 20. [22] Ibid. II.4.24. [23] Ibid. II.4.27.

[24] Lewis Ayres, 'The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology', in Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (eds.), *Augustine and his Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 61–2.

[25] Newton, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, p. 55.

'meta-biblical' stereoscope gave us the Trinitarian monotheism which became normative in the West.

We should note that Augustine is considering the matter of the scriptural record psychologically, or, at least, from an anthropological perspective. His concern is not with what *God does* (the divine deeds and theophanies), but with a warning about the incapacity of *human* seeing and visualization to rise to the order of metaphysical reflection. By contrast, Irenaeus' account of salvation history is slanted, not to any epistemological impression which the biblical scenarios may make on human beings, but to the divine *protagonist*. There is a certain biblical richness to his idea of the Trinity:

> the Father is Lord, and the Son is Lord, and the Father is God and the Son is God; for He who is born of God is God. And thus God is shown to be one according to the essence of His being and power; but at the same time, as the administrator of the economy of our redemption, He is both Father and Son: since the Father of all is invisible and inaccessible to creatures, it is through the Son that those who are to approach God must have access to the Father. Moreover David speaks . . . most manifestly of the Father and Son . . . : *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; Thou hast loved justice, and hated iniquity, therefore God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.* For this means that the Son, being God, receives from the Father, that is, from God, the throne of the everlasting kingdom, and the oil of anointing above his fellows. And 'oil of anointing' is the Spirit, through whom He is the anointed, and 'His fellows' are the prophets and the just and the apostles, and all who receive fellowship of His kingdom, that is, His disciples.[26]

Was anything lost when this imaginative *and* ontological approach was set aside? If the answer is affirmative, then a natural response would be to retrieve the Irenaean richness by returning to the narrative. Christian biblical scholars of a literary bent were eager to emulate the success of great Jewish literary critics like Robert Alter, who gave us close readings of the prose and poetry of the Hebrew Bible. But, whereas Alter could easily tell us what *Jahweh* is doing in the Exodus, it was less clear to the Christians *who* to designate as the divine protagonist of the New Testament story. For the only narratively outstanding divine character in the Gospels is Jesus. Whilst one can infer that the agent of the resurrection is the Father, he performs from behind the scenes—and he is designated as the 'raiser' of Jesus by Paul, not in the Gospel 'stories'. This invisible 'raising', and the two voice-overs of the Baptism and Transfiguration, is not much to be going on, in imaginative terms. For a narrative theologian like Thiemann, this rightly goes to show that the narrative affirms not only the divine expressivity, its outering in story, but God's 'hiddenness', and through that, the very distinction between ' "immanent" and "economic" trinity. That

[26] Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 47: 'The Trinity and Creatures'.

distinction guards both the hiddenness and the presence of God's identity, because it asserts that the self-differentiated unity we observe in God's narrative relations is a reiteration of God's inner but hidden identity. The narrative description of God . . . shows us God's "immanent" identity though in "economic" depiction. God's hiddenness is not some elusive self lurking behind or beyond the narrative depiction. God's hiddenness is simply a quality of God which the shape of the narrative itself indicates.'[27] If the Gospel narratives make the Father stand for the hidden or immanent Trinity, descriptive Trinitarianism can resonate with the Irenaean 'the Father is the invisibility of the Son, and the Son is the visibility of the Father'.[28] Given that this is what Scripture shows and tells (John 14.9-11), Irenaeus probably had a point. But a problem will certainly arise if, taking the terms descriptively rather than metaphysically, we equate 'invisibility' and 'visibility' with the Father's and the Son's ways of being *to our vision or imagination*. For that identifies what the divine persons are in themselves with what they are to us. Augustine read the biblical descriptions of God alongside a metaphysical notion of what *can and cannot reasonably be ascribed to God* in order to avoid equating God with our material methods of seeing and thus with a material object.

For Karl Barth, the twentieth-century analogy to Augustine's sense of the danger of imagining the Trinity is that of *psychologizing* it. Just as Augustine downplayed the specific visibility of any one member of the Trinity, so Barth wanted to undercut the modern, novel-reader's habit of considering particular behaviours as the outcome of a particular psychology. But, whereas Augustine's tactic was to detail a wider disapproval of imagination into the strategic circumvention of modalism, part of the Swiss theologian's strategy was to deter Christians from forming *tritheistic* images of the Trinity. The problem as Barth saw it was that moderns interpret the term 'person' psychologically: thus construed, three persons would require three distinct divine *psychologies* (or *psyches*). A defender of many Augustinian moves in Trinitarian theology, such as the *filioque*, Barth nonetheless considered that the patristic tradition of speaking of the Three as *persons* leads modern people to conceive the Trinity as a *Trio* of distinct individual psyches. Barth thought that 'persons' had worked for the ancients, but that, since the nineteenth century, it had inadvertently oriented Christians toward tritheism and that less misleading expressions should therefore be applied, such as 'modes' or 'ways'. Convinced that the principles which had inspired patristic, medieval, and Reformed Trinitarian theology could be better articulated today with

[27] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 139.

[28] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haeresis* IV.20.5.

a fresh terminology, Barth affirmed that, 'The statement that God is One in three ways of being, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, means . . . that the one God, i.e., the one Lord, the one personal God, is what He is not just in one mode but . . . in the mode of the Father, in the mode of the Son, and in the mode of the Holy Ghost.'[29]

For Barth himself, as an opponent of tritheism, the most serious peril in Trinitarian theology is enabling each of the divine persons to provide us with a different psychological reading, so that we mistake unity for *plurality*. According to Richard Roberts, 'it is above all the unity of the Godhead' which Barth looks to 'confirm' in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*.[30] Why does the strategy of preserving the *unity* of God appear more important to Barth than that of giving a metaphysical underpinning to the *tri-personality*, as with Augustine? Barth has to continue addressing tritheism because he cannot relax into the assured knowledge of the unity of God. Augustine's culture, as with 'the books of the Platonists' which he credits in the *Confessions* with guiding him toward the single 'I am that I am' of Exodus, taught him that philosophical meditation can so transcend material things and their images as to attain the one God. The target of the *Confessions* is then knitted into the overall strategy of the *De Trinitate* as a mere *tactic*: he writes it knowing that one God exists and that He Who Is is not who he is by dint of the images we form of him. Conversely, Barth learned from the semi-secular and liberal Protestant culture of early twentieth-century Europe that Christians slip into psychological self-projection the moment they launch upon apologetic defences of God's existence. Where Augustine's pilgrimage had included Plotinus, Exodus, and Romans, Barth's journey includes Romans but must exclude Feuerbach. With Plotinus as well as Scripture behind him, Augustine sets out to explore the Trinity with the transcendent '*unicum*' under his belt.[31] If knowledge of the existence of the one God is not implicated within one's Trinitarian theology, then psychological or epistemological manoeuvres aimed at circumventing a God who could be reduced to a human psychic projection must be retained as part of one's overall Trinitarian *strategy*. Barth is as wary of psychological projection as he is of Tritheism. His strategy is aimed partly at God and partly at what people should or should not say or think about God.

Unlike Augustine, Barth does not hesitate to incorporate descriptive and imaginative notes into his doctrine of the Trinity, so long as he can take them to be scriptural, or revealed. He does not fear a pictorial or narrative

[29] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, pp. 355–8 and 359.
[30] Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', pp. 106–7.
[31] Von Balthasar, *Glory* V, p. 625.

description, but only the human orientation to psychic self-projection. For *biblical* narrative is, as Barth takes it, objectively given. This stipulation enables him to build a theology of the Trinity on the biblical picture of God. It also requires him to see God acting 'unitively', for God's actions and operations, as described in Scripture, *are* the unity of God. As Roberts puts it: 'Barth must at all costs preserve the unity of the divine act, for "all God's operation, as we are bound to conceive it on the basis of this revelation, is a single act, occurring simultaneously and unitedly in all His three modes of existence"... The unity of Barth's theological scheme can only be preserved if the unity of the divine act is sustained, because the doctrine of God's being-in-act is the ontological *fundamentum* of the *Church Dogmatics*.'[32] Moreover, the idea that God's being *is* an act could be defined more precisely as the idea that God's being is a *describable event*. The metaphysical word 'act' has no temporal markers; the term 'event' does.

More recently, and partly because of these nudges from the *Church Dogmatics*, theologians have taken issue with the tendency to construe the Trinity from an excessively un-historical perspective, bypassing the access given to God's nature by the historical missions of Son and Spirit for the eternal processions within the transcendent Trinity. In the mid-twentieth century, Karl Rahner delivered the adage, 'the Trinity of the economy *is* the immanent Trinity and vice versa'.[33] This expressed his anxiety that Western Christian theology had severed the transcendent, eternal God from the God made known to us in the history of salvation. Here, the tactic of giving due attention to the historical missions of Son and Spirit serves the strategic purpose of attaining a conception of God which is attuned to the way human beings have achieved the belief that God is triune, that is, through history. Rahner's remedy encouraged theologians to dig further into causes and solutions to the apparent error. The finger was often pointed at Augustine, whose Trinitarian theology was deemed by Colin Gunton and many others to have spurred the tendency 'to draw apart the being of God—what he is eternally—and his act—what he does in time'.[34]

Augustine, and the Western tradition which appropriated and deepened his Trinitarian thought, had distinguished the persons of the Trinity by means of a metaphysical analysis of the relations pertaining amongst the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From the 1970s, theologians began to assert that these relations, and the eternal processions from which they spring, ought not to be the primary means by which we understand the Trinitarian persons: rather,

[32] Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', p. 107.
[33] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* IV, p. 87.
[34] Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 3.

Trinitarian theology should be initiated by the historical marks which the persons of the Trinity had left in their wake. Narrative theologians expressed this intuition by speaking of the Trinitarian persons as three characters, each with a detectable role in the biblical narrative. Much of this rethinking of the Trinity deprecates Augustine's contribution to Western theology, as with the claim that it was the Bishop of Hippo who misled the West into believing that we can know the relations which constitute God as triune without adverting to history.[35] In the half-century after Rahner's and Barth's initiatives, three issues in particular have been highlighted: first, that salvation *history* rather than *eternity* should be our signpost to the naming of the Trinitarian persons; second, that the Trinitarian persons can be interpreted less like *relations* and more like relationships; and, thirdly, therefore, that 'Father', 'Son', and 'Spirit' can be understood as *descriptions* of these relationships.

This came about through a combination of the intentions of steering clear of modalism and of avoiding an 'eternalizing' conception of the Trinity. We can see this in the way that Nicholas Lash took up the preference for naming the Trinity as three 'modes' of God's divinity. Lash remarks that there 'is no doubt whatsoever... but that the arguments for ceasing to speak of "persons" in Trinitarian theology greatly outweigh those in favour of the term's retention'. We moderns have an overriding tendency to imagine that 'a person is an individual agent': so to begin with three *persons* is to conclude to three agents. Lash regards the use of the less colourful term 'modes' as a way around the 'modalist' notion for which 'God' is a single 'agent acting in three episodes': 'First, God makes the world, then we make a mess of it which God sends his Son to clean up and, thirdly, God sends his Spirit to bring us back to him through faith and sacraments and holiness.'[36] Grammatical Thomism and story Barthianism appear to have taken the evasion of modalism as a central motif. But they have gone about it differently from Augustine.

In traditional Christian theology, each subsistent divine person corresponds to a relation: the Father as Son⇨Begetter and Spirit⇨Breather, the Son as Father⇦begotten-Spirit⇨Breather, and the Spirit as Father/Son⇦ breathed. One may draw them, thus, with pedagogical arrows attached, but, from the Cappadocians and Augustine to Aquinas, the oppositional relations within the Trinity are terms in *logic*—not picturable at all.[37] As Trinitarian

[35] Barnes, 'Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology', p. 237.

[36] Lash, *Believing Three Ways*, pp. 30–1.

[37] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 28, a. 3: 'although paternity, just as filiation, is really the same as the divine essence, nonetheless, these two in their own proper idea and definitions import opposite respects'. That is, paternity and filiation are *definitionally* opposed. In q. 32, a. 2, Thomas remarks that, 'there is no reason against our admitting in God many logical relations'.

monotheists conceive them, the intra-Trinitarian relations are *logical* and are therefore not *analogous* to anything in creation. It's important to grasp the distinction, and one way to start is to think back to the intra-Thomistic debates about the character of our language for God. We have seen that for one strand of Thomistic thinking, which runs from McInerny to Burrell and has repercussions in Lindbeck, our language for God has to be *negative* only. The reasoning behind this is that the notion of an '*analogy of being*', and thus of analogical language, is a late, baroque invention. For Thomas, this line in Thomistic exegesis argues, analogy is a *logical* category, not an ontological one. As we have seen, those who accept this view of Thomas on religious language consider that God can only be named negatively. It's certainly true that the Cappadocians and then Augustine took over *relation* as a category from Aristotle's metaphysics, and transferred it to the Trinity. For Aristotle, relation is a logical category. The relations between substances are not themselves 'substantial', but logical. The relation of one substance to another does not add a new substance to reality; it just requires the inclusion of the category of relation within logic. Augustine proposed that, although relations between creaturely substances are purely logical, nonetheless, in God, relation is *real*. By the time Augustine composed *De Trinitate*, in partial dependence on the Cappadocians, 'substantiality in Trinitarian terminology is primarily logical, designed both to establish a structure of relationship between the Biblical Trinitarian terminology and also to provide a philosophical focus which will demonstrate how one can make theological sense of the story of the economy'.[38] It follows that the *real* relations of Father, Son, and Spirit can have no *ontological* created analogate. For relation is real in God but purely logical amongst creaturely things. With Augustine, Thomas argues that the *relations* in God are not ontologically analogous to created relations. Jenson wholly misdescribes the Augustinian tradition when he objects to the fact that, within it, '"Persons" and "relations" are taken to be a reality in God describable by *analogy* from temporal reality.'[39] For Augustine and Thomas, we have no proper analogy for the divine relations, because, real in God and logical in creatures, 'relation' is used equivocally as of God and creatures. It is even interesting to wonder whether one strand of our Thomist family felt it legitimate to prescind from what Thomas says about the positive character of our language for God because, for Thomas, what is most real in God—relation—is ontologically equivocal with respect to creatures.

This is one of the reasons why twentieth-century theologians have believed that the Augustinian tradition tends to detach itself into an empty

[38] Ayres, 'Augustine, the Trinity and Modernity', p. 130.
[39] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, pp. 127–8.

consideration of *eternal relations*, making the historical missions a secondary *illustration* of these timeless logical truths. Barth aimed to move *relation* out of the sphere of logic. His 'modes' or 'ways' really are *directives*: a way is a way *to*, for instance. The Father is a way of being *to* the Son; the Son is, for Barth, a 'direction downward' as from the Father.[40] Barth's picture of the Trinitarian relations is deliberately 'anthropomorphic', or imaginable because he's trying to show us that, in God, relation is most perfectly *real* within the Trinity. Tucked into the analogy of faith, the notion that relation is at its 'truest' amongst Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ought to imply that the Trinitarian relations perfect or cause created relations, and thus that, rather than being merely logical, created relations have a purchase on truth or reality. Taking up this hint, von Balthasar proposes that the Trinitarian relations *are* analogous to created relations. For von Balthasar, we find the created analogate to the divine, intra-Trinitarian relations in the *real distinction* of essence and existence. Healy brings this out succinctly: 'Whereas for Thomas the real distinction functions as a principle by which the creature is distinguished from God, in Balthasar's writings the distinction also becomes a positive image of God—the love of God for creation, and, more profoundly, the love within the Trinity.'[41] The real distinction of essence and existence within creaturely existents is garnered within both Thomas' and von Balthasar's proofs of God's existence, but the modern philosophical theologian made the distinction wield a positive analogy to the God who is known as love.

The narrative theologians draw something quite different from Barth. The side of him which they emphasize is not the analogous character of the intra-Trinitarian relations, but their impersonality—as it were, the apophatic side of the equation. Whereas von Balthasar developed the side of Barth which assumes 'relation' into the *analogy* of faith, the narrativists took from Barth the accentuation of relation at the expense of *person* indicated by the substitution of the relational term *modes* for *persons*. Thus, when anti-eternalizing Barthians or Rahnerians replace 'persons' with modes or ways of being, the intra-Trinitarian relations are reconceived as *relationships*. Lash observes that God 'is relationship without remainder'.[42] Relationships unsustained by substantive persons bear no analogy to anything we could conceive of

[40] Barth writes, 'Does subordination in God necessarily involve an inferiority and therefore a deprivation, a lack? Why not rather a particular being in the glory of the one equal Godhead, in whose inner order there is also, in fact, this dimension, the direction downwards, which has its own dignity? Why should not our way of finding a lesser dignity and significance in what takes the second and subordinate place (the wife to her husband) need to be corrected in the light of the *homoousios* of the modes of divine being?' Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, p. 202.

[41] Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, p. 54, citing von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, p. 75: the real distinction is 'a structural reflection of triune being'.

[42] Lash, *Believing Three Ways*, p. 32.

relations. Narrative theology has sought to avoid modalism whilst conceiving the intra-Trinitarian life as *relationship*.

Jenson seeks to educe the meaning of Barth's affirmation that the 'one God is God three times in different ways'[43] by taking it to mean that God is an event or a '*deed*'. For, a deed, something which is done *to* another, can be described or imagined. As Jenson puts it, the '"is" in "God is God" is a transitive verb. It is not so much that God *is* deity as that he *does* deity. ... God does ... his divine nature. And he does it three times. He *repeats* himself.' A doing takes shape; it takes the pattern of an action. For Barth, the way of preventing *that* from leading to a God who is *bound* to his relationships is to affirm, simultaneously that God is a *free* event, one who decides his own doing. Jenson states that, 'This does not mean ... God has no nature—so as to be abstract, contentless freedom, "pure Spirit." God's freedom is decision *about*... a concrete describable event. God is an indissoluble unity of concrete reality and absolute freedom.'[44] A 'decision about' has the same tenor as a 'mode of' or a 'way to': all of them capture the transitive, towardness structure of intentional relationships.

Neither Augustine nor Aquinas had a descriptive notion of the Trinity. Jenson thinks this has undermined the connection between the eternal Trinity and the roles played by the divine persons in history. He is critical of Augustine's notion that the Old Testament theophanies could be ascribed to any or all of the divine persons: the divine manifestations in Old Covenant history were, rather, 'the original evidence for the reality of the Logos!' He observes that, with Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, it became standard to hold that any one of the Three could have become Incarnate as man: this, he thinks, is the 'bankruptcy' of Trinitarian theology.[45] The non-arbitrariness of their historical roles to the tri-personality of God is behind Jenson's insistence that 'the *plot* of Jesus' history... is the plot of God's being'.[46]

The pitfall in Western tradition, as Jenson perceives it, is its impulse to make eternity the 'really real', fixed background out of which relatively unreal Trinitarian roles or persons emerge; if eternity is the benchmark, the historical personalities of the Trinity will always be shadowy 'appearances' in relation to this timeless Sun. For Jenson, the heresy of modalism consists in placing an 'eternity' behind the historical, visible Trinity. Jenson denies that the 'Trinity' as a whole is a single 'identity', speaking, rather, of Father, Son, and Spirit as three separate divine identities, each carrying out a descriptively distinct role within history.

[43] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, p. 360.
[44] Jenson, *God After God*, pp. 110 and 127.
[45] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 127–8.
[46] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 106.

Since this new look on the Trinity highlights the difference between the characters of the Trinitarian persons, it is not surprising that a revisionist defence of Trinitarian monotheism would regard proponents of this conception of the Trinity as tending to tritheism. Nonetheless, the aim of this chapter is to indicate that a *descriptive* approach to the Trinitarian persons lends itself to the converse problem of *modalism*. It may be more fruitful to consider whether Jenson and other narrative theologians meet their own criteria for sound Trinitarian theology rather than those laid down by others. We should ask whether it advances its own objectives rather than those supplied by the Western tradition of Trinitarian monotheism. Does a narrative theology of the Trinity avoid or succumb to that 'modalism' which makes evanescent, historical Trinitarian persons emerge from and return to a faceless eternal Fate?

As it seems to us, both Barth and Augustine underrated the metaphysical potential of mythology: perhaps both of them equally considered too much the psychology of myth, and too little its intrinsic metaphysical impetus. The aesthetic or organic requirements of *story* drive even professed polytheists like Homer to imagine a single *rule* beyond the many gods at work in the *Iliad*. In the *Iliad*, the ultimate 'rule' governing even the actions of Zeus, and thus the outcome of the narrative, is Fate. When a polytheist's gods are placed in a single coherent story, they become the messengers of Fate, modes of the outworking of necessity. Those modern theologians who seem to their Augustinian critics to incline to tritheism by their accentuation of the individual visualizability of the divine persons are actually modalists by force of a metanarrative. It is, in that sense, Fate or cosmic Necessity which equally books Guinness to play eight members of the D'Ascoyne family and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to play at being 'God'. Story will eagerly do the strategic work once accorded to monotheism.

The novel on which *Kind Hearts and Coronets* was based, *Israel Rank* was reprinted in 1948, with an introduction by Hugh Kingsmill. Rereading the novel as an adult, the critic was struck by its theme of 'The one and the many, and the one slowly and surely absorbing the many—it was as though one were watching the working of a mystical experiment.' It is as if Fate took up this hint when it cast one person to play out the D'Ascoyne family's 'being-towards-death'.[47] The identical-repetition of the Dukes is a token of their familial death-wish. The initial choice is thus not between biblical *description* and meta-biblical *theory*, but between a form of unity which preserves multiplicity, and one which kills it, absorbing it into the One. Some theologies are born to be monotheist, we may say, and others have a metanarrative violently thrust upon them.

[47] Cited in Newton, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, pp. 36 and 54–5.

4. Trinitarian Monotheism versus Descriptive Trinitarianism

The Cappadocians, Augustine, and Aquinas created a methodology which could be called 'meta-biblical'. They developed the biblical descriptions of God into notions which can be contemplated, but not literally visualized. This gave rise to *Trinitarian monotheism*, which conceives the Trinity as three *irreducible* persons. Trinitarian monotheism requires a means of thinking out how the persons can be irreducible, without being three separate divine substances, that is, whilst remaining *one God*. Trinitarian monotheism requires a 'strong' definition of what makes Father, Son, and Spirit irreducible, that is, not just the adjectival modalities of a chameleon God. And it needs to anchor this in an equally careful exposition of what makes the Trinity of irreducible persons One.

Recent theology has questioned whether Augustine and his heirs had transcended visual imagery at the cost of sublating the Bible itself: had they merely 'gone beyond' salvation history into classical metaphysics? The precise issue here is not simply aversion to giving Christian theology a Hellenistic or philosophical foundation, but the belief that a *metaphysically* achieved Unity cannot fit into a revealed Trinity: the Trinity will be squeezed flat so as to accommodate it to the One. As Jenson puts it, 'If we once set out to reconcile a religious and metaphysical concept of God's static oneness with the Biblical witness to the gift of the Spirit in the knowledge of the Son, we will be driven, says Barth, to "modalism" or "subordinationism." Modalism . . . does not take the revelation seriously; the real God is static oneness somewhere and somehow behind the history of the Son and the Spirit.'[48]

The theology strategy which emerges from this way of looking at the Christian God is 'hyper-Trinitarian'—that is, purely *Trinitarian*. Such doctrines are methodologically *descriptive*. They keep to description in order to focus the idea of the Trinity within the frame of biblical history. But one should have a caution in using the word 'history' here. For the purpose of the biblical narrative is taken to be the description of *God* rather than of worldly factual events. We observed this in Kelsey's preference for the second of two ways of 'authorizing' or giving a methodological basis for theological ideas: 'One way is to construe the narrative as historical recital, and the other is to see it as a story rendering an agent.'[49] Story-Barthianism uses the Bible to deduce the interactions of Father, Son, and Spirit.

To tell a story about God is to describe his actions. Narrative Trinitarianism draws its picture of God as *three* from biblical scenes which indicate more than one divine agent. For instance, Thiemann suggests that, 'The Father

[48] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 109. [49] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, p. 32.

promises, enacts his intention to save, and fulfils his promise by raising Jesus from the dead. The Son is conceived, receives a mission of salvation, and obediently accomplishes that mission through crucifixion. The Spirit conceives Jesus, confirms his Sonship, and empowers the disciples' witness.'[50] The pure Trinitarian project endeavours to enable three identities to emerge from the biblical story. So it is natural that Jenson should make Tertullian a forgotten hero of Trinitarian theology. It was Tertullian who first employed the 'economy' of salvation history as a 'term of Trinitarian analysis' and who used the word 'personae' to mark out the identities of Father, Son, and Spirit.[51]

Whereas eternal processions engender relations, story-based identities create or 'do' relationships. One difference between descriptive Trinitarianism and Trinitarian monotheism is that, for the former, the persons of the Trinity are distinguished by *relationships*, whereas, for Trinitarian monotheists, Father, Son, and Spirit are distinguished as *relations*. Here, 'relation' is taken as a substantive. For the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Aquinas, the three persons of the Trinity are *relations*, and 'to relate' is a verbal *substantive*. In narrative theologies, on the other hand, the *unity* of God is achieved descriptively: the three divine agents and their actions are *relationships*, whose actions produce one single divine Gestalt: just as the characters in a movie don't make any sense without each other, and the character-interactions are synonymous with its *plot*, so God's story *is* the relationships of the three divine persons. So, for Thiemann, the unity of God consists in the fact that the Three are 'necessarily related'.[52]

As a pure methodological or tactical Barthian, Jenson can glide effortlessly back and forth between the epistemic affirmation that our 'knowledge of God' is 'a matter of following the way he goes, of tracing after a history' to the metaphysical assertion that God *is* a history: 'God *lives* his being.' For the affirmations work both ways around: 'God is not abstracted from temporality' in our 'discursive' minds, '*because* God is in fact a *life*', a temporal event.[53] The equation of what God is with how we know God is clearest at the points where Jenson argues that, because we *identify* the characters of the Trinity in and through the resurrection, the three persons achieve their identity in and through 'the Father's amazing triumph'. We have distinguished between a person's uniqueness and his identity: a person's uniqueness refers to what intrinsically and properly belongs to that person; his 'identity' is the differentiating features which enable someone else to select him out.[54] Unlike the words person, *hypostasis*, or even character, the term 'identity' naturally

[50] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 138. [51] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 24.
[52] Ibid., pp. 138–9. [53] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 134.
[54] See above, Chapter 3, section 7.

slides, linguistically, toward the act in which someone else 'identifies' them; that may be why modern usage tends to protect 'identity' by adding 'self', as in 'he self-identifies as Irish'. Jenson's 'Lord' has no such corrective shield: through the Resurrection, he shows himself to be 'not only in fact identified by certain temporal events but is apprehended as himself temporally identifiable'.[55] George Hunsinger sees that this is to make God conditional upon a history, and objects that, 'for the ecumenical church, the cross of Christ presupposes and reveals, but does not metaphysically constitute, God's triune identity': 'it is not the holy trinity that depends on the cross but the cross that depends on the holy trinity'.[56]

In the early volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, the methodological question of how we know God was so much at the forefront of Barth's mind that he defined Father, Son, and Spirit as 'Revealer, Revealed and Revealedness',[57] that is, by the modes through which believers identify them. Jenson is not entirely departing from Barth's method when, having identified the 'three modes of being' in God with a 'living self repetition' which '*is* interpretation', he concludes that, since 'God interprets himself, to us and to himself, in living as Jesus with us . . . This act of interpretation *is* God.'[58] Although Barth himself surpassed the philosophical, or epistemic, concerns of the early volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, Jenson is not isolated amongst narrative theologians in equating the 'truth of the doing', or the proof, with the 'doing of the truth': we saw in the second chapter that George Lindbeck 'often confuses or conflates truth with verification, justification, or *certainty*'; he believes, for instance that because 'we cannot *confirm* how a theological statement can "correspond" to divine reality, it is *informationally vacuous*'. This is the upshot of a foundationalist fideism, which keeps its eye so firmly fixed on 'believing in its belief' that it forgets that 'the question of verification is not the question of truth'. 'Truth and proof are simply different things', and 'confusing them leads' not only, as Richards observes with respect to Lindbeck, 'to epistemic perdition' but to making our method of knowing the Trinity constitute what the Trinity is in itself.[59] There are continuities between

[55] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 48–9.

[56] Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: A Review Essay', pp. 177–8.

[57] In a review of the first edition of the *Church Dogmatics* I/1, Erich Pryzwara seems to have accused Barth on these grounds of collapsing the Trinity into the Trinity as known by us. Barth responds to this by asserting that God as he is in himself and God as he is known to us are distinct. See Barth's *Church Dogmatics* I/1, p. 172. The problem which Przywara saw was perhaps that, this assertion notwithstanding, there are scant means within Barth's theology for telling the difference.

[58] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 125.

[59] Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*', citing *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 67.

Jenson's thought and that of other narrative theologians, and it is unjust to him not to notice them.

Robert Jenson certainly took Barth's love of Mozart very literally when he decided to claim that the Trinity is *music*. His idea of the Trinity aims at being musical in two respects. In the first place, music is the most temporal of the arts. Whereas the plastic arts are achieved on a space, like a stretch of canvas, or a block of stone, the musical arts are ways of articulating *time*. It uses sound to recreate moments of *temporality*, such as suddenness, halting, expectation, and slowness or rapid flow. Whereas the plastic arts reconfigure space, music refashions the varied movements of time, within its own, musical terms. For Jenson, God moves with time, like music does. God fashions *time* as Father, Son, and Spirit: the 'stuff' out of which Jenson's Trinity construct themselves is time.

As Jenson sees it, Western religion has 'posited' a 'timeless reality' above our stories merely as a means of 'evading death': thus, Plato renders Socrates as an 'icon of the overcoming of death', and the 'religious' Barth of the Romans *Commentary* makes time a 'likeness' of eternity. Jenson will argue, likewise, that, with Augustine's *De Trinitate*, 'the relation between the creature and God is now back to the old Hellenic standoff between temporality and its negation' and thus 'the Hellenic way of giving meaning to talk of timeless deity was . . . adopted: "Persons" and "relations" are taken to be reality in God describable by *analogy* from temporal reality.'[60] Nonetheless, Jenson says, Barth himself partly overcame this Augustinian legacy, learning to talk about God by 'working out the phenomenology of time itself':[61] that is, the Calvinist theologian has the inkling of a musical God.

Secondly, just as the parts of a symphony grow out of one another, and are achieved in relationship to one another, so do Jenson's Father, Son, and Spirit. Jenson brings his doctrine of God to a finale with this declaration:

> the discourse that is God is not other than its sheer occurrence as the divine perichoresis. Therefore the discourse that is God may be thought of not only as singing but even as 'pure' music. It is the peculiarity of the aesthetic that in apprehending beauty we abstract from the content of discourse without becoming abstract in our understanding. God, we may thus say, is a melody. And as there are three singers who take each their part, a further specification suggests itself: the melody is fugued. . . . The phrase 'the one God' directs us finally to the sheer perichoresis of Father, Son and Spirit, and that is to their communal music. . . . God is a great fugue. There is nothing so capacious as a fugue.[62]

Since successful musical compositions achieve unity out of plurality, and without 'absorbing' or quelling the plurality, music is a fair analogy for the

[60] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, pp. 127–8.
[61] Jenson, *God After God*, pp. 12–14 and 96.
[62] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 236.

Three-in-One. The only question is, how deeply can descriptive, Trinitarian story-theology score musicality into God?

We have seen that Richard Roberts ascribes a temporal ontology to Karl Barth, arguing that, 'for Barth, time is a surrogate for substance in general'.[63] For Barth, God's mode of self-revelation is narrational, or temporal, and this expresses *something* about what God is like in himself. That is, there is in God's *eternity* some 'higher' mode of 'supra-temporality' which corresponds analogically to what time is for us. For Barth, when God reveals himself in time, the temporal revelation is not *extrinsic* or aslant to what God is really like: the temporal self-revelation is a genuine unfolding of an archetypal 'temporality'. God's 'Eternity is not the negation of time, an "abstract non-temporality" ' but 'real time', the archetypal reality of time.[64] The springboard for this is not Platonic speculation but the doctrine of the processions within the immanent Trinity: 'God, in his true being, in the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, exemplifies an order and succession in which "unity is in movement" and in which there is a "before and after"... "God's time is the form of the divine being in its trinity" '.[65]

What Jenson himself has in view is 'a temporally three-point identification of the gospel's God'.[66] If, as Barth considered, God's engagement with history is made possible by something 'archetypally' temporal in God's own being, then, for Jenson, that 'archetypal' temporality is the Trinity itself, as three interacting and yet unified poles—*of historical time*. As divine Fugue, God-moving-First is an opening, or beginning, the 'Creator' who '*has been*' or is past, God-moving-Second is a present, which '*is now*', and God-Third, is moving toward futurity, the Holy Spirit's '*will be*'.[67] Each of the three movements of the Fugue defines a distinct temporal mood: the Father structures past time, the Son gives tempo to the present, and the Spirit constructs future, eschatological time. Many of the gods of 'religion' are triune: what differentiates the God of the Gospel is that 'he occupies each pole of time as a dramatis personae; precisely this characterizes Israel's story of God'.[68] God is thus the 'three arrows' of time.[69]

An Augustinian objection to Tertullian's theology can fast forward us to the complaints with which Jenson will meet from Trinitarian monotheists: 'the divine unity', says Edmund Hill, 'has been distributed into a trio in the course of putting into effect the economies of creation and salvation' and all as a consequence of Tertullian's 'subject[ing] God in his own nature and being

[63] Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', p. 89.
[64] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, p. 613.
[65] Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', p. 115, quoting the *Church Dogmatics* II/1, p. 615.
[66] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 24.
[67] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 128.
[68] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, p. 88.
[69] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 24.

to a temporal process'.[70] For Augustine, modalism consists in visualizing three stories with our physical eyes, and modern Augustinians would say that this is what narrative theologies do when they treat the biblical *descriptions* of the varied actions of the persons of the Trinity as *definitions*. For Jenson, to give a name is to give a definition, and he picks out or names each of the three 'agents' in the Trinity, by what they *do*, such as raising Jesus. Descriptive Trinitarianism cannot wholly disengage itself from definition: rather, it locates the definitions of the three persons in their several actions.

For Trinitarian monotheists, on the other hand, the three persons are held as one in that, although they all 'do' different voices and manoeuvres, their operation is as singular or unitary as God himself is. This is the doctrine of the 'single operation' of the persons of the Trinity. Its premise is that anything which God does in history is the act of all three persons: any act described in the Bible whose ultimate agent is God is 'operated' singly by the entire Trinity. The three persons are not three distinct *agents*, with their own agendas. So, for Augustine, whereas the persons are distinct, their historical 'operation' or 'production' is worked by all three, in the unison of the divine being. Thomas Aquinas argues, for example, that Christ bounced back from death of his own accord: Christ's *own divinity*, identical in reality and thus in production to that of the Father, is the 'cause' of his resurrection.[71] As Thomas and Augustine, have it, 'assigning separable actions to separable persons leads to Tritheism', and their notion of the 'indivisible *opera ad extra*' flows from this perception.[72]

Abrogating the notion of a 'single operation' is a common feature of narrative Trinitarianism. Speaking for its anti-Augustinian wing, Gunton argues that the 'development of the principle, *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (the actions of the Trinity outwards are undivided)' was unobjectionable 'if it means that everything God does, he does in the unity of his being. But if it is taken to mean . . . that no characteristic . . . forms of action can be ascribed to Father, Son and Spirit, there appears no point in distinguishing between them.' This opinion is commonplace amongst descriptive Trinitarians because of their inclination to view the 'single operation' principle as an intrusion of an 'essentially monotheistic "natural theology"' within Trinitarian theology.[73] We recall that Hans Frei's *The Identity of Jesus Christ* turns on the identification of the crucified and risen Jesus. Because he hopes to retain a literary proximity to what the Gospel

[70] Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity*, pp. 52 and 54.
[71] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 53, a. 4.
[72] Lancaster, 'Three-Personed Substance', p. 139.
[73] Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, pp. 3 and 7.

narrative depicts, Frei disavows the notion that Jesus raised himself. Frei turns both to an 'invisible' hand behind the screen-play, and to how this verifies Christian faith: 'the divine action remains in the background, dark and veiled. Something does indeed take place in the resurrection, but it is not described and ... cannot be described. ... The foreground and the stress in the resurrection belong not to the action of God but to its confirmation of Jesus' identity.' Being 'raised' is what 'redeems' or verifies divinity in our eyes. Thus, not to be the agent of his own 'raising' is likewise not to be the agent of his own 'redeeming': 'the story of Jesus', Frei says, 'is that of the redeemer both in need of redemption and yet also in fact redeemed from death and the power of evil. ... According to the gospel accounts Jesus is not simply in need of redemption; he is in fact redeemed, though the Story of the connection between his death and resurrection is not an organic but a dramatic transition.'[74] Far from having a single operation, the persons of the Trinity are for Frei subjects and objects of one another's volition, like different characters in a narrative.

Because Jenson defines God as three distinct 'identities', Hunsinger thinks that his doctrine of the Trinity carries the seeds of *tritheism*. Jenson claims to have no affinities with modalism, and Hunsinger accepts his innocence in this regard. Given the vivid character which Jenson outlines for each of the divine 'agents', the *singularity* and irreplaceability of their roles, the insistence that the Father could not substitute for the Son, or the Holy Spirit for either, it would seem the three must have different autographs. Or, as Hunsinger complains, Jenson does not present 'a God who as such can address us in the first person singular, or be addressed in the second person singular in return'.[75] Rather, his God must be addressed as he is identified, as 'you, you, and you'.

But, this can't easily be squared with Hunsinger's wide objection to Jenson's doctrine of God: that it is Hegelian, or panentheistic, identifying God with history.[76] History as Hegel conceives it is not filtered through the dialectical progression of *three* Absolute Spirits, as tritheism requires, but by One alone. What concerned Hegel about the 'reifying' of the three divine persons 'into static relations' in traditional Trinitarian theology was its 'implication of Tritheism'. Hegel sought to overcome the tritheism which he took to be latent in the Western tradition by re-describing the Trinity as a single, long historical *process*: there is only *one* 'Absolute Spirit' or Geist in Hegel's philosophy. His 'revision' of the Western, Augustinian paradigm requires 'that the dominant be process rather than entity'.[77] For Jenson, likewise, there seems to be a single

[74] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, pp. 58 and 75–6.
[75] Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: A Review Essay', p. 188.
[76] Ibid., p. 175. [77] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 128.

motive force back or fore of the Trinity: 'the Trinity', he says, 'is a kind of individual' who is identifiable in three ways. He claims that his 'proposed basic Trinitarian analysis' is that 'There is one event, God, of three identities.'[78] For all the insights available in Hunsinger's essay, it does not dissuade us from considering that a unitary Fate presides over the fortunes of Jenson's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The modern modalist looks like a tritheist to the modern Augustinian for good reason: it is because he or she imagines the Trinitarian persons as *different* rather than as distinctive. Just as, we have argued, differentiated identities imply their opposite numbers, so an apparent 'hyper-Trinitarianism' is effectively a modalism, because difference implies a higher Unity which enables us to take account of it. To differentiate is ultimately to unify, and univocally, under the higher category which explains the difference; to distinguish is analogically to unite, within the integrative notion which the distinction indwells. It may be that the Augustinian or Trinitarian monotheist is no better off than the modern modalist, for one can question whether he too is restricted to the category of difference, doing his utmost to minimize difference rather than allowing the personal distinctiveness of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be the root of all analogical action and predication.

As Jenson sees it, the 'single most disastrous Trinitarian result' of the Augustinian strategy for avoiding modalism is that it makes the 'economic' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity into two 'different and metaphysically separated things', for '"mission" and "sending"... are predicated only temporally, "generation" and "breathing" only eternally'.[79] Jenson claims that it is not he but Augustine and Aquinas who have some explaining to do: how can they avoid making the economic, historical Trinity a mere shadow of eternity? He believes that one can only steer clear of doing so if 'there is no way past the temporality of God's action': for only thus is there 'no static "essence" of God behind God's act'.[80] Does the Augustinian-Thomistic account avoid tritheism at the expense of laying itself open to modalism? As Jenson defines it, modalism consists in hanging on to a 'time-immune Continuity' *behind* the history of salvation, and therefore seeing 'the real God' as 'a fourth, of which the three are only temporal manifestations'.[81] Is it descriptive Trinitarianism or Trinitarian monotheism which imposes unity upon plurality?

[78] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, pp. 111 and 114.
[79] Ibid., p. 125, quoting Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 43, a. 2.
[80] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 125.
[81] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, pp. 64–5.

5. Why Jenson is a Cinematic Modalist

We seem to have reached an impasse. On the one hand, for the God-storytellers, a Christ who could resurrect *himself* is like the D'Ascoynes, who pop up again after their murder in a different Edwardian costume, more and more of the same stuff, and this is modalism. On the other hand, for the Trinitarian monotheists, making Christ the passive *recipient* of redemption or resurrection makes him the object of *someone else's* volition, like Lady Agatha D'Ascoyne, shot down by Mazzini whilst flying her hot air balloon above Mayfair, and this is tritheism. It's important to see that Jenson is modalist on his own terms, not merely at the hurdle set him by Augustinian theology. The paradigm method for his Trinitarian theology is not really music, but cinema. It is easy to mistake the two, because the very 'word melodrama means, originally, a drama accompanied by music'. Stanley Cavell commented that there has 'never been a silent movie'.[82] As Gordon Graham remarks, 'film is the supermedium, the sort of thing Wagnerian opera aimed (but arguably failed) to be'.[83] From the inception of cinema, where the 'technology' was often just a concealed piano-player, music has functioned as an affective bridge between screenplay and cinema audience; without it, the action is cold. The function of music within stage melodrama and today's movies is 'to strike a particular emotional pitch or coloring and lead the audience into a change or heightening of mood'.[84] No movie is scripted around its score: the function of its music is not to shape the cinematic action but to shape the audience reaction. The movie-story as received or identified by an audience is a part-musical experience. In a creative reading of the Cappadocian Fathers, Jenson finds that they teach that '"Creator"/"creature" names an absolute difference but no *distance* at all, for to be the Creator is merely as such to be actively related to the creature. Each of the inner-Trinitarian relations is then an affirmation that as God works creatively among us, so he is in himself.'[85] Music functions within the cinematization of the Trinity as the facilitating expression of the interaction of God and humanity, out of which God is deemed to arise.

The producer at the Ealing Studios, Sir Michael Balcon, told Robert Hamer that, with *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, 'You are trying to sell that most unsaleable commodity to the British—irony. Good luck to you.' Alec Guinness felt that the director 'disliked close-ups, he liked distancing things'. The movie is about the histrionics of social life—Louis tells Sybilla, with respect to their

[82] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 150.

[83] Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, p. 112.

[84] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 14 and 49.

[85] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 107.

extra-marital affair, that 'these things only become wrong when people know about them'. As a send-up of Edwardian melodrama, *Kind Hearts* shows that rites and taboos are transparent—to an all-seeing eye. Louis Mazzini knows that joining the aristocracy is a matter of the appropriate aesthetic. The duplicitous Louis, the 'stage lover', and great manipulator and see-er through is the villain, a cold serial killer; the movie indicates that 'knowingness is a misfortune, a fault, an illusion'.[86]

It does that at the same time as making us experience knowingness; because, of course, the audience can see through the central gag. Guinness plays himself, that is, he *plays* a man in disguise, an actor. While Mazzini scythes through the D'Ascoynes who stand between him and the Dukedom, movie-watchers can see through the cinematic spin to the reality; he is repeatedly murdering, not many D'Ascoynes, but one single Guinness. No allusion to the reality, no joke: we have narrowly to be able to see that they are all the same for the comedy to work. The movie makes Mazzinis of its audience, people who enjoy penetrating an illusion. It makes them experience their own *seeing*, making the detached act of *seeing* replace that of *looking at the visible*. It was 'unEnglish' in being an early New Wave film about the 'exteriority' of our experience of cinema.

The visual arts reconfigure *space*. And yet, the painters who do this are themselves spatial entities. For the human painter to *see* and reconfigure space is a prolongation of his own spatiality; or, conversely, the prolongation of spatiality into the painter's seeing. The painter does not look at her objects from outside of them, she has a kind of 'in-ness' with spatial bodies and this interiority with things is the bit of her own existence which flows into the extant picture. What is deposited in her eyes, and emerges in her picture is the objects' visibility, what Merleau-Ponty calls 'the coming-to-itself of the visible'.[87] Through a like interiority with *sound*, the composer gives us the meanings of audibility, that is, not just temporally separated *hearings*, but the various, sweet and dissonant audibilities of our world.

Whereas, on the other hand, films invite us to look at them from outside, from the viewpoint of the camera. This is because movies are neither material *objects* nor purely temporal *events*. A picture *is* a material object. The 'base' for the *actual* (that is, experienced) aesthetic object *is* the always already actual artistic object. A piece of music is not a physical thing—the score is not the symphony: it only exists as music in the temporal event of its being

[86] Newton, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, pp. 39, 45, and 41.

[87] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', trans. Carleton Dallery, in Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception, and other Essays in Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 181.

performed. Here, the base for actual aesthetic experience is the coming-to-be actual *event* of the playing. Both for pictures and for music, actual experience is generated by an actuality. Conversely, a movie has a material basis, in the sound-and-image reels, but, unlike the musical score, the reel image *looks like* its on-screen projection (as one can gather from photographs of directors looking at stills). Whereas an actual picture lies in wait for a visitor to an art gallery, what lies in store before a movie is shown is a box of *potential* pictures. The movie on the screen *illustrates* the film on the reel, via the medium of temporal projection. The aesthetic character of each cinematic image emerges from the temporal length of the shot, the film as a whole thus being a 'temporal gestalt'.[88] But the artistic result of the cameraman's work is a reel containing a non-temporal *sequence* of images which look like a 'motion picture' when projected, over the course of time, onto a screen. A very early phenomenologist, the Czech J. E. Purkoyne, foresaw the basis for cinema when he recognized that the human eye spontaneously creates a synthetic 'flow', a pictorial-temporal *gestalt* when shown a fast sequence of images.[89] The movie reel is a series of motionless pictures, or still photographs, waiting to be run off their projector. They are so arranged as to make their potential for creating the aesthetic *appearance* of temporality be activated by their projection.

Jenson envisages God as 'running himself off' an internal projector in just this way. The audio-visual idea within his conception of the 'biblical God... is a storm blowing all creatures before himself'.[90] Jenson admires Gregory of Nyssa's definition of God as 'infinity' because it means God 'has irresistible Possibility'. 'Gregory's God keeps things moving',[91] or, drives time before him. Jenson is entangled in the 'modalism' he opposes, *modalism as positing the 'priority' of timeless eternity over the historical story*, because, for him, God is one long 'film-strip', potentially encapsulating a sequence of motionless pictures, awaiting empowerment or actualization as the same pictures made visible in historical movement. Jenson proposes that the fact that God has 'unveiled' himself means, 'he *could* do this. God has this possibility, this readiness for time, in *himself*—in that he is triune.'[92] There is a trio of God-identity cards in the film, waiting to be unrolled in time. To conceive of the Trinity like this is to drain from it all of the vitality which Barth sought to locate in it, with his notion of God's 'eternal time' as 'pure duration'.[93] It is reminiscent of Plato's opinion that change is not a dynamic process within an

[88] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense And Non Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 54.

[89] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, p. 244.

[90] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 27.

[91] Ibid., p. 165.

[92] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 128.

[93] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, p. 608.

entity, but the replacement of one form by another. Plato's '"replacement" theory corresponds to reality as it is sensed by the human eye. Change, to the eye, is precisely a kind of replacement of one object by another, of one coloured thing by another. This game of musical chairs is all that sight by itself can make out of change or process, ... a game that fits ... Plato's understanding of the meaning of being and non-being.'[94]

Hunsinger identifies Jenson as a tritheist because he feels that 'narrative coherence' is the relatively 'weak' theme in Jenson's Trinitarianism, and 'identity' the 'strong' motif.[95] But the dynamic of his theology really seems to flow from what unleashes the potential to become motion picture—the story. Jenson wants 'succession' to play the role in his descriptive Trinitarianism which is held by 'relation' in Trinitarian monotheism, that is, as a substantive verb. But, the Cappadocians and Augustine took 'relation' as a substantive because relations can be mutually constitutive *in simultaneity*, whereas, 'succession' seems inevitably to imply producing and then *giving way to* a new actor or image. On the movie reel, the screen images *are* simultaneous, but, as they run off the projector, they have to give way in the face of the next, in order to produce their illusion of temporal change.

We can also observe the use of a 'past' connotation for God's eternity—as in the statement that 'God's eternity in himself is the *pre*-condition, the possibility, of his temporality with us.'[96] For Jenson, this kind of 'eternity' means 'temporal unsurpassability': such a temporal eternity has to contain the possibility for God's story having run otherwise. Hence Jenson sometimes adverts to the idea that God's identity is as it is, '*as it is*', that is, as a contingent fact.[97] If his eternity is 'temporal unsurpassability', God *could* play his identity again, or elsewhere, differently. That's because the three divine identities are contingent upon time, or upon the 'temporal succession' constructed by those who live in time.

Unrealized potentials are 'could have beens'. For Jenson, God's could have beens are the potentials which hit the cutting floor or otherwise failed the existential test of verbalization. The 'potentials' have a shadowy 'unreality', because they are never taken up as concepts for defining God's identity. Jenson writes that 'Father, Son and Spirit are the actual God. We may of course note another abstract possibility: this God could have been Father, Son, and Spirit otherwise than as the crucified Jesus and his Father and Spirit. But immediately we must ... embrace our inability to fill in that

[94] Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, pp. 7–8.
[95] Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: A Review Essay', pp. 193–4.
[96] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 128, my italics.
[97] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 65, my italics.

"otherwise." '[98] The 'abstract possibilities' are the *undescribed* Trinity. Erich Przywara observed that Bach's *Art of Fugue* is like the Trinity, because it 'ends in silence'.[99] Great musical compositions do not just *conclude* by pointing to that which is beyond sound; silences, pauses, breathing spaces, lacunae, are engraved into the shape which they give to sound. These are not simply 'abstract possibilities', but actively structure the musical gestalt. Unlike a fugue, the story-God has no breathing spaces, no moments of silence. Revelation's 'five minutes of silence in heaven' would be an alien intrusion into the descriptive theologian's non-stop narrating. And yet, from the Pentateuch to the Fourth Gospel, the biblical narrative is *laconic* in its narrative means, exceptionally sparse in its visual details, for instance.[100] One had to wait for the Apocrypha to *see* the details of Adam's post-Edenic life, of Jesus' infancy, or Mary's childhood.[101] Within a Story, God's invisibility ineluctably *becomes* his audio-visibility. But since God *does* speak to us, Christians need not overdo the *silence*: Platonizing apophaticists can hardly 'appeal to biblical revelation to support their claims'.[102]

We prefer not to conclude this section by writing Jenson down as a *Hellenizer* because the realistic side of the Greek approach to things actually helps Christianity to grip its own realism, particularly in its dialogue with the modern scientific mind. This is the side of Plato and Aristotle which is not averse to movement but which *is* more interested in the *moving object* than in the scientifically traceable occurrence of motion: it seeks, not 'the *happening* of movement, but the *ens mobile*', as Zubiri puts it. This way of considering things, which is more concerned in reality than in rationally founding its objectivity, takes the standpoint of interiority with the moving object, and thus achieves *episteme*, or knowledge:

> Whereas science considers in a phenomenon or appearance that *which appears* before someone, the Greek considers the apparition of *that which appears.* Rather than the spectators, what is important to a Greek are precisely the personages of the spectacle. . . . As the men of the Middle Ages would later say, *operari sequitur esse.* A thing and its action is what *episteme* seeks to take as its point of departure . . . . what constitutes the point of departure of science is the occurrence of the spectacle of nature; the object of *episteme* is the things manifested in it.[103]

[98] Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II: *The Works of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 23.

[99] Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, trans. Philibert Secretan (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), p. 163.

[100] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 71.

[101] Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 303–4.

[102] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 94.

[103] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, pp. 68–9.

What the scientific attitude, which Jenson emulates in his Trinitarian theology, achieves in its grasp of 'that *which appears* before someone' is not a concrete, cataphatic vision of the *moving thing*, but rather its '*impetus*, the impulse inherent in a moving object once it has been set in motion'. A *mechanical* metaphysics of the 'moving' Trinity veers always toward apophaticism because a moving *subject* cannot be reconstructed on a natural or descriptive level. Even if one could cinematically envisage all of its motions in sequence, that would not 'be enough to reconstruct the whole movement. As Bergson keenly observed, this juxtaposition of states would lead to a cinematographic reconstruction of an unreal movement, rather than to the movement in question; the succession—though perfect and infinitesimal—of states would be a *film*, but not a movement.' The moving thing itself would be omitted, since the 'motion picture screen is not a subject which passes through the various states projected upon it; it therefore does not move'.[104]

6. God in the Eye of the Camera

Robert Jenson does not so much score music into God as *see* God's outlines, and labels his *process* of identification as their 'identities', as in 'God is whoever raised Jesus.' He makes the divine identities external objects of sight by equating *what* he knows of them with *how* he knows them. Jenson tells us that, because God is identified by a narrative, God is a narrative, or that, because it takes time to identify God, God is temporal.[105] The 'blatantly temporal' events which took place between Good Friday and Easter 'belong to his very deity'[106] because that is how we 'identify' it. The instruments of our seeing and recording, our eyes, determine and control what is seen, from outside. The axis is not the divine–human *uniqueness* of Jesus, but the instrumental process of *identification.* The controlling question is not, 'What am I shown?' but, 'How can I know?', and, still more vital, 'How could I talk about it?' For 'the gospel's theology', God could not be outside time, because that 'would saw off the limb of narrative identification on which all its talk of God sits'.[107] Why should God be identical to 'talk of God', unless the lever of story-theology absorbs the Triune God into the human mechanism for perceiving and describing God? The unitary process into which descriptive Trinitarianism ingests the three-personed God is human storytelling.

[104] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 66.
[105] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, pp. 21–4.
[106] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 49.
[107] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 25.

We have yet to put our finger on what drives the story theologians to subsume the Trinity into human ways of *identifying* God. Those who are hostile to Barth *per se* may consider it to be an obvious upshot of the narrativists' exploitation of Barth's idea that 'God's being is his act'. Once they had taken it from the modernizing Calvinist that for God to be is for God to act, it was logical for story Barthians to go on to maintain that God *must* act, so as to be, and then God is embroiled in human history by a necessity of his event-nature. Hans Frei describes the 'Biblicism' of the Barthian notion of incarnation like this:

> Barth said . . . consistently that the possibility and even the necessity for God's assuming man into himself by incarnating himself may be affirmed and explored *because he did so* and only for that reason. . . . The ground of the actuality of the incarnation, of its ontological possibility, and of our being able to think about it, are one and the same. That God related himself to us means that it was possible, that he must be himself eternally in a way that is congruent with his relating himself to us contingently. . . . for him [Barth], not only the situation of sinning, but the doctrine of creation and of a primordial relationship of the creature to God are reflexive considerations of the fact that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.[108]

Or, as Barth himself has it: 'The possibility of revelation is actually to be read off from its reality in Jesus Christ.'[109] Critics of this position may consider that to speak of a potentiality for human-relatedness in God automatically implies that it is *human beings*—the 'dialogue partner'—who actualize or awaken this dormant possibility within God.

I am not convinced that Barth's designating an openness to world creation or even to incarnation within the very nature of God is the culprit. Thomas Aquinas argued on several occasions in his *Commentary* on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* that the *ratio*—or pattern—of the eternal, immanent procession of the Son and Word is the *ratio* or pattern of the creation; even as he regards creation and redemption as no necessity for the Trinity, so he regards both Son and Spirit as primed for their historical missions by the manners of their processions from the Father.[110] God's creation and redeeming of an historical world are freely chosen within the eternal Trinity, for Thomas: and yet, the character of the Son's begetting makes him 'apt' for Incarnation, and that of the Spirit's 'breathing' gives the Spirit his aptitude to be Gift.[111]

But Saint Thomas the Trinitarian monotheist was not working from biblical description alone. Is it then the biblical material, by its very *materiality*,

[108] Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, pp. 170–1 and 174.
[109] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, p. 31.
[110] Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* Prol.; I *Sent.* d. 27, q. 2, a. 3, ad 6.
[111] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 38, a. 2.

which seduces Barth's followers into making God the passive recipient of a Triune identity from the active construction of human thinkers? On a strictly Augustinian analysis, one would inevitably set up a *requirement* of world-relatedness within God if one insists on drawing one's entire Trinitarian theology from biblical *description*. For the biblical God is only described in action, and world-related action at that. The Scripture is largely silent about the immanent Trinity. In a chapter about 'The Being of God in Act' Barth explores the meaning of the statement 'God is':

> When we ask questions about God's being, we cannot . . . leave the sphere of His action and working as it is revealed to us in His Word. God is who He is in His works. He is the same even in Himself, even before and after and over His works, and without them. . . . He is who He is without them. He is not . . . who He is only in His works. Yet in Himself He is not another than He is in His works. In the light of what He is in His works it is no longer an open question what He is in Himself.[112]

The narrative Trinity seems to have no being in itself, no autonomy from humanity. Does the collapse of the eternal, transcendent Trinity into the economy not automatically follow once the historical actions of God return to the centre of Trinitarian theology, as they do in Barth's writings? Not necessarily, no. One can say equally in defence of Barth what Cyril O'Regan says about Irenaeus: although he writes little about the transcendent, supra-historical Trinity, Irenaeus implicitly recognizes the Trinity's 'in itselfness' by the fact that his God is always *active* in relation to the world, always the *protagonist* or maker of history. To the extent that

> Irenaeus supports the purely agential character of Father, Son, and Spirit, and correlatively refutes the passivity of divine perfection that is an implicate . . . of Valentinian depiction, even he, the most economic of trinitarians, proleptically supports a distinction between the Trinity *in se* and the Trinitarian economy. The pressure to take this stance is his sense that . . . Gnosticism . . . suggests that the hypostases and aeons that articulate divine perfection are subject to fall, fault, degradation, and suffering.[113]

No less than Irenaeus' Father, Son and Spirit, Barth's Trinity is the free Lord of history—just as God is, in Scripture, one may say.

In that case, *why* do both story Barthians and grammatical Thomists so easily assimilate this Subject into human thought, and project the Triune Identity out of the camera of human data-processing? The reason why they do so, and the underlying *ratio* or pattern of the modalism of their theologies, is their intolerance for the use of the term *person* in reference to Father, Son, and

112 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, pp. 257 and 260.
113 O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, p. 232.

Spirit, and the consequent substitution of 'relationships' for persons in their Trinitarian theology.

As we have seen, Barth asked himself, 'why should we cling to the concept of person which invariably obscures everything?' and concluded that, 'at the point where earlier dogmatics and even modern Roman Catholic dogmatics speak of person we prefer to call the Father, Son and Spirit in God the three distinctive modes of being of the one God subsisting in their relationships with one another'.[114] Although even hostile exegetes draw back from convicting Barth himself of modalism, cancelling the term 'person' within Trinitarian theology was nonetheless an ill-fated move for those of his followers who took his advice literally. From the Thomistic side of things, works such as Lonergan's *Verbum* had described the Thomistic theory of understanding as a reflection on an inner word in order to give a subtle and lucid defence of the 'general theorem that knowledge is by immateriality'. The thesis of the book is that 'the human mind is an image . . . of the Blessed Trinity, because its processions are intelligible in a manner that is essentially different from, that transcends, the passive, specific, imposed intelligibility of other natural processes'.[115] If one considers the Trinity rather single-mindedly from the perspective of the immaterial mental act—and I do not say Lonergan himself did so—it may bring about a slight inattention to the divine *personalities* from whom this act stems. One can observe the attention straying from the divine persons in Burrell's remark that,

> orthodox Christianity insists on one act of understanding in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These cannot be three gods, but one. So we are left with trying to conceive of the Father as articulating the divine self-understanding in a Word, where the Word is otherwise indistinguishable from that very act. To do that would require a concept of articulation as a sheer ordering—an ordering which presupposes no elements to order.[116]

The 'elements' in question are the three persons of the Trinity.

7. The Cartoon Trinity: Digitalized Relationships

Although it may seem unlikely that we can simplify matters by referring to G. W. F. Hegel, the German philosopher does provide a paradigm illustration of how a thinker's determination to avoid tritheism results in Trinitarian modalism. Many people know that Karl Rahner blamed scholastic pedagogy,

[114] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, p. 366.

[115] Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. David Burrell (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968), pp. 151 and 34.

[116] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 155.

with its separation of the treatise and course on *De Deo Uno* from the treatise and module on *De Deo Trino*, for the overvaluation of the eternal Trinity at the expense of the economic, 'missionary' Trinity. As Cyril O'Regan reminds us, the impulse to merge the two treatises had been at work in German philosophy for a century before Rahner made his complaint: Hegel got there first, through his labours to identify what is known by reason with what is given in revelation. Already, in the nineteenth century, German thinkers had been accused of modalism by a Catholic theologian, the Tübingen scholar Franz Anton Staudenmaier (1800–56). One reason Staudenmaier gave for regarding Hegel as a modalist was that the philosopher overplays the unitary process in God, at the expense of the persons or hypostases in the Trinity.[117] We are thus compelled to recall once more that, for Hegel, 'the absolute eternal idea', or Spirit / God, is 'first in the realm of *universality*, second' in the 'realm of *particularity*' and 'third' in 'that of *singularity*'. According to Hegel, these three modes of Spirit 'are not external distinctions, which *we* have made merely in accord with what we are; rather they are the activity, the developed vitality, of absolute spirit itself. It is itself its eternal life, which is a development and a return of this development into itself; this vitality in development, this actualization of the concept, is what we have now to consider.'[118] The notion of the 'vitality' of Spirit is so important to Hegel that Barth, commenting on this 'full movement of life', within which 'mind', 'reason', and 'truth' serially appear, remarked that, 'Only a kaleidescope or the moving film of the cinematograph could offer the visual quality that would be required' to capture it.[119] Hegel cannot be faulted for unimaginativeness: it was in his steadfast maintenance and vivid statement of the process of *life*, organically connecting everything within its moving dynamism, that he was drawn to make the entities and substances within life secondary to the total effect of *interrelation*. Relationship is for Hegel the most beautiful and thus the most all-encompassing category. Just as, for Hegel, the 'truth' of a substance is not what it is, but what it becomes, in relation to other entities, so, the 'persons' within his Trinity are 'moments' within the life of this dynamic Spirit. 'Universality', 'particularity', and 'individuality' are not names for the three *persons* of Hegel's Trinity, but of its constitutive 'moments': 'Eschewing the traditional theological language of person, Hegel recommends a nonsubstance trinitarian discourse, a discourse of movement, where one speaks of three interconnected "moments" rather than a Trinity of mutually relating entities.'[120]

[117] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 77 and 218.
[118] Hegel, *Lectures in the Philosophy of Religion* III, pp. 273–4.
[119] Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 399.
[120] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 68.

As we have seen earlier,[121] Hegel has a thorough account of the distinctions of the three 'moments', and a colourful account of their self-differentiation. He is not a modalist in the sense of revoking *distinction* within the Trinity, but is so in the sense of not permitting these distinctions to issue from *personal* actions.[122] There is no sense in which Hegel's 'moment' of 'universality' personally, and thus freely, elects to beget his Word or Concept, no sense in which the two freely breathe 'individuality' into being.

For Hegel, the Triad are 'moments' within the life of Spirit: they can be none other, since the process of interrelating subsumes them. A simpler way of coming at it is to say that his 'moments' function as adjectives do to a noun. The D'Ascoyne family make only one simultaneous appearance, at the funeral rites of Henry D'Ascoyne, and the representation *en famille* is a trick photograph. When he appears serially as each member of the doomed dynasty, Guinness makes use of camouflage, the 'art of masking a form by blending its principal defining lines into other, more commanding forms'.[123] He works around the fact that all of his features are on show by foregrounding one feature of each character. So much the High Churchman, as Reverend Lord Henry D'Ascoyne, wedded to Votes for Women as Lady Agatha D'Ascoyne, every inch the naval officer as Admiral Lord Horatio D'Ascoyne, the actor makes the High Churchness, the suffragettness, and the seamanship more visible than their bearer. Lord Horatio D'Ascoyne is so overpowered by his seamanship that he goes down with his sinking ship, rigidly saluting. The man becomes his adjective. For all narrative modalisms, 'Father', 'Son', and 'Spirit' function like *adjectives* rather than as personal *substantives.* The modalist God can be 'Fatherly', or 'Filial', or 'Spiritish', putting one adjective or costume on show at a time, and keeping two in his Wings.

Hegel's three moments are as *eternal* as Barth's three modes or Thomas Aquinas' three persons. His 'immanent Trinity' is always already Triune, not needing history to 'become' so: 'While it is possible to accuse Hegel of directly narratizing the Trinity, it is not possible in the same way to accuse him of directly historicalizing it.'[124] One might want to say something similar about Jenson's Trinity: the apparent 'historicity' in which he implicates the Trinity smacks not of hard, historical events but of the airy play of story-invention. Nowhere in his discussion of Israel does he refer us to Middle-Eastern geography, archaeology, or ancient history; nowhere in his indications of the gospel story do we feel planted in first-century Palestine. Contrasting

[121] See above, Chapter 4, section 1. [122] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 136.
[123] Merleau-Ponty, 'Film and the New Psychology', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, p. 49.
[124] Ibid., pp. 306–7.

theatrical to cinematic time, Pudovkin remarks on the comparative unreality of the latter, subject as it is to the director's volition:

The theatrical producer has always to do only with *real* processes—they are his material. His finally composed and created work—the scene produced and played upon the stage—is equally a real and actual process that takes place in obedience to the laws of *real space* and *real time*. ... If, on the other hand, we consider the work of the film director, then it appears that the active raw material is... those *pieces of celluloid* on which, from various viewpoints, the separate movements of the action have been shot. ... And thus the material of the film director consists not of real processes happening in real space and real time, but of those pieces of celluloid on which these processes have been recorded. This celluloid is entirely subject to the will of the director who edits it. He can... eliminate all points of interval and thus concentrate the action in time to the highest degree he may require.[125]

A fair marker that a narrative is related to temporal reality is its wastage, or 'intervals', deriving from the fact that the narrator has to manoeuvre his characters across some stretches of not especially meaningful time and space, rather than indicating one or two perfectly symbolic occurrences: 'When a stage-actor finds himself at one end of the stage, he cannot cross to the other without taking a certain necessary number of paces. ... crossings and intervals... are a thing indispensable,... with which the theatrical producer has always to reckon... in work with real processes, a whole series of *intervals* linking the separate points of action are unavoidable.'[126] The lack of intervals in Jenson's descriptive Trinitarianism gives cause for the suspicion that we are not dealing with storied history, but pure story.

The cinema director who still had to cut and paste celluloid, to capture real houses and streets, and to direct living actors was practically a film producer by comparison with the contemporary master of computer-generated imagery. With the development of digital imaging, 'animated'—that is, cartoon—'imagery did not need to appear cartoon-like or artificial'. There are, nonetheless, certain aesthetic drawbacks to the technique, which Irenaeus might have been the first to pick out:

CGI recreated the drama of Rome's Colosseum in *Gladiator*, but did the technique capture the physical mass of the building, and from what point of view? ... Directors used CGI to simulate a camera floating over the recreated Colosseum in Rome in *Gladiator* and around the *Titanic* in mid-ocean. These magic carpet rides, or 'fly arounds', were crane shots for the digital age. ... Yet these were weightless and point-of-viewless moves, exhilarated by the possibility of CGI but devoid of feeling.[127]

[125] Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, pp. 83–4.
[126] Ibid. [127] Cousins, *The Story of Film*, pp. 457–8.

A similar weightlessness affects Jenson's descriptive Trinity: it is not only unweighted by real ancient Romans, but lacks the weight of personality. The ultimate locus of the otherness of the other, their objectivity and 'historicity' is their free, unpredictable and self-governed personhood.

To see how this disappears in grammatical Thomism as in story Barthianism, we return to the principle we mentioned above: the Trinity is said to be 'relationship without remainder';[128] or, as David Burrell has it, 'God's own life must be thought of as a kind of relating.'[129] In Herbert McCabe's reading of the treatise on the Trinity in Thomas' *Summa*, God the Father 'begets' the Word by forming a concept of himself: this 'concept . . . is not *what* is understood, but *how* something is understood, what is produced, brought forth, conceived, in the understanding of something'. What makes God the Father, or 'mind', distinct from the concept, is the *relation* of mind to the concept it considers:

> The act of God's self-understanding which involves the bringing forth of a concept, a *verbum mentis*, . . . brings about a relationship between God and the concept. They are distinct but related . . . as conceiver and what is conceived, meaner and meaning. . . . The mind and the *verbum* it produces are really distinct as the opposite ends of a relationship. And whatever is real in God is God.[130]

McCabe's examination of the Trinity is in a very broad sense a successor of Augustine's presentation of the unity-in-trinity of God as analogous to memory, thought or self-understanding and will or love within a single human mind. As Father McCabe sees it, his view derives from the more developed notion of the Trinitarian persons constructed by Aquinas, who figured out a precise sense for the claim that the three divine persons represent subsisting relations. The point, for McCabe, is to be able to say that all three persons are co-equally God, without allowing the differentiation apparent in 'personhood' to produce lesser levels of deity within the Trinity. He wants to argue, then, that the persons of Father and Son *are* their relations: 'The Father has no features or properties which the Son has not. The only thing that distinguishes them is that they are at the opposite ends of a relationship. The Father *generates* the Son, the Son is *generated by* the Father. . . . The Father *is a relation*.' What matters here is not the persons from whom this dynamism of interrelation derives, but the distinguishing process itself: 'the only distinction in God is that of being at opposite ends of a relationship due to an act or "process" within the Godhead'.[131] Best of all is the utter impersonality of the

[128] Lash, *Believing Three Ways*, p. 32.
[129] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 143.
[130] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, pp. 47–8.
[131] Ibid., pp. 48–50.

Holy Spirit, who 'is formed in the act of loving. This is the term of the act of what he [Thomas Aquinas] calls "*spiratio*", breathing forth. It becomes, then, difficult to speak of the Holy Spirit as a "thing" that is formed . . . With the Holy Spirit, at least, we are in no danger of seeing God as a "person" in the modern sense. Here God is a movement, an impulse, a love, a delight.'[132] McCabe's account is an over-simplification. Thomas himself does not denigrate or diminish the tradition of seeing three *persons* in and through the logical relations pertaining within the Trinity. The Father, he says, generates the Son *because he is Father*: 'Quia Pater est, generat.'[133] It takes an unrationalizable *someone* to create the processes of generation, being generated, breathing and being breathed, and Thomas knew it and said so. So he ascribes personal *names* and personal *properties* to Father, Son, and Spirit, such as 'Word' and 'Love', and innascibility and nativity. Moreover, on the Augustinian-Thomistic analysis, there are *four* oppositional relations in God, paternity, filiation, spiration (by both Father and Son), and procession (on the part of the Spirit). Unless one connects up the relations with the *personal* properties and *personal* relations, one has to say there are more than three persons in God.[134]

Thomas understood that the use of person with reference to the Trinity to mean subsistent relation derives from the need rationally to explore a unique datum of biblical faith. He explained that such could not be the meaning of the 'person' outside the Trinity, since human persons are not subsistent relations.[135] Prescinding from the fact that any notion we have of divine 'personhood' comes from Scripture and tradition, McCabe is, like Karl Barth, exercised by the meaning of 'person' in our time, and determined not to yield to its individualistic connotations. It 'will be clear', after reading his analysis,

that Aquinas's doctrine gives us no warrant for saying that there are three persons in God; for 'person' in English . . . means an individual subject, a distinct centre of consciousness. . . . the consciousness of the Son is the consciousness of the Father and of the Holy Spirit; it is simply God's consciousness. For Aquinas, the key to the Trinity is not the notion of person but of relation, and . . . in my account of his teaching I have not found it necessary to use the word 'person' at all. Aquinas quotes with ostensible approval Boethius's definition of the person as 'an individual substance of rational nature.' . . . What Aquinas labours to show is that in this unique case 'person' can mean relation. This he does out of characteristic *pietas* towards the traditional language of the Church. But of course even in Aquinas's time *persona* did

[132] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 51.
[133] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 40, a. 4, c. and ad 1.
[134] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 30, a. 2: 'Whether there are more than Three Persons in God?'
[135] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 4.

not mean relation and most emphatically in our time 'person' does not. For our culture the 'person' is almost the opposite of the relational; it is the isolated bastion of individuality set over against the collective. Even if we criticize this individualism, even if we try to put the human being back into a social context as part of various communities, the notion of person does not become relational enough to use in an account of the Trinity.[136]

Setting aside the facts that this account abridges the complexity of Thomas' teaching on the three persons, and that, even in Latin, *persona* doesn't mean subsistent relation outside of Christian theology, we can probe the question of why it would appeal to a *grammatician* to reduce persons to relations. The reason may be that, grammatically, no word stands on its own. A sentence must have a subject, object, and finite verb because words only make conceptual sense in grammatically defined interrelationships. A child can point to a thing, indicatively, and make some sense by affirming 'Dog!', but she cannot convey or grasp a concept unless she elaborates the thought in a well-formed proposition, that is, one in which subject words are cogently related to object words. Just as, in a story, it is the whole which makes sense of the parts or moments, so, in a sentence, the meaning of the proposition as a whole ultimately defines the meaning of the individual words. It is what a particular word *does*, in relation to the other words with which it is grouped, which lends to the word the particular conceptual meaning it has in that sentence.

If Father, Son, and Spirit have no more inherent meaning than that of words within a sentence, but only a relational meaning, then, on the one hand, they *are* indeed their interrelationships, and, on the other hand, it is the single process of interrelating which defines them, rather than their self-constitutive or self-receptive acts. One can then see why McCabe gives this modalist definition of the Trinity:

Aquinas could have made better use of the original sense of *prosopon* or *persona* as the player's mask; and his doctrine of the Trinity might be more easily grasped if we spoke of three *roles* in the strict sense of three roles in a theatrical cast—though we have to forget that in the theatre there are people *with* the roles. We should have to just think of the roles as such and notice how they each have meaning only in relation to and distinction from each other. We could speak of the role of parenthood, the role of childhood and the role of love or delight. . . . These roles, firmly established in the life of the Godhead, are then reflected (I prefer the word 'projected'—as on a cinema screen) in our history as the external missions of the Son and the Spirit by which we are taken up into that life of the Godhead. In this way the obedience of Jesus is the projection of his eternal sonship, and the outpouring of the Spirit is the projection of his eternal procession from the Father through the Son.[137]

[136] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 52. [137] Ibid., pp. 52–3.

In this cinematic conception of the Trinity, no person actually *is* itself; each is what it is over and against a limiting other. But this is to reduce the Trinity to the very 'thrownness' of human, finite personhood, for which to be is to become, to be limited and to die. None of the persons—or subsisting relations—within such a Trinity could exist, as *pure act* of being. According to Frederick Wilhelmsen, when 'Being' is

> described in terms of its direction, in the prospect of its future, in the light of the things to which it is related . . . The universe of being is . . . frozen into a mosaic of relations in which nothing truly is, but in which all these nothings are related one to another. . . . To describe being as otherness, to see being constituted *as being* in the light of its direction, to understand being as 'for-ing' rather than as an 'is-ing', is to introduce nonbeing into the structure of existence.[138]

Plato thought like this, but, Wilhelmsen thinks, Thomism cannot do so.

It may still seem counter-intuitive to describe *Barthian* narrative theologies as modalist, or as effecting an Hegelian absorption of the three hypostases into a single process or grammar, because, as we have seen, descriptive Trinitarianism so cheerfully abandons the tactical bastion of the 'single operations' of the Trinity in their works in salvation history. We were thus able to use the analogy of *Kind Hearts and Coronets* for this theology. In this black comedy, Louis Mazzini regains his lost heritage by murdering the eight D'Ascoynes who lie between him and the Dukedom. This would be unworkable were he not a *different agent* from the eight Guinness-D'Ascoynes. Mazzini could not push Young D'Ascoyne's punt over a waterfall, trap Henry D'Ascoyne to burn to his death in a photography shed, or poison the Reverend Lord Henry D'Ascoyne, were he not the *active* protagonist, and these victims his passive 'Other'. A plot requires agents who function as 'others' to their co-actors. In descriptive Trinitarianism, Father and Son are distinct agents: just as Jesus is type-cast as the Son, so the Father's typifying, and distinct action is to raise Jesus from the dead. As Thiemann puts it, 'In the resurrection Jesus is definitively identified as Son of God, and God is definitively identified as his Father. . . . To call God "Father" is to identify him as the one who raised Jesus from the dead.'[139] The story gives Father, Son, and Spirit three separate parts to play, three roles. As in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, we have active protagonists and a passive victim: at the Resurrection, the Spirit is the active protagonist, the 'Resurrector' of Jesus, and the Son passive. The Son is resurrected by the agency of the Spirit's divinity, not by his own.[140] Just as what makes these movie characters distinct is that one interacts or interrelates with another,

[138] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 39–40.
[139] Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 134.
[140] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 24.

so the three divine person are different in and through their 'role distinctions'. The D'Ascoynes, Mazzinis, and Sybilla can *interact* because their *roles* are inexchangeable: 'Tertullian's cases of the distinction of "persons" all come down to the narrative over-againstness of Father, Jesus, and Spirit in Scripture. They are three in that they speak to and about one another in such scriptural incidents as Jesus' baptism.'[141] However, although one actor may be relatively active or passive with respect to the others, all of these roles are passive with respect to the dynamic impetus of the story itself, which creates the place for the roles. Just as the meaning of a sentence specifies that of its individual words, so the story defines its characters.

8. An Odd Definition of Modalism in Story Barthianism and Narrative Thomism

Sensing that his elimination of persons from God may incur a certain counter-charge, McCabe remarks that, 'This is not to speak of the Trinity as a matter simply of three aspects of God, three ways in which God appears *to us*, as Sabellius is alleged to have taught, for essential to this whole teaching is that God turns only one aspect to us, *opera ad extra sunt indivisa*; it is in his immanent activity of self-understanding and self-love, delight, that the roles are generated.'[142] But modalism is not only a matter of the external, historical appearances being just appearances, behind which a unitary God invisibly presides: as Hegel clearly shows, a modal God could be 'modal' all the way down, and not only in respect of history. It might be self-conscious in different ways, conscious of itself in the mode of love and in the mode of understanding, but that consciousness, too, would be a 'mode' of a unitary God's manner of self-presentation. If McCabe's relatings *are* simply 'modes' or 'moments', then his God is as 'modal' in eternity as it is in history.

McCabe notes, rightly, that, 'If we say there are three persons in God, in the ordinary sense of person, we are tritheists.'[143] A student once remarked to me, apropos of one narrativist, that, if he wanted to avoid modalism, redefining the persons as *modes* was not the most obvious way to go about it. It may help to make sense of this counter-intuitive manoeuvre if we consider that, it is not actually *modalism* which story Barthians and grammatical Thomism are striving to avoid, but tritheism, or polytheism. We have not kept this point entirely in the wings, for we noted at the beginning of the chapter that,

[141] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, pp. 73–4.
[142] McCabe, *God Still Matters*, p. 53.
[143] Ibid., p. 52.

within speculative Trinitarian theology, tritheism means maintaining one God as supreme, and giving lesser or semi-divine positions to the others. In the case of Jenson, the Unity is the Story, of which the persons are the modes; in the case of McCabe, the relations are modes of the Unity: for both, the persons are subordinated to impersonal Fate.

As we've seen, Lash imagines that the modalist believes that 'God' is a single 'agent acting in three episodes': 'First, God makes the world, then we make a mess of it which God sends his Son to clean up and, thirdly, God sends his Spirit to bring us back to him through faith and sacraments and holiness.'[144] Jenson likewise states that 'Modalism is the teaching that God himself is above time and the distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit but appears successively in these roles to create, redeem, and sanctify. From modalism's first recorded appearance in Rome, around 190 A.D., it was the standard theory of the congregations, as it still is.'[145] The middle-brow beliefs against which Jenson and Lash take their stand picture 'God in the economy' as a subordinate 'gofer' to 'God in eternity': this is tritheism, or, more precisely, a sort of quaternalism, for all *three* divine persons in the economy are conceived as 'lesser' manifestations of a higher, eternal power.

For Jenson, the heresy of modalism consists in conceiving God as a single, eternal Deity in the wings, who expresses himself in the different scenes of time in the costumes of Father, Son, and Spirit, each of these characters setting out individually to act in history, and yet, all of them really one and the same *eternal* Deity, under their temporal wigs and face-paint. He sees modalism as resulting from conceiving God as 'above time'.[146] In that case, what is being criticized could be the Arian subordination of the God who acts in history to the God who Is, in eternal oneness.

9. Monotheistic Trinitarian Theology

We have mentioned Lonergan's theology as a stimulus to narrative theologies; it may be worth mentioning another cultural enzyme. The most up-and-coming philosophy of religion in the 1960s was the process theism of Whitehead and Hartshorne. These thinkers and their many disciples contended that Thomas Aquinas was a classical theist with a static conception of God, a God who, *horribile dictu*, is not so much moving the world as moved by it, but rather, *entirely unrelated to it*. Whilst thinkers such as Thiemann and Jenson had no difficulty in absorbing these opinions, the grammatical Thomists were

[144] Lash, *Believing Three Ways*, pp. 30–1.
[145] Jenson, *Triune Identity*, p. 65. [146] Ibid., pp. 64–5.

more challenged. Burrell devotes a chapter of *Aquinas, God and Action* to rebutting these charges. It is in this context that he permits us to affirm one thing about God. 'Aquinas' point in denying God to be "really related" to the world' is intended, he thinks, 'to assert the one thing we can know about divinity, its transcendence'.[147] As with Lonergan's thesis that evil comes down to ir*rationality*,[148] so modern Thomism has been as much floored by evil as by dynamic theisms, because it does not align the quasi-foundationalist or conceptualist side of our thought about God with something more animating. Rather than claiming that 'Aquinas had no theory of analogy' it might be a better idea to free up and so enliven the notion of the transcendent Trinity, thus making it a creative analogy to creatures.[149]

Although we have indicated our intention to conclude by discussing monotheistic Trinitarianism, readers need not brace themselves for a disquisition on the Father's Ur-Kenosis. Von Balthasar's writings are not the only source for a monotheistic Trinitarianism; one can also espy it in Frederick Wilhelmsen's own development of Thomism, and in the writings of Xavier Zubiri. Our aim is not to outline the Trinitarian theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, but to indicate briefly that, since it works from love, a monotheistic Trinitarianism can resolve some of the *aporias* apparent in the contest between descriptive Trinitarianism and Trinitarian monotheism, such as the debate about history and eternity and that about the single operation of the divine persons. We shall also reconnoitre with certain dangling threads, such as original sin, left hanging in Chapter 4.

One thread has already been picked up at the start of the chapter. Von Balthasar's restatement of the Five Ways begins with, and never leaves, the mother–child analogy. His argument indicates 'the subject-quality of the absolute': 'Logically speaking, this "conclusion" precedes all supernatural self-disclosure on God's part; it is one of the conditions of its coming about.'[150] Because we receive being as a gift, the 'subject-quality' of God is that of love. This philosophical or natural image of the generosity of being as *love* can be carried over into Trinitarian theology. Thus, 'in Christ's relation to Mary one can begin to discern a new image of transcendence more in accord with the perfection of love'.[151] Whereas, in the tradition of Trinitarian monotheism, the logic of the divine relations is equivocal to what creatures have as *relation*, for von Balthasar, relation is an analogous term, even and especially in respect of the Trinity.

[147] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 86.
[148] Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 699.
[149] Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action*, p. 56.
[150] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, p. 141.
[151] Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, p. 99.

One disjunction which we have met in this chapter is between those theologians like Augustine whose primary strategy is to avoid imparting historical *change* to God (because they see historical change as a characteristic of material objects), and those like Thiemann and Jenson who effectively insist that God is historical (because they think that otherwise, 'Eternity' becomes the 'real' essence of God, back behind all historical appearances). How can one affirm that it really is the case that, as Rahner said, 'the economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity' without collapsing history into eternity, or eternity into history? Logic begins from axioms; the most we can pick up from the passage of history are a few adages. Rahner's 'rule' should be employed within theology as a practical *adage*, like the 'rules' used by cooks, sailors, farmers, and historians, not as a necessary *axiom*. For if we take it as an axiom, then immanent and the economic Trinity are *necessarily* identical. But the distinction of 'nature' and 'history' turns on the fact that, unlike natural processes, historical events come about through the interventions of free actors; even a human person has to be '*at a distance*' from things in order to respond to them historically rather than naturally: 'This ontological condition of his being is what we call *freedom*.'[152] If we undermine God's freedom by making the parity of his transcendent, immanent life with our economy a necessity of his being, we simultaneously make even his acts in salvation history a-historical. Our own apparently free acts will then be swept up into this necessary progress. So one's first approach to Rahner's rule must be precautionary: God

> does not *become* 'love' by having the world as his 'thou'. . . ; in himself . . . he 'is love' already. Only in this way, in complete freedom, can he reveal himself and give himself to be loved. This is the only way . . . in which the theo-drama can be . . . a personal, not a natural, event, something that does not undermine dramatic encounters between human beings, but undergirds them . . . [153]

But at the same time, and however wide of the textual mark Augustine's and Thomas' contemporary opponents are, it strikes us that the complaint that the West utilized a 'static' concept of God has some foundation. If it is really the case, as Zubiri suggests, that there is one side of Plato and Aristotle which is inclined to place a higher value on *certain knowledge* than on events and things themselves, then traces of this determination to find a fixed and thus static point of epistemological certainty in the Idea are likely to have entered Christian theology. The Spanish philosopher contends that, by a curious transference, it was the *Platonic* side of Christian thought

[152] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, pp. 282 and 284.
[153] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 509.

which carried the Greek sense of being as *energeia*, whereas the *Aristotelian* Christians tended to take up the conceptualism:

> Thus one can explain how St. John Damascene, though officially Aristotelian, finds himself identified with thinkers having deep Platonic roots just on account of having tactfully integrated this active purity of *energeia* into his thought. On the other hand, the so-called Aristotelians absorbed more and more of the Platonic Idea into the Aristotelian 'concept.'[154]

If this is so, one consequence would be that, within the Western understanding of being, no satisfactory formula would emerge for showing how it can be that, as Rahner went on, 'the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity'.

Many will object to our speaking of 'the Western' notion of the Trinity, for the distinction between Greek East and Augustinian West has come to look outmoded. There has been a scholarly fightback on Augustine and Thomas' behalf, conducted, at times, with genius. One might say, then, that Jenson has just got the story wrong when he complains that,

> We must, of course, beware of modalism and all its works and ways. But we must not let the threat of modalism put us off the truth which tempts to it: Scripture's plain correlation . . . of whence to the Father and whither to the Spirit. The Father is Father precisely as sole source of God in God; and the Spirit is Spirit precisely as the sole future of God in God. Modalism results not from recognition of these relations, but from their too grudging recognition, which allows them to be real in time but not in God.[155]

Rather than hearing, today, that Augustine or Thomas have cankered the Trinitarian enterprise at the root, one more often learns that a strict distinction between 'Greek' and Western Trinitarian was an unwise invention of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century neo-Thomism. This distinction is now thought to have backfired, since it exiled crucial elements that are actually in the texts of Augustine and Thomas, expatriating them to the benighted 'East', thereby creating a false dilemma which had to be solved through Rahner's rule. The nineteenth-century manualist Th. de Régnon and a twentieth-century theologian, Michael Schmaus (who was not enthusiastic about Joseph Ratzinger's Habilitation thesis on Bonaventure)[156] are said to be the culprits for this mischaracterization: 'Michael Schmaus was perhaps the key figure in bringing de Régnon's scheme into mainstream theological thought. According to him, the focus of de Régnon's study is the difference

[154] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 364.

[155] Robert W. Jenson, 'Reconciliation in God', in Colin Gunton (ed.), *Reconciliation* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 162.

[156] Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927–1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, [n.d.]), pp. 104–14.

between Bonaventure and Aquinas and the way such differences can be explained vis-à-vis Dionysius and Augustine.'[157] Prescinding from the negative marks he awards, there is something in what Schmaus says: for Bonaventure and Dionysius the Areopagite constantly use the category of *expression*, interpreting the participation of created beings in God's being as the expressing of the divine life, and thus as *symbols* of the divine, whereas Augustine and Thomas use the 'participationist' or emanationist schema in a more scientific way. For Augustine, the material is a *reflection* of the spiritual, whereas, for Dionysius, material things are the expression of the spiritual. Bonaventure articulated St Francis' *sacramental* experience of the cosmos. For Thomas, the 'ratio' or figure of the processions is reflected in their missions: but do the historical missions energetically and iconically express the Trinitarian processions? If not, then maybe one can see what Schmaus—and, more to the point, Jenson—are getting at: for what God does in history is then a *shadow* of what he is in eternity, not its dynamic *manifestation*. We have not repeatedly compared Jenson with Hegel in order to denigrate him, but to show that the problem which lends its title to this book has deep roots in Christian tradition; rather, we honour him, because he perceives that the problem is not only an intellectual one but an imaginative one.

If we are looking at a real dilemma, one would need to begin by saying that the Trinity really is expressed in first-century Jerusalem; it was not projected from afar or operated by remote control. Our language for saying that the very *nature* or *essence* of God was exhibited through the Incarnation stumbles at once, for our word for God is 'Being', and it's far from obvious that Jesus preached or did 'being' in his life, death, and resurrection. Our initial problem is that we have one word for 'God' and other words for the actions of the Trinity. But, if defaulting on Rahner's adage led to putting some subliminal essence back behind God, one may say, with von Balthasar, that

> the revelation that takes place in Jesus Christ is primarily a Trinitarian one: Jesus does not speak about God in general but shows us the Father and gives us the Holy Spirit. Thus it is on the basis of Jesus' Trinitarian relationship with God that we should construct a picture of the divine 'essence' and 'being'; for the latter manifests, in the historical 'happening' of Jesus himself, as an eternal 'happening'...[158]

To speak of God 'on the basis of Jesus' Trinitarian relationship with God' one needs an ontological notion of love. It is evident from Augustine's mental analogy for the Trinity as Mind, Understanding, Love/Will that the Latin West has usually thought of love 'as an act of the will'. On the other hand, according

[157] Timothy L. Smith, 'Thomas Aquinas' *De Deo*: Setting the Record Straight on his Theological Method', *Sapientia* 53 (1998), 119–54, p. 121.

[158] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, p. 67.

to both Wilhelmsen and Zubiri, the 'Greek Christian mind has tended to see love primarily as constituting reality in its most profound center'. By adopting this analogy, the East did not depart from the 'Aristotelian' idea of being. Aristotle's idea of being is multifaceted: he has a relatively immobile concept of being, applicable to inanimate objects like the Sun, and a mobile notion of being as *energeia*. The West gave a bit more emphasis to that aspect of Aristotle's understanding of being which is related to the epistemic concept, the 'timeless' truth which can be extracted from being. The East drew slightly more on that side of The Philosopher which designates being as '*energeia*, the substantial operations in which being itself consists'.[159] This is important because the paradigm does not imply that the primal constituent of reality is *changeless*. Otherwise put: the West tended to promote the more immobile side of Aristotle's reflections on being, the East the mobile facet. In the 'Eastern' or energetic conception,

> being is *operation*. And the more perfect something is, the deeper and more fertile is its operative activity. Being, said the Pseudo-Dionysius, is *ecstatic*; the more it 'is,' the more it diffuses itself, in one sense or another. Employing a metaphor of St. Bonaventure, if we consider a vessel full of water, in the first conception, being signifies the volume of water contained in it. In the second, it is the overflowing through which the source, located in the bottom of the vessel, simultaneously keeps it full and causes it to overflow.[160]

In our second chapter, we compared the idea of understanding a text, like the Gospels, as grasping its written essence with the more vulgar, biographical hermeneutic which takes us back to the overflowing energies of the author himself. The idea of being as energy and thus as love can make us conceive it as something passing over from one person to another; for instance, 'that which is communicated from father to son'.[161] The fact is, the idea of being is safer in the hands of the biographers and the historians than of the philosophers, for the ' "God of the philosophers"... tends to ossify into a concept; his immutability (which we must maintain) can only be combined with eternal, inner vitality if... we dare to take the step forward toward the mystery of the Trinity.'[162]

One can link this to the 'real distinction' of essence and existence in creatures (proven when one shows that God exists), by reflecting that this distinction is not static, but a dynamic movement of essence into its existence, and of existence travelling through created natures. If being is energetic love,

[159] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 73 and 75.
[160] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 361.
[161] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, p. 79.
[162] Von Balthasar, *Glory* VII, p. 296.

communicated from one nature to another, to exist is to owe one's personhood to another; it's a process of giving and receiving. If one conceives of being in this way, one need not draw a thick dividing line between created beings, in their mutability, which makes them so irritatingly *unknowable* to the semi-foundationalist side of the Greek mind, and the closed eternity of God, in which Son and Spirit proceed un-energetically, or 'statically'. One can conceive of the Being of God as positively analogous to this dynamic process which happens in human, historical life. As von Balthasar puts it,

> each of the Divine Hypostases *is* identical with the divine essence, otherwise there would be three gods. Nonetheless, just as the divine essence is not a blank, homogeneous block of identity but a giving (in the Father), a receiving (in the Son), a gift given to the Spirit by Father and Son together, and a cause of thanksgiving by Son and Spirit, so the kind of being that is given to finite creatures also possesses a fluidity and a transitional quality that is 'fixed' only in such creatures. They, in their individuality, owe their existence to that divine kindness which posits them 'in connection with the pouring forth of all being from God' (S. Th. I, 45, 4 ad 1). Thus it is only through and in them that being can have its unity (a unity that transcends them all); only thus can the variety of beings reflect the complementarity of Hypostases within the Godhead ... created being owes ... its essential particularity in the first place to the Logos, its participation in non-finite being to the Father (to whom the creation is dedicated), and its vocation of self-surrender to the Spirit, who is the embodiment, in God, of love's generosity.[163]

It is by considering that the Trinitarian revelation made by Jesus exhibits God's very nature that one may be led to believe that the 'real distinction' in creatures is not only what makes them unlike God (for in God, essence and existence are one), but that this distinction, the basis for all change and becoming, must flow from something really there in God. There is no natural or historical 'becoming' in the being of God, but the 'peace or rest' of the Trinity 'is not inert, but "eternal movement", since the divine processions that give rise to the fellowship of Persons are ... eternally operative'.[164]

This represents some traction in the standoff between those who are accused of 'eternalizing' God and those who historicize the Trinity. It does so because it gives us a revealed analogy, an *analogy of faith*, as Barth would put it, to something *like* 'historicity' in God. The Trinitarian monotheist may think that such a concessionary move is an expression of a liberal guilt complex in Thomists like von Balthasar, Wilhelmsen, and the Jesuit-educated Zubiri. But consider Father McCabe's remark that, 'For Aquinas, you might say, the norm for being is that it should be intelligent, understanding immaterial being; the

[163] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, p. 76. [164] Ibid., pp. 77–8.

exceptional ones are those whose being is curbed and restricted by matter'[165] in the light of Rahner's adage. This way of picturing the divine 'norm' makes it impossible to conceive the relation of immanent, eternal Trinity to the actions of the economic Trinity in material history as one of real self-expression and self-giving. If we say, instead, that 'God is beyond all becoming yet is no mere rigid being; rather, he is *energeia*, ever-actual event'[166] we seem to be able to recapture the literality and concreteness of Irenaeus' Trinitarian theology, and thus to reformulate 'narrative theology' as dramatic theology. We argued in the previous chapter that the grammatical Thomism developed by McCabe must deny that *otherness* is a good, for a normative mind should think self-identical thoughts.[167] As an heir to the Augustinian West, this Thomist lacks the analogy of *love* as that ontological energy which simultaneously diversifies itself in the act of *being* at one with itself. This is not just an 'Eastern' intuition, but a Pauline one, as Zubiri notes in remarking that,

> The mystery of the creation has its roots in love. Throughout the Old and New Testaments the creative act is a 'call': 'He calls the things which are not as if they were' (Rom 4.17). . . . the creation is a word, a logos. But this word has been pronounced through the ecstatic character of love. . . . creation is a production of the 'other,' but as a diffusion of 'itself.' . . . Seen from the viewpoint of God, the effusion of love does not primarily consist in unifying something already produced by creation, but in producing the very ambit of otherness as a *unum* projected *ad extra*; so that what is existent only gleans its existence through the primary, originary, and originating unity of love.[168]

We claimed that the reason for McCabe's denial of otherness was the failure to think about the *single* divine nature in a Trinitarian way. We call von Balthasar a monotheistic Trinitarian because he considers, conversely, that,

> Without the difference between the hypostases, God cannot be the God whom revelation knows him to be: the God of love. If . . . it is absolutely good that the Other exist, this otherness within God's perfect unity of substance also founds both the possible otherness of the (non-consubstantial) creature and the ineliminable differences that characterize it as such. . . . there must already be something in God that enables him to plan and to posit in existence a creature that in its being and essence is an image of, and so is similar to, the triune God.[169]

If the historical events of Christ's life really exhibit the Trinity, the eternal processions within the Trinity are an eternal movement of love. 'With that,' von Balthasar asks, 'does not the last shadow of a lingering objection of a divine *quaternitas*' (an eternal nature in the wings, 'an essence that persists

165 McCabe, *God Still Matters*, pp. 45–6.
166 Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 83.
167 See above, Chapter 5, section 2.
168 Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 382.
169 Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 82.

unmovingly alongside the processions') 'finally vanish?' Anyone who has seen the helpful if somewhat gloomy placards in the railway stations has been instructed that 'God gave his only Son': it is the basis of Christian apologetics. 'No one doubts that, as the New Testament tells us, the Father's act of giving up the Son and the Spirit in the economy is pure love, as is the Son's and the Spirit's act of freely letting themselves be given up. But how could this fundamental claim about the economy of salvation have no foundation in any property of the essence of the triune God . . . ?'[170]

The placards remind us of original sin, understood by Christians as the channel of suffering: 'the unbearable contradiction that runs right through the form of man: that he, knowing and touching what is immortal, yet dies'. A theology which interprets God's Being as his love will affirm that the death of Christ heals this breach only because 'the divine love . . . *out of love* takes upon itself the sins of the world'. The death of Christ out of love for sinners is the terminus of his eternal procession and historical mission: 'the abyss of the unfathomable love has entered the abyss of the meaningless hatred and hidden itself there'.[171]

We come back thence to tragedy: the hell of suffering which the Son enters is the 'love of God' which Daniel Russ described as the most terrifying of Job's experiences. According to von Balthasar, Christ's fate

> surpasses all human tragedy; it is the super-tragedy of ultimate 'God-forsakenness', in which he descends to the hell of those who have lost both God and every personal name (that is, the personal consciousness that comes from possessing a mission); and for that . . . reason, he experiences a 'superexaltation' and is given 'the Name that is above every name' (Phil 2.9). In this . . . collapse and rebirth, he maintains his identity; and so, as the matrix of all possible dramas, he embodies the absolute drama . . . in his personal mission. . . . this person, in order to preserve his identity, must be Trinitarian: in order to be himself, he needs the Father and the Spirit.[172]

We turn then to the single operation of the persons of the Trinity *ad extra* (in history). We recall that the embargo on conceiving the Trinity as acting in operationally different ways is powerless against Hegel (and thus, if he is a modern variant on the tradition, against any kind of Gnosticism): one can conceive of the Trinity as *eternally* operationally one, operationally one 'all the way' down. Modalism conceives the divine being as a 'doing' or process, and can give a sophisticated story about what makes its 'moments' distinct, whilst all the time conceiving of that process as a single operation. If it does not serve as a bulwark against modalism, surely the theory of the single operation of the divine persons in history is the Christian's last defence against tritheism.

170 Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 136.
171 Von Balthasar, *Glory* VII, pp. 82, 207, and 210.
172 Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 22.

We have argued that tritheism is the real 'worst-case scenario' for most modern Trinitarian theologians, for Barth as for Jenson and McCabe. As the father of modern descriptive Trinitarianism, Barth conceived of one single operation as meaning one single *deed* on the part of the divine persons. This is connatural to the Barthian method, for here, on the one hand, 'God's being is his act', that is, God is as he does, and does as he is, and, on the other, the unity of the divine doing must secure the unity of the Trinity. One would have to identify *being* with *doing* to imagine that it is *tritheistic* to consider it metaphysically dysfunctional for the three persons to be doing different things at any one point in time. Only a 'deep' modalist would think there is something tritheistic about the Baptism scene, in which Christ enters the Jordan, the Spirit descends and the Father blesses his Son (Matt. 3.13–17; Mark 1.9–11; Luke 3.21–2). Here the persons of the Trinity show up as distinctive persons. One would likewise have to entertain a modalist identification of being and doing to discern tritheism in any conception of the Trinity in which Father, Son, and Spirit each use the tactics specific to their own personal properties in order to bring off one and the same divine strategic plan. Conceived as love, being is essentially productive, both in the eternal, begetting-and-breathing sense, 'each person . . . unable to exist except by producing the other', and by that token, productive in the sense related to the drama of the sacred history: 'from the concurrence of this personal production the identical nature of a single God is assured'. God's love makes him one, not by making him a single *deed* but by making him a single *energeia*, or vital operation. As Zubiri puts it, 'Each person is distinguished from the others by the way of having the divine nature. In the Father, it is a principle; in the Son, as constituting agency; in the Holy Spirit, as autodonation in act. The nature of God is indivisibly identical in pure act of essence; this is the active sameness of love. God is pure act thanks . . . to the Trinity of persons.'[173]

The theory of the single operation of the divine persons in history as in eternity refers to their integrated *being*, that is, the integrated production of their energies, not their integrated doing in the sense of dancing in unison like chorus girls. Consider again von Balthasar's claim that, in his death, the Son alone enters suffering, hell, in the 'passive passion' of his divine identity. The cry of desolation is indeed Jesus' last word: this does not separate him from the divine *being*, or break up the single operation of the persons of the Trinity because the efficacy of the atonement is ascribed to 'the love of God the Father, who allows God the Son to go into the absolute obedience of . . . self-abandonment . . . and as the love of God the Son, who identifies himself out of

[173] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, pp. 374 and 376.

love with us sinners (Heb 2.13), and thereby fulfils the will of the Father in free obedience'.[174]

In bringing to our attention the fact that, somewhat as a fugue with its three parts is yet a single form, what is 'multiple' in it actually serving to create its aesthetic unity, so an act of love is made to be *one* by the actions of two or more lovers, von Balthasar deepens the notion of the single operation of the divine persons. Maintaining the single operation of the persons does not entail mechanically ascribing every 'tactic' within that operation to all of the divine persons. Rather, it requires seeing or hearing how love brings a unitary strategy into being. One can thus take a mediating position with respect to the narrative, revealed evidence upon which descriptive Trinitarianism draws. It's obvious from Scripture that,

> just as Jesus did not incarnate himself, he did not raise himself from the dead either; Scripture clearly emphasizes that it is God the Father who resurrects the Son 'through [the Holy] Spirit' (Rom 8.11). Insofar as he is a dead body, he cannot reanimate himself; on the other hand, his assertion, 'I lay down my life . . . of my own accord . . . and I have power to take it again' (Jn 10.17 f.) must not be assigned one-sidedly to the Son's divine nature; he says this as the God-man, and the Spirit who raises him is also his Spirit. The Resurrection is primarily attributed to the Father's 'superabundant power'. . . This event, which is Trinitarian in a complex way, inaugurates the time of the Spirit . . . [175]

Lying behind the equation of a single divine being with a unitary divine doing is the Augustinian Trinitarian analogy of the single human mind, which acts 'in unison' with itself just because it belongs to one single person. This brings us, third and last, to the determination of Trinitarian monotheists to conceive the Trinity on what they take to be the 'ontological' analogy of the single mind, knowing and willing itself, as against the no less firm maintenance of a 'social' model of the Trinity by the descriptive theologians. Because they conceive of the Trinity as three agents, it is natural for descriptive Trinitarians to consider God as a divine society: 'it is the Trinity as *community* that might be a personality',[176] as Robert Jenson feels. It is clear that to conceive the Trinity as *literally* interpersonal or inter-agential will undermine its unity; and equally clear that 'intrapersonal' introspection on the Augustinian paradigm will not deliver 'an adequate picture of the real and abiding face-to-face encounter of the hypostases'.[177]

[174] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 207.

[175] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, pp. 197–8.

[176] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 122.

[177] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 38.

If one aims to say that 'in God, the relationship of the Father and the Son in the Spirit of God is his very being',[178] without dissolving the hypostases into relationship without personal remainder, that is, without remaindering the personal faces of Father, Son, and Spirit, one must keep in mind that personality and energetic self-communication are not inverse proportions; as if the more related one is, the less one is of a person, and vice versa. Since the quality of personhood is an ecstatic going out of oneself toward others, the return of love from other persons and things is no less a part of it. Wilhelmsen gives a concrete analogy of this: 'If I give of myself to a bed of flowers and bring them into full bloom, then they in time perfect *me*, give of their fragrance and their beauty to my contemplation. If I care for my boat by caulking its bottom every season, my boat "takes care of me" when I go sailing. Thus there is an interchange between *eros* and agape.'[179] Relation as the interchange of love does not diminish the person, in its solid, individual personhood, but enhances and 'perfects' it. What is missing from the Augustinian analogy is the sense of the 'communication that grounds persons',[180] my giving of attention to the boat, and its return of shelter to me. The Augustinian analogy of one person in self-contemplation forgoes the deepening of *self*-awareness through loving and being loved by another.

But, whereas the Augustinian analogy of the introspective mind is limited in its Trinitarian efficacy, the descriptive notion of three separate divine agents at work in salvation history, or at play in eternity, cannot be squared with the biblical teaching that 'The Lord our God is one' (Deut. 6.4). 'Person' in God is not the same as 'person' amongst creatures: 'in God there can be no genus to subsume a univocal concept of person' and thus 'the application of "three" to him has nothing to do with what can be counted quantitatively'.[181] Rather than thinking of three *agents* directly apparent in the salvation history, we return to the Irenaean dictum, well exegeted by Thiemann, that 'the Father is the invisibility of the Son, and the Son is the visibility of the Father'.[182] And so, we can picture, not three literally different persons, for one is 'hidden', but rather a Triune milieu within which Christ the Son is spotlit, pointing us to the dark or hidden depths out of which he receives his stage-direction, and the Spirit is the one who illuminates, and thus creates, this sacred space:

> God has actually appeared in the play: in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, who possesses the Spirit 'without measure'. Does this mean that he has given up being the play's director and judge?... Surely not, according to Jesus Christ's own portrayal of

[178] Von Balthasar, *Glory* VII, p. 311.
[179] Wilhelmsen, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 80–1.
[180] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 157.
[181] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 148.
[182] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haeresis* IV.20.5.

himself. For the latter presents himself . . . as the definitive 'interpretation' (Jn 1.18) of God the Father: the Father has not disappeared into Jesus Christ; the Father remains the point of reference from whom Christ comes; he takes his bearings from the Father; and it is to him that he returns. Jesus wants to be understood as 'the truth' only . . . as the Father's perfect unveiling and manifestation in the Son. . . . if we are to grasp it, we must have been admitted into the sphere of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 11.27).[183]

A monotheistic Trinitarianism is poised to recoup what is biblical in descriptive Trinitarianisms like those of Irenaeus and Barth, without losing what is of value in the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition. It answers the problem of time and eternity by considering Christ as the very revelation of God: 'The Father shows himself in the Son, who, for his part, points to the Father; and the Spirit (who is of both) directs attention to this reciprocal "showing" that reveals God as love. . . . by pointing to the reciprocal relationship of Father and Son, he simultaneously reveals the essence of the Persons.'[184] Our point of disagreement with Trinitarian monotheism is merely one of methodology, and so will not disturb the peace of friendship. Should Trinitarian theology strive, ever so patiently, to absorb all of the nuances of the biblical witness into a metaphysic, or should it yearn to draw the metaphysics of monotheism into the existent reality of revelation?

[183] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 506; cf. pp. 510–11.
[184] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 185.

7

Conclusion: A God Who Is Love

> 'Another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren't a priest.' 'What?' asked the thief... 'You attacked reason,' said Father Brown, 'It's bad theology.'
>
> G. K. Chesterton, 'The Blue Cross'

> But it rides time like riding a river
> (And here the faithful waver, the faithless
> fable and miss).
>
> Hopkins, 'The Wreck of the *Deutschland*'

1. Futurity

Christopher Wells notes that Jenson feels that theology is ever endangered by the

> intrusion of paganism in all shapes and sizes, which threatens to domesticate the gospel by... removing its offence... on Jenson's reading the Christian doctrine of God has been vulnerable to a rarefied form of paganism—namely, ancient Greek philosophy—that has worked its way into... mainline Christian theology down the centuries... Jenson's own term for his program is thus... *revisionary metaphysics*.[1]

Jenson may be inspired by Luther's belief that Christ desires us as 'new men' wanting us 'to regard nothing according to reason, as it appears to the world, but rather as it appears in his eyes, and to direct ourselves to the future, invisible new nature that we have to look forward to'.[2] Jenson aims to achieve this by asking himself the following rhetorical questions:

> The order of a good story is an ordering by the outcome of the narrated events; its animating spirit... is the power of a self-determinate future to liberate each specious present from mere predictabilities, from being the mere consequence of what has gone before, and open it to itself, to itself as what the present is... not yet. ... Can stories *as* stories be true of reality other than that posited in the storytelling itself? Can Aristotle's criterion of a good story apply to nonfiction, as he himself did not think it did?[3]

[1] Wells, 'Aquinas and Jenson on Thinking about the Trinity', p. 346.
[2] Luther, quoted in Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, p. 46.
[3] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 159.

Throughout this book, our question has been precisely how revisionary this proposal is. Like all other Christians, Lutherans recognize that Christianity's ability to rise above and to challenge merely human ideas comes from our being entrusted with God-given revelation. It is not easy to see how the idea of story as such is any less pagan or any more biblical than, say, that of *ousia*. It is equally or more susceptible to being taken to mean an immutable idea. But would applying it to 'nonfiction', that is, to reality as a whole and to God, nonetheless challenge and revise the culture in which we now live? Again, we have argued that it would not, because our idea of what a good story is is intermeshed with the goals of our global, technocratic culture.

Within our culture, the most common idea of what a story is for is to tickle our curiosity about the sequel to each particular scene. This is neither something new, nor, for instance, the legacy of movies to writers: dramatists were effectively writing 'screen-plays' in advance of the invention of the technological medium which could fit them to purpose; indeed, one could argue that the technology was invented *because* people now wanted to imagine the world in the way in which the art of movies makes possible. Francis Fergusson thinks that the notion of a 'good story' as a page-turner began to influence drama through the theatre of Racine, because the great neo-classical tragedian conceived of drama as 'the demonstration of an essence'. When Racine

> says *plot* he usually means simply the intrigue—plot in Aristotle's second sense—the facts of the situation and their logical concatenation. By means of the intrigue he could hold the interest of the audience, and build it to a point of high excitement, whether that audience was interested in the life of reason or not. At every moment the tragic plight of reason is made clear, if we care to look at it; hence the crystalline intellectual consistency and the beauty of form. But the incidents are also so arranged as to pique our curiosity about the literal facts of the story. Will Bérénice relent and accept Antiochus? Will the Roman Senate change its mind? Which of the men will Bérénice marry? Every act ends with such a question, and by this means 'suspense' is built up, and we are held by the machinery of the intrigue until the denouement.

With this, Racine moves the art of tragedy one step closer to what in the nineteenth century will be pure melodrama. Melodrama derives partly from an acutely Cartesian sense of tragedy:

> This aspect of the art of plot-making follows quite naturally from the rational basis of Racine's art; and he and Corneille were quite proud of it. They rightly saw that the whole notion of suspense, to be gained through alternately piquing and thwarting our curiosity about the literal facts of the situation, was a discovery of theirs: Sophocles, with his ritual basis, does not primarily seek suspense of this kind.[4]

[4] Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, p. 77.

It's only if one is accustomed to following movies, in which each shot arouses suspense, that one will imagine that the meaning and the very reality of a story derives from its denouement. Racine's 'story' is an immobile essence in that all the facts are given from the outset, and nothing actually changes in the course of the play. Jenson's aesthetic sense is not immune to the modern connotation of the word 'story'. Somewhat as Jenson's Future Spirit is 'hidden' in the sense that he plays 'hide-and-seek'[5] with us, so Racine gives his plot the illusory appearance of movement by 'withhold[ing] until the very end, from one or more of his three main characters, some crucial fact of that character's situation'.[6] The change, such as it is, is an intensifying of knowledge, not a real movement. This gives us intellectual or affective suspense in relation to a 'forgone essence' of the story. Given that this is one of the commonest cultural experiences of our secular era, Jenson's belief that 'a person is a story'[7] seems as much tied to our time as Racine's 'theatre of reason, which once seemed in its perfection to be *the* theatre' but 'now looks as grotesquely French and Baroque as Louis himself; wig, laces, high heels and all'. No aesthetic is culture free, which is why theologians have been found to argue that we need, not an aesthetic theology, but a theological aesthetic. The cinematization of our contemporary aesthetic sensibility may explain the peculiar preference for method over object content in narrative theologies. Contemporary audiences and script-writers conceive 'the well-made play' in terms of the production of suspense, and thus imagine story-making as 'a means of gripping the audience in abstraction from all content whatever. Its purpose is solely to catch the mind of the audience, and to hold it by alternately satisfying and thwarting the needs of discursive reason.'[8] It was the argument of the previous chapter that, despite their efforts to revise our notion of the Trinity in a biblical direction, story theologians like Jenson seem to render God more static than the classical views did. Viewers are more likely to recall a movie's essential plot-line than the names of its characters: what they are *most* likely to recall, however, is its ending, because that is what the cinematic plot is *for*. It is constructed out of futurity. For the aesthetic which writers and audiences have brought to 'stories' is that of a scientific culture.

In pragmatic conceptions of scientific knowledge, an informative hypothesis is one which enables us to predict future behaviours of material substances. The future is important to science, but only a theologian, and one who identifies what we know with how we know, would think of reifying it as *futurity*. Futur*ity*

[5] Robert W. Jenson, 'The Hidden and Triune God', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2/1 (2000), 5–12, p. 12.

[6] Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, p. 56.

[7] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, p. 151.

[8] Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, pp. 69 and 78.

is more than an empty or potential 'future': via the 'ity', a suffix indicating an abstract noun or essence, as with 'humanity', 'density', or 'infinity', the future can be seen as the *mould* and *maker* of the present. Although Jenson hopes to differentiate 'the God of the gospel' from those of pagan cultures,[9] privileging future over past and present is a mark of our secular, technological culture. The apocalypticizing orientation of narrative theologies displays the modern equation of drama with *plot*, in which one question leads to another, and the audience's attention-horizon is filled with suspense.[10] Although there is little that is authentically 'revisionary' about this, it does come back to an interpretation of Scripture, and specifically of the Apocalypse.

Historians have tended to contrast two different traditions in the history of the interpretation of Revelation. On the one hand, there is an 'orthodox' tradition which understands this biblical text analogically. Stemming from Augustine and *The City of God*, this tradition places the New Jerusalem beyond time, and thinks of the events described in Revelation as recircling within history, that is, as recurring under analogical forms. On the other hand, there is the 'heterodox' interpretation, whose first great expositor was Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202). This tradition sees Revelation as describing what history will look like as it approaches the end of the age, and thus conceives of the Kingdom of the Spirit as commencing within chronological history.[11]

Literalism underlies 'millennialism', in particular a literal reading of the suggestion in Revelation 20 that the 'saints' will reign for a 'thousand years'. The expectation of a chronological thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints was not new in the twelfth century. In Augustine's own time, what he considered 'ridiculous fables'[12] had been spun out of the vision in Revelation 20: 'Then I saw thrones, and those who sat on them; and judgement was given. And the souls of those slain because of their witness to Jesus . . . these reigned with Jesus for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the man who shares in this first resurrection. Over them the second death has no power; but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him for a thousand years' (Rev. 20.1–6). It was a Donatist theologian, Tyconius, who assisted Augustine over the obstruction of a literal, millennialist, reading of Revelation, by showing that scriptural descriptions of

[9] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 45.
[10] See above, Chapter 3, section 4.
[11] We will add some nuances to the contrast of the 'Augustinian' and 'Joachimite' traditions below, in section 9. I discuss the topic in more detail in 'The Book of Revelation: The Apocalypse of St. John the Divine', in Kevin Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic/SPCK, 2005), 680–7.
[12] Augustine, *City of God* XX.6.7.

time-periods can be read 'mystically'. It was especially helpful with reference to a text which seems to demand to be taken as a story and yet which is exceptionally 'unstorifiable', to learn from Tyconius' *Liber Regularum* that, in Scripture, 'sequential events may reiterate each other, so that what looks like sequence is repetition'.[13] Tyconius' Seventh Rule, *On Recapitulation* helped Augustine to reach the conclusion that the 'saints' who judge the world for a thousand years in Revelation 20.1–6 are judging the world *now*, in the midst of history. Thus the 'thousand years', which millennialists took as a literal run-down to the Eschaton, is the 'Sixth Day' of history, for which no time span can be calculated, and which delivers no 'sense of an ending',[14] since the Seventh Day is eternity, outside of time. As Augustine puts it: 'After this present age God will rest, as it were, on the seventh day; and he will cause us, *who are the seventh day*, to find our rest in him.'[15] In Augustine's spiritual interpretation, the saints who reign which Christ in the present, the Sixth Age of history, are those who have died for Christ at the hands of the Church's enemies, that is, martyrs, the slain and yet living members of the mystical body of Christ. The judging saints are, Augustine claims, the

> souls of the martyrs, their bodies being not yet restored to them. For the souls of the pious dead are not separated from the Church, which is even now the kingdom of Christ. Otherwise they would not be commemorated at the altar of God at the time of the partaking of the body of Christ, nor would it be of any avail to have recourse to the Church's baptism in time of peril . . . Why are such steps taken, unless it is because the faithful are still members of this body, even when they have departed this life? And therefore their souls, even though not yet with their bodies, already reign with him while those thousand years are running their course. This is why we read . . . : 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yes, indeed, says the Spirit, from henceforth they may rest from their toils: for their deeds go with them.' And so the Church now begins to reign with Christ among the living and the dead.

Because, for Augustine, the eternity captured in the book of Revelation is not at odds with history, but in a state of analogous symmetry to it, he can claim that, 'those people reign with him who are in his kingdom in such a way that they themselves *are* his kingdom'.[16]

Joachim of Fiore was no more a millennialist than Augustine, in the sense of believing that the saints will judge the world for a thousand calendar years.[17] The crucial difference is that, for the Calabrian Abbot, the events of Revelation

[13] Paula Fredriksen, 'Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse', in Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (eds.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 27.

[14] Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, ch. 1, 'The End'.

[15] Augustine, *City of God* XXII.30.5.

[16] Ibid. XX.6.9, quoting Rev. 14.13.

[17] Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957), p. 154.

not only recapitulate the flow of chronological history since Adam, but also enable us to describe the character of the New Jerusalem, to put a date on the beginning of the thousand-year reign, and thus scientifically to *predict* the end-times. Joachim spoke of the book of Revelation as 'the key of things past, the knowledge of things to come; the opening of what is sealed, the uncovering of what is hidden': he treats it as a predictive key to future history. He does not imagine an abrupt or staccato transition from the register of history to that of eternity, but, rather, pictures an unbroken 'evolutionary process', extending from time into eternity:

Whereas Augustine concentrated on the two cities, ... seeing the era of the Church as an indefinite period of time during which the predestined would be saved and the reprobate damned, Joachim emphasized the evolution of historical entities, generations, peoples, and orders within a meaningful, definite chronological framework. For Augustine, the Apocalypse functions ... as a guide toward and an opening into heaven. For Joachim, it was the key to the meaning of human history.[18]

Joachim's prophesies calculate on the Trinity: a First Age, running from Adam to Abraham, belongs to the Father, a Second is attached to Christ, and the Holy Spirit commands the Third Age. Cyril O'Regan has made available this interesting passage from the medieval monk's *Liber de concordia Novi ac Veteris Testamenti*:

The mysteries of Holy Scriptures point us to three orders (states or conditions) of the world: to the first, in which we are under the Law; to the second, in which we are under grace; to the third, which we already imminently expect, and in which we shall be under a yet more abundant grace ... The first condition is therefore that of perception, the second that of partially perfected wisdom, the third, the fullness of knowledge. The first condition is in the bondage of slaves, the second, in the bondage of sons, the third in liberty. The first in fear, the second in faith, the third in love. ... The first condition is related to the Father, the second to the Son, the third to the Holy Spirit.[19]

Clearly a descriptive Trinitarian, and maybe the first, Joachim invented 'the idea that the Trinity is the archetype of historical process where humanity comes to perfect itself'.[20]

Those who inherited Joachim's exegesis of Revelation include the Anabaptists of the Reformation era. The Anabaptists were the 'calendralizers' of the Reformation, putting dates on the Last Day which, pitifully, tended to occur a year

[18] E. Randolph Daniel, 'Joachim of Fiore: Patterns of History in the Apocalypse', in Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (eds.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 87.

[19] Joachim, *Liber de concordia Novi ac Veteris Testamenti*, cited in O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 266. O'Regan notes that this citation embellishes Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), pp. 204–5.

[20] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, p. 269.

or so after the deaths of these zealous reformers at the hands of the German princes' armies.[21] A grain of Joachimism even entered Reformed theology, as can be seen from Luther's idea of the difference between time and eternity. Whereas Augustine thought of the judging saints as continually present to this world, Luther considered that the 'pious dead' (and the impious departed) subsist in suspended animation, in a 'deep, dreamless sleep' outside of both time and eternity:

From the point of view of the soul itself and of God . . . the final resurrection of the whole man, and the Last Judgment . . . follow instantaneously upon death. To leave this world is no longer to experience time. 'For just as he does not know how it happens, who falls asleep and comes to the morrow unexpectedly when he wakes, so will we suddenly rise from the dead on the Last Day, not knowing how we have been in and come through death.' Outside this life, in the world beyond, all time collapses into a single eternal instant.[22]

The point is not just the rejection of purgatorial states, for the semi-pious saved, and disembodied infernal and paradisial consciousness, for the others, but rather the consequent denial of the notion that finite, human time has its own place, through the dead, in eternity *during* the 'Sixth Day'. It is difficult to see what sort of 'time' could persist for those who have left history behind but not yet entered eternity at the Last Judgement. The advantage of envisaging three relationships to time, finite historical time, the disembodied 'time' of the dead between Private Judgement and Last Judgement, and God's eternal possession of all time from beyond it, is that one need not *absolutely* advance the reality of one above the others. Because, according to Barnes, the medieval Church thought in terms of the 'intermingling of time and eternity, the Kingdom could exist both in history and in the hereafter'. There is then an analogical tension and an 'overlap' between the times, but not an 'antithesis of the world of time' to that of eternity, such as is found in Luther's writings.[23]

Since for us, here below, 'eternity' is narratively or phenomenologically in the future, an emphasis on eternity is, in terms of the stories of our lives, as emphasis on futur*ity*, as the maker of the present. According to Barnes, sixteenth-century 'Protestant piety'

directed the religious imagination away from the rituals of the medieval church and turned it toward prayer and prophecy. . . . this narrowing . . . concentrated the religious imagination upon the promise of salvation, upon a future-directed hope and the avenues by which it was revealed. . . . this focusing applied not only to religious belief . . . but . . . to a broader realm of intellectual concerns. . . . 'that part of the magical

[21] Walter Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages: Apocalyptic Expectation in the Radical Reformation* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992), pp. 17 and 24–31.
[22] Ibid., p. 37. [23] Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, p. 38.

scheme of the Renaissance appropriated by Protestantism was the realm of prophecy, revelation, and predictability.'[24]

It was in this context that Luther ejected the notion of an interim period after the 'Private Judgement', replacing it with the idea that 'individual death and the Last Judgment were both encounters within the same eternal moment'.[25]

As we noted in reference to the French Revolution,[26] Joachim had secular heirs as well as religious ones. In modern times, the notion of an orientation to futurity gained credence through the success of scientific technologies: for the empirical scientist, knowledge amounts to predictive potency. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is good nineteenth-century sociology, making sense of a culture rich in engineering inventions, which perpetually extends its knowledge of material things so as to assimilate them into its designing projects. It is not only as a relic of Joachimism that Hegelianism pervades secular culture, but as an expression of our pragmatic attitude to human understanding. Whereas a contemplative attitude can delight in agreement with the given, for the knower as *doer*, 'truth is an agreement with things, but above all with things in the future; therefore viewed from the present, a true law of nature is nothing but an attempt to dominate the course of things'.[27] It is not a God who can be known to create the world who slots into a gap left by modern science, but a God who is thought to do so out of the future.

2. Story Thomism as Apocalypticism

This pragmatic, somewhat scientistic side is the most accessible aspect of Jenson's apocalypticism. In the 1960s, when Christian theologians like John Hick met the challenge of empirical verificationists with the claim that the 'truth' of Christianity will be verified when Jesus comes again, Jenson took over the same cudgel, while divesting it of its classical ring. ' "Eschatological verification" is indeed', he affirmed, 'the key to the logic of theological utterances.' Given that data of faith like the resurrection of Christ are not accessible to scientific testing and verification, the issue of the debate was in what sense the events from which Christian faith issues are empirical facts. Jenson's response was that the resurrection is 'informative' in the sense of being an 'intersubjectively indicable event' which 'predicts that he will come to final judgment of all men'. Nonetheless, it is not a natural empirical-historical prediction, since no merely *present* moment

[24] Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, p. 32, quoting R. J. W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550–1700: An Interpretation*, p. 394.

[25] Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, p. 37.

[26] See above, Chapter 5, section 6.

[27] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 18.

can encompass, or will ever encompass, the infinite weight of this futurity: 'a historian *qua* historian simply cannot weigh the claim'. We return to Luther's acute sense of the difference between time and eternity. Christian proclamation cannot hand on *substantial* information concerning the resurrection because this apocalyptic event is not to be condensed into the morsels of words. Since one may not hand on the 'content' 'Jesus is risen', one must say, perhaps with a thump to the table, 'it is the tradition of *doing* telling Jesus' story as the story of the End'.[28] It is a pneumatic *doing* of the telling, rising above the letter to the spirit, or to proclamation as apocalyptic event.

Jenson is wrestling with a problem concerning the reality of God's works in *history* which he inherited from Karl Barth. Not only the hyper-eschatological Barth of the Romans *Commentary*, who told us that 'A Christianity which is not wholly eschatology and nothing but eschatology has nothing to do with Christ',[29] and who bifurcated time and eternity more vigorously than Luther, but even the calmer Barth of the *Church Dogmatics* found it difficult to affirm in other than a sermonic sense that God's actions in history occur in real chronological time. Even to sympathetic readers, the self-revelation of the eternal God seems in Barth's works to touch our human time frame rather lightly, failing 'to do justice to the genuinely historical nature of biblical revelation'.[30] For Richard Roberts, Barth wavers here because he cannot make eternity fully engage with ordinary, finite time without granting the latter an independence which is alien to his faith-based methodology. The dilemma which seems to impel Jenson into a pragmatic futurism is that, on the one hand, he wants the Christian story to be heard by empiricist non-believers, but, on the other, his method is one in which 'theologically posited realities are absolutely undetectable outside the peculiar theological mode of their positing and perception'.[31]

It is the desire to be an empirical-verificationist and, simultaneously, a Barthian which leads Jenson, not just to substitute *time* for substance as a basic category, but to affirm that the lived experiment of time *is* its denouement. For a scientist, the point of closure is that disclosure of the value of one's hypothesis which wraps up an experiment. The meaning of the practical labour which goes into testing an hypothesis is the fact that it works, and seeing that it does closes this particular experimental field. When we repeat the experiment under different conditions, we intend to confirm or disallow the same closure, or to know that this bit of 'futurity' is a

[28] Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, pp. 148, 183, 228–9, and 231.

[29] Barth, *Commentary on Romans*, 4th edn., p. 314, cited in Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, p. 8; I confess my notes cease on page 57 of the Romans Commentary.

[30] Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), p. 164, citing *Theo-Drama* I, p. 27.

[31] Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', p. 114.

foregone conclusion. When Jenson substitutes 'futurity' for being or substance as the basic category of Christian metaphysics, being, which had been convertible with truth and goodness, becomes experimentally convertible with the future. In such a theology, words such as being 'are eschatological narration: to be is to be underway to a conclusion narrated by the story of Jesus. It is to be living a story which will be resolved by involvement in his.' It is through God's identification with the meaning our future-oriented story, as 'the temporal bracketing of our lives',[32] or what holds them together, that God himself becomes a story; as Jenson sees it, the 'order of a good story is an ordering by the *outcome* of the narrated events'.[33]

One can best appreciate the thrust of Jenson's assertion that the '"relations" by which . . . the three' divine persons 'subsist . . . are plot lines of the narrative constituted between them and with us'[34] if one puts oneself in the position of a spectator alive with suspense to the outcome of a thriller. One would then conceive of the divinity of the three persons as hinging upon their own futurity; this God does not just create *us* from the future, but *itself*:

> Instead of interpreting Christ's deity as a separate entity that always *was*—and preceding analogously with the Spirit—we should interpret it as a final *outcome*, and just *so* eternal, just so as the bracket around all beginnings and endings. . . . And the Spirit that is the breath of this Future will blow all things before himself into new life. . . . the saving events, whose plot is stated by the doctrine of trinitarian relations, *are*, in their eschatological finality, God's transcendence of time, his eternity . . .[35]

Somewhat as, in the tradition of Lutheran apocalypticism, and in Barth's writings, *real* time, for us humans, is eternity (conceived, by us, as our future), so for Jenson's God, real *eternity* is futurity. We have noted that one of Barth's problematics is the Calvinist tradition of the *decretum absolutum*, that concealed will to save or to damn which provoked the seventeenth-century anti-theodicists; Barth's response to this is to make the Father's eternal election of the Son the only real 'predestination'. With Jenson, however, the *decretum absolutum* returns in the shape of God's concealed 'Power of futurity' which '"goes out"' from 'the Spirit'.[36] The Spirit is for Jenson as for Joachim the 'truth' of the Trinity, and its hidden truth: 'The Spirit is God as his own future', he says, and in the 'game of hide-and-seek' which he plays within himself, there are thus pockets of suspenseful unknowability, in the sense of disclosures yet to come. The Spirit is thus 'the encompassing mode of God's hiddenness', not in the 'empty freedom of postmodern horror' but in the 'freedom of a good story'.[37]

[32] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 172. [33] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 159, my italics.
[34] Jenson, 'The Hidden and Triune God', p. 9. [35] Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 140.
[36] Ibid., p. 166. [37] Jenson, 'The Hidden and Triune God', p. 12.

3. A God Who Is Love

Since postmodernist theologies draw on the ideas of narrative and cinema, some may be disappointed that I have said little to repel the irrationalists. I have set this task to one side,[38] because since no one enjoying our technological world is a practising irrationalist, the current against which our theology actually has to swim for its survival is rationalism, or making God look suspiciously like our reasoning processes. Once we are more accustomed to boarding an Easyjet than a horse we expect a certain kind of predictability from our world, the explicability of logical progression rather than that of felt reasonableness. It is on account of his rationalism that Hegel remains the most influential intellectualist of our postmodern culture.

This book has made a case that grammatical Thomism and story Barthianism have been drawn against their best intentions into the strongest current in modern thought. This reflects more on what happens when a method is detached from its characteristic content than on the theologies of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth. Where content is replaced by method, one has a methodologism. One example of methodologism is Hegel's definition of the *truth* of a thing as its *outcome*, the culmination of its process of becoming. Truth is thus a *tale*. It is not easy to think of the contents of Christian theology as *real* whilst picturing them as a story. It is no more possible to demonstrate that the contents of theology are real than to prove to a doubter that a desk is real; like Caesar's wife, the world's reality must remain above suspicion.[39] So we have played with cinematic metaphors, with the serious purpose of raising a shadow of suspicion about narrative methodology: *do* we believe that Christianity is true in the sense in which we 'believed' in *Batman* when we were six years old?

If Saint Thomas Aquinas had lived today, he would have considered it unreasonable not to respond to Hegel, and towering theologian that he was, Barth actually did so.[40] If one does not reason Hegel's proposals through one will be suckered into his rationalistic project. Hegel did not mean to say just that God is a story. He wanted to affirm that God is love. Such an effort at a Christian resolution deserves a response which begins from Christian revelation.

[38] A brilliant and intelligent polemic against postmodernism and its use by modern theologians can be found in David Bentley Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite*.

[39] 'Descartes' demonstration was as good as it possibly could be; its only defect was that it was a demonstration. As soon as Descartes published it, it became apparent that, like Caesar's wife, the existence of the world should be above suspicion.' Étienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), p. 186.

[40] See in this context particularly the chapter entitled 'The Being of God as the One who Loves' in *Church Dogmatics* I/1.

As we saw above, Joachim prophesied that the order of the Third Age, the Age of the Spirit, would be one of love. One of the tempting features of Hegel's thought for narrative theologians is the German Romantic's belief that, to say God is *Spirit* is to say that God is *love*. Dialogical philosophies claim that an 'I' achieves *self*-recognition when it is addressed by a 'Thou'. This is, in a sense, a redescription of Hegel's notion of love, as the way in which the one comes to know itself in another: 'love', he says,

> is a distinguishing of two, who nevertheless are absolutely not distinguished for each other. The consciousness or feeling of the identity of the two . . . consciousness not in myself but in the other. . . . This other, because it likewise exists outside itself, has its self-consciousness only in me, and both the other and I are only this consciousness of being-outside-ourselves and of our identity; we are only this intuition, feeling, and knowledge of our unity.[41]

Describing that progress in which God, as Universal and Particular, differentiates itself, sublating or projecting itself into another whilst remaining 'present to itself in the other', Hegel claims that this process 'is the Holy Spirit itself, or, expressed in the mode of sensibility, it is eternal love: *the Holy Spirit is Eternal Love*'. 'The truth of personality'—where *truth* means the full and final concretization of one's *becoming*—is giving all that one is over to the other and 'winning it back'.[42] This is the tale the Universal 'Father' enacts, in giving himself to the Particular 'Son': the *truth* of this eternal relating is the Spirit, their 'love'.

But that is just the objective, 'fated' side of things. Hegel detects the same process, as subjectively *conscious* of itself, in the historical story about Christ. Here again, the relating or 'reconciliation' of the Universal and the Particular is the Holy Spirit. Humanity becomes aware of itself as Spirit, or is given the Spirit by the Son, at the death of Christ on the Cross. In this moment, when, through its death to itself, God becomes Spirit,

> humanity has become conscious of the eternal history, the eternal movement, which God himself is. Other forms such as that of sacrificial death reduce automatically to what has been said here. 'To sacrifice' means to sublate the natural, to sublate otherness. It is said: 'Christ has died for all.' This is not a single act, but the eternal divine history: it is a moment in the nature of God himself; it has taken place in God himself.[43]

Rather than discounting this as bogus religiosity, Christian theology might need to take Hegel's religious seriousness into account. Hegel attempts to create a 'Spirit-Christology',[44] and one could grasp the nettle of responding to this in kind.

Those who miss this opportunity are lured into the thesis that God is love as Holy Spirit and fail to notice the Hegelian antithesis, that, as Holy Spirit,

[41] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* III, p. 276. [42] Ibid., pp. 276 and 286.
[43] Ibid., pp. 327–8. [44] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 40.

God is story. There are three principles which can arm a theologian against this conclusion. The first was well known both to Thomas, in his faithful reasoning, and to Barth, with his endeavour to reason faithfully. It is that theology is the unwrapping of God's revelation, and thus the unravelling of the *plenitude* or *fullness* of truth, not of a truth that has as yet to achieve its identity.[45] Revelation is the 'momentum of God's love to the Church', and theology occurs within it.[46] The second principle, following from this, is freedom, and thus it is also what freedom is for, *personalities*. It may be a drawback in Hegel's account of the Spirit as love that, for him, the Spirit is not a person, not, that is, a Third over and above the 'binity' of the relationship of Universal and Particular. Thirdly, then, and despite his conviction of the *centrality* of Christ's death, because his God is not integrally or personally free to create history, but simply *is* Its own story, it becomes impossible for Hegel to show that God designated this one historical event as *the* singular point for his self-expression. Since he is not free, Hegel's Spirit is bound to expressing himself homogeneously, in *all* 'Christ-like' sacrifices: his Spirit will relate the same tale in the death and resurrection of every mythic god.[47] Addressing this point in our second chapter, we argued that a *collective* founding for the Church, such as sharing a common mind about the biblical text, makes it difficult to distinguish the resurrection of Christ from that of a Gnostic saviour.

4. Truth and Personality

If God is not a story, and Christianity is a reality, this hinges on *truth*. This is not just the love of truth, in a psychological sense, but the truth of love, in a realistic sense. Narrative theologies often desire certain values, like freedom and personality, but their talk of freedom does not come off because they do not start from truth. In every narrative theology both the human and the divine person lack substance or what one used to call *bottom*.

Looking back at the patristic era after the dust has settled on the debates about the Hellenization of Christianity, it's fairly plain that, in its 'baptism' of Graeco-Roman culture, Christianity did unwittingly absorb some cultural ephemera, such as the idea that an 'invulnerable', healthy and autonomous male's perspective constitutes an intellectual norm into which revealed truths can be fitted. And so one would like to concur with Jenson's attractive claim, 'That we take God's personality seriously is vital to the religious life demanded by the gospel. The Bible's language about God is drastically personal; he

[45] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, pp. 23–4.

[46] Von Balthasar, *Glory* VII, p. 114.

[47] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, pp. 45–6.

changes his mind and reacts to external events, he makes threats and repents of them, he makes promises and tricks us by how he fulfils them.' If only he had stayed with that spontaneous, playful insight, and not founded it in a *theory* of what personality is, he might not have enclosed God in a story. The theory of *personality* in which he rests this conviction is, unfortunately, that the human, 'the self is not a "self"-contained or "self"-sustaining something' and thus that a 'person is' simply 'one whom other persons may address in hope of response'—that is, lacking any truth of its own and collectively defined by others. Since a biblical Christian's notion of God is the formal agent of his anthropology, one is naturally told that the Father's 'consciousness finds his "I" in the Son . . . and in such fashion . . . the Son and the Father are free for each other in the Spirit'.[48] This is a God who *lacks* the truth of personality until he finds it in his other. Defining 'reconciliation' as a 'finding of oneself in an other', Jenson suggests that, since

> the classical trinitarian tradition names the Spirit as the *vinculum amoris* between the Father and the Son, and if the love of the Father and the Son includes a reconciliation between them, then the Spirit is the agent thereof. . . . where two are one only because of a third, it is surely appropriate to speak of reconciliation. . . . we are reconciled to God and to one another simply because the God in whom we live and move and have our being is this God who is reconciled in himself. . . . We are reconciled to the Father in that the Spirit reconciles us to the Father's reconciled Son.[49]

One indicator of what Hunsinger rightly takes to be the impersonality of this notion of God can be found in Jenson's denial of the pre-existence of Christ. For Jenson, 'only the Father is pre-existent'.[50] Referring to the statement of the Johannine Christ that, 'Before Abraham was, I am', Jenson comments that one should not 'conceive the preexistence of the Son as the existence of a divine entity that has simply not yet become the created personality of the Gospels'.[51] The main sense in which Christ is *pre-existent* for Jenson is as historical Israel. And yet, as the New Testament scholar Simon Gathercole notes, the contour of pre-existence is created, in Scripture, by *Christ* himself: 'pre-existence in the New Testament is real and personal, because it is invariably the case that the person of Jesus Christ defines the "that" and the "how" of pre-existence'. Thus, in the great kenotic hymn of Philippians 2.6-11, Paul ascribes self-emptying 'to the pre-existent Jesus' as 'a personal act of *choice*'.[52] If one's theology lacks a concept of truth as eternally real in itself, one's notion of free personality will be undermined.

[48] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, pp. 222 and 121–3.
[49] Jenson, 'Reconciliation in God', pp. 160, 163–4, and 166.
[50] Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: A Review Essay', pp. 188 and 172.
[51] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 139.
[52] Gathercole, 'Pre-Existence, and the Freedom of the Son of God in Creation and Redemption: An Exposition in Dialogue with Robert Jenson', pp. 42 and 45–6.

Truth is the eternal self-giving of love. This is a notion of truth which emerges in conversation both with what is best in the Hegelian idea of truth (truth as love), and with what is worst—truth as becoming, which makes it impossible to lie, since things might go the way one said they were, or to be hypocritical, since one may become as one pretends to be, or to distinguish fiction from fact, since telling a story may lead to its being enacted. For Thomas, truth is a conformity between the way one thinks about a thing and the way it is.[53] If we would rephrase that in response to Hegel, we would take nothing away but add this: Realities lend themselves to be known because they give themselves to be known; they give themselves to be known because the energy by which they exist is love.

We suggested in the fourth chapter that one stimulus to non-realism, not only in modern Idealism and pragmatism but also in Greek and Hellenized Christian thought, is an unwillingness to *suffer* reality. A bit of the human mind is in denial about reality because it is in denial of suffering. It is not as a theodicist that one goes within a hair's-breadth of saying that God suffers on the cross; as if to say, 'God suffers too, so we're evens.'[54] But if one wants to stake a claim for accepting reality as it is then perhaps one has to connect the claim, not just to an unfortunate drawback in the way we *know* things ('we just have to swallow the pill', in this vale of tears), but to the way things really *are*, in themselves. One may thus say that something like 'suffering' is part of the way things are. From the perspective of the

> fundamental realism vis-à-vis the world, which, in its bottomless suffering . . . and its positive meaninglessness, resists all Idealism's attempts to interpret it away . . . a perspective is opened up on the central Christian synthesis that lies in the divinity of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. . . . All meaning hangs on the fact that, in Jesus, the God who 'cannot suffer' is able to experience death and futility, without ceasing to be himself.[55]

This 'something like suffering' is the selfless donation of love. Truth is thus not a becoming, but a patient listening to another being's self-declaration, and a vital, perceptive response, seen best of all in the mutual self-giving of two persons, their reciprocity.

Narrative theologies conceive the Trinity in a modalistic way because, without plenal, self-giving truth, one must have a modalistic notion of the *person*—the person as a self-begetting, autonomous substrate which only *appears* to

[53] Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Method of the Sciences*, q. 5, a. 1: 'the truth of the intellect results from its conformity with reality'; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 1 and a. 5: 'truth is found in the intellect according as it apprehends a thing as it is' (a. 5).

[54] Karen Kilby is critical of this Moltmannesque idea in her essay, 'Evil and the Limits of Theology'.

[55] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* II, p. 120.

engage with others. In this Hegelian perspective the self or personality is, in a sense, even more unconditioned and non-dependent than the Hellenistic *mens*: I project myself into the other as a means for *me* to achieve self-consciousness. It is literally *death* for me to become the other; hence the centrality of the idea of crucifixion in Hegel's theology. Without self-giving, kenotic *truth* at the bottom of all self-giving, as the paternal source of the Son's identity,[56] and through that of human identities, the existence of others is a violation of *any* identity. Hence the temptation to the abolition of the other, in a collective nest in which all little birds agree. With this absolutization of personal autonomy, comes the modalistic idea 'that between the Divine Persons there is not only a contrast, but a "contradiction" (albeit one that is constantly sublated), which Karl Barth terms "Hegel's boldest and most weighty innovation." '[57] Modern, anti-foundationalist theology tends to shy away from *truth* because it pictures it in terms of *my* facing an external object which corresponds to my idea of it. But here we are speaking of truth as we know it in good conversation, as an energetic interchange, not an immutable foundation. We mean truth in an ontological sense, that is, as the love from which every person, divine and human, is always rebounding. Without this conversational or dramatic notion of truth, 'the individual is seen solely in his antithesis to the other' and 'the other must appear as a contradiction through which the individual must find himself—and not as an equally legitimate other with whom alone he becomes who or what he is in the give and take of mutual dialogue'.[58]

Since every person's response to every thing and every theory has its uniqueness, rightly coloured by one's own perspective, no unitary idea has ever been collectively thought. But what approximate to collective *affective* reactions are not uncommon in the contemporary world. Projecting such collective affective states has been the vocation, first of the late baroque theatre, then of opera, of melodrama, and of cinema and TV today. For

> Racine may have rescued the theater one more time from the spirit of music, but he could do so only by concentrating on emotion rather than on the greater action that pits man against a hostile universe. After him, the operatic emphasis on projecting the inner states of the characters onstage dominates all serious theater. . . . the point of a play is to convey to an audience what Orpheus is feeling as he sings his way to the underworld. The affective power of music . . . is ideally depicted in the figure of Orpheus, hence his popularity amongst operatic composers.[59]

[56] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, p. 84.

[57] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 47, citing Barth's *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 285.

[58] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, p. 48.

[59] Dupree, 'Alternative Destinies: The Conundrum of Modern Tragedy', p. 283.

It may even be that, for all his love for truth, or for rationality, Hegel did not grasp the truth of love, 'because he logicizes and, ultimately, absorbs love in absolute knowledge. Love, it turns out, is mostly "sentiment."' So we have gone back beyond Hegel to the philosophers of dialogue themselves. Rather than assimilating all relationships into God's collective self-knowledge, these authors made the truth of God the transcendent guarantor of genuine reciprocity between one person and another.[60]

A simple theological principle comes in handy here. It was used by Athanasius in arguing that, if Christ is not God, he could not divinize us,[61] and by Basil of Caesarea in contending, likewise, that the Spirit is divine because we are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection by invoking his holy name.[62] The notion that like causes like gives us a reason to deny the hyper-rational thesis that the Spirit is not a *person*: the Spirit makes us persons. In Scripture, 'the Spirit effects personal relationship. ... he leads us into the ... innermost being of Jesus, into his relationship with the Father, and thereby reveals the latter's whole Personhood while bringing us into the personal relationship of the "child" to the Father.' Could 'such functions' 'take place in a purely impersonal way'?[63]

With his idea of truth as process, Hegel thought of God's *eternity* as his mere *objectivity*, and his coming to be as historical Spirit as the flowering of his *subjectivity*. Posited as eternal, *objective* 'love' by the Universal mind and its Particular concept, Hegel's Spirit posits itself as subjective consciousness in the community of the Church. There could be something in Hegel's thesis that there is a subjective-objectivity in the Holy Spirit (which is not, precisely, Hegel's 'Spirit'). But God is proactive, and the objectivity-subjectivity of this divine *protagonist* remains, in the historical adventures of human persons in the Church: to us, in history, the Holy Spirit 'is simultaneously the (objective) attesting of this love between Father and Son ... *and* the inner fruit of this reciprocal (subjective) love ... So his "leading into all truth" is initially something quite different from the imparting of information; rather, he leads us from inner participation into inner participation.' Because the Holy Spirit is the transcendent or immanent *truth* of love within God, a 'subject' in relation to Father and Son, but objective in himself, *eternally* 'search[ing] the depths of God' (1 Cor. 2.10, 12), the Spirit does not only show us the Trinity in its historical works, but leads us into the heart of the immanent God. It is in the Spirit that 'we come to recognize who this God the Father is, who "so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" (Jn 3.16), and also who this Son is ... Thus we are not only introduced to an "economic" Trinity in its

[60] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* II, pp. 48 and 46.
[61] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, no. 54.
[62] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Spirit*, chs. X–XI and XIX.
[63] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 114.

external relations; we are introduced to its immanent truth, otherwise we should not be introduced to "all the truth".'[64] In Christian tradition, this process of coming to *know* God is divinization, the human subjective appropriation of the ontological truth of God's love. Buried in all good Western catechisms, the idea of divinization has been vividly appropriated in the East. In 'the mind of the Greek Fathers', 'the three metaphysically distinct modes of the effusion of divine being understood as love' are 'Trinitarian procession, creation, and *deification*'.[65] A Spirit which was not God already but only in the process of becoming God could not deify us.

The principle which we have tried to express in many of our criticisms of a fictive God is that only a real, objectively given truth can make personal subjects of us: 'because of the "objectivity" of the mother's smile, the child's "subjectivity" is guaranteed'.[66] It's not that I face my mother and found my truth on accurately grasping her nature, but that she *gives me* my truth, and I may give her something of hers. Truth is a matter of reciprocal dependencies; even in God, for the persons of the Trinity eternally give one another their truth. Although, 'ultimately, it is inappropriate to speak of the "subjective" and "objective" in God, it is possible, in the "logic of love", to distinguish the Spirit's two aspects; but, contrary to Hegel, they should be seen, not as moments in the self-realization of absolute Spirit, but precisely in his eternally realized being'.[67] We prefer to speak of the Spirit as 'eternally realized being' than as the denouement of a tale because it is only as *eternal* that we can reasonably think of him as the creator of persons and thus as the truth of love.

5. Dare We Hope that God Exists?

Just as it is impossible to prove to the doubter that the table exists, so one may consider that if someone denies that the Five Ways are proofs of God's existence, on the grounds, for instance, that Thomas uses the word *effectus* just before he springs off into them, there is no reasonable response to such solipsism. But it can be legitimately questioned whether the proof of God's existence is as centre-stage in the theologies of Thomas Aquinas or Hans Urs von Balthasar as it has been in this book. We confess that we take Trinitarian heresies with a larger grain of salt than what Father Brown called 'attacks on reason'. It is not the *modalism* evident in narrative Trinitarian doctrines which gives us a sense of humour failure, but their aura of unreality. They strike us as exercises in rhetoric rather than in reasonable exposition. Likewise, it is not

[64] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, pp. 74–5.
[65] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 358, my italics.
[66] Schindler, *The Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 113.
[67] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, p. 243.

the unwitting modalism of McCabe's cinematic metaphor for the Trinity which exercises us, but the fact that it is 'just metaphor', not rooted in a sacramental, Trinitarian analogy of being. It seems to us that both defects are the upshots of not *knowing* that God exists, or of not utilizing the building-blocks of reality in what one says about God, whether *Uno* or *Trino*.

There are, nonetheless, two very strong reasons against the kind of argumentation which I developed in Chapter 5. One is, dare I say, that it doesn't work very well. It does not work well because a 'natural' argument for God seems to need to begin from *nature*. But modern urban dwellers are so far 'at two with nature', that such proofs have more the feel of intellectual games, which attract or repel on a *notional* level, than anything that could lead us to *real assent* to God's existence. Von Balthasar took a glum view of the survival of a sacramental sense of nature in a technologized world. He tried to understand the truth of the secularization thesis in terms of a Christological theology of history:

> we are not denying the possibility of a 'natural knowledge of God', as defined by the First Vatican Council . . . ; we are simply saying that, as a result of Jesus Christ's absolute claim, the vague, universally tangible 'divinity', '*rerum omnium principium et finem*' (DS 3004), has become profoundly latent; nor has it stopped seeking ever-deeper levels of concealment. Wherever modern technological civilization penetrates areas that are still religious, it also infuses a post-Christian, secular, atheistic consciousness as well. This comes not only through the human beings that make the machines but through the machines themselves; these new fetishes cast a previously unknown spell because they are manipulable. This step into secularity is irreversible . . . [68]

When the 'proofs' are delivered in a purely intellectual way, they will run into the sand of our rationalized minds and be of no effect. The 'proofs' are voiced by a converted religious consciousness; he or she can expect no quantitative payback. To *know* that God exists is to ensure that one's *theology* of the Trinity does not just play variations on language. 'By its very nature,' von Balthasar says, 'theological insight into God's glory, goodness, and truth presupposes an *ontological*, and not merely formal or gnoseological, infrastructure of worldly being. Without philosophy, there can be no theology.'[69]

Secondly, the academic reaction against arguments for God's existence comes down to solid objections to the use of Thomas' proofs within analytic philosophies in isolation from their theological context. I have written a book about the history of fideistic versus rationalistic readings of Thomas Aquinas in the twentieth century, and it may fairly be said that the author comes out squarely behind the fideistic Thomists, as the more reasonable of the two. But the current opinion that Thomas wrote, not as a philosopher but

[68] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, p. 65. [69] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* I, p. 7.

as a theologian in the second Question of the *Summa Theologiae* is not like Gilson's conviction that Thomas' arguments are better *arguments* without the rationalizing paraphernalia added to them in the last three centuries. Many who currently reclaim the arguments as *theological* treat 'theology' as an unreal enterprise, as if, *within* faith, the proofs are Theological Monopoly Money, to be traded only by believing players. This is to take up the pessimistic stance of foundationalist fideism, which keeps checking back on its *believing act*, as if *faith* did not show us reality. We have tried to mediate between the complementary ideas of the proofs as foundational philosophical exercises and as theological in a monopolistic sense. If the Bishop of Hippo were alive today, the author of Christianity's first philosophy of history would not just respond to Hegel, he would remark on the *libido dominandi*—the birthmark of original sin—implicit in concupiscent endeavours to gain a monopoly for reason or for faith. Our irenic proposal, is that, standing in a third realm between philosophy and theology, the proofs are *religious*, or 'religated'.

Our way of treating them as *religious* arguments has been to lay them out like a drama, like a sacramental procession, or a Noh play; or as analogous to a piece of good theatre in which human beings catch a reflection of the truth and reality of the cosmos. 'Cosmos' is a funny, slightly rhapsodic word. Zubiri notes that it means something different from 'world': 'World is objective structure of phenomena; cosmos, real ordering of realities. In Kant's idea of world the "things in themselves" remain outside of science; in the idea of cosmos, phenomena manifest and discover what things are.'[70] The proofs put the 'world' into a cosmological form, in which we can see its reality by dramatizing it.

Von Balthasar suggests that, when a human being makes his paces across this stage, he makes four 'basic gestures': first, turning, that is, 'turning-around or conversion', an initial peripeteia in which one freely and decisively turns around to see the light of Being or reality; secondly, one sees another person in the light of *perfection*, in the light of the norm or standard of truth and goodness; thirdly, one may *love* the other; and fourthly, one *hopes* or *yearns* for God.[71] In addition to showing us the world as *cosmos*, the dramatization of the proofs exhibits the human being as a *free* being:

> Without man's free ability to make decisions, the careering of blind fate is undramatic and subhuman. The fundamental element of all dramatic action on the world stage is man's . . . intelligent freedom that enables him to receive the 'instruction' that comes from the absolute light . . . together with the decision that this intelligent and responsible human being makes, embodying it in the form of history. This very act gives a

[70] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 81.

[71] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, pp. 111–16.

shape to the continuing stream of events (which is . . . unforeseeable); it gives drama a beginning, a middle and an end, as Aristotle required.[72]

The Barthian's instinctive response to our claim that we must *know* God exists if our Trinitarian theology is not to be just something we made up would be that theology gets its objective content from *faith*. The strictly *philosophical* Thomist has always been liable to retort that this deprives the world of its *autonomy*; if one wants to give Trinitarian theology a solid *foundation* one must do philosophy and then add theology. As we see it, however, the issue is not an autonomous foundation, but freedom, and hence the genuinely dramatic quality of the encounter between God and human beings. One may doubt the reality of created freedom in the *Church Dogmatics*;[73] it's as if for Barth only God is free, whereas only humanity is free, for Hegel. Thus, in dialogue with Hegel's secularizing thesis, human freedom is our best evidence for God's existence. We know freedom in every simple movement toward a selected good, picking up a cat and putting him down. Given our everyday experience of freedom, it is the sociologist's belief in the inevitable 'death of God' which juts up like an unsteady groyne above the tides of faith.

There was nothing sacred about the *Five* Ways, for Thomas; he sometimes gave only two arguments, or even just one.[74] When he used human freedom as his means of exhibiting God's existence, von Balthasar used just the Fourth Way, from perfections. We, as human persons, 'have an irrefutable awareness of our freedom'. Phenomenologically, freedom does not present itself to us like sight, or having the use of one's limbs, as given all at once from the start. Our sense of our freedom is exploratory; since it is at the basis of our ability to plan and project, our experience of freedom is like a sense of projectedness or movement. We feel, not that we always already have freedom, but that we are always moving into it, like sailing into the horizon. When I first grasp that I can move my limbs any which way I choose, my freedom is self-possession, a sense of owning my self. I experience such self-possession with vast enjoyment, as a *good* or a *truth* about myself:

When I grasp some finite thing that is true or good, this act is accompanied by a self-awareness containing something inseparably twofold: the consciousness of being present to myself is not something I only learn by exercising some particular activity of my own; 'even before my soul performs some abstraction, it has a habitual (self-possessing) knowledge whereby it can understand that it exists' and this is because the soul's essence is present to itself, so that it knows itself 'in and through its essence as God knows himself.'[75]

[72] Ibid., p. 111. [73] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* II, p. 159.
[74] Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, p. 60.
[75] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* II, pp. 207–8, citing Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, c. and ad 9.

It is in and through knowing myself as *my* very, self-possessed and *in*communicable self as a good, that I know others, indeed, everything else that is, as goods.

The rub is that the opposite is also true; the less I know of others, the less I know and grasp myself, and the more I let others enter my own, always incommunicable freedom, the more I have it; the more I relax my grip on my self-possession, the more firmly I grip it. I relax my grip by recognizing myself in the light of *other* freedoms. And now I'm posed with a decision, that same decision which made our Noh actor about-face. Nothing can compel her to do so. Why should she see them as other *freedoms* at all, and not as objects for her own manipulation and use? It is reasonable to let them go, and be free, for it is only their *reality* which makes them enjoyable to *me*. If these others in whose light I know myself *can* be treated as the *goods* I experience them to be, that can only be because they are a different reality from myself:

> it is an integral part of this imperishable freedom . . . that the soul, precisely because it possesses itself in freedom, necessarily respects all other beings on account of their freedom . . . and *lets them be*; only on this basis does it seek to embrace them. An existent being is good for me because it is real, because it complements my particularity; but since it is real, I cannot absorb it into me: I must allow it to maintain its own independent reality, for only then can it be regarded as good.[76]

The other cannot be a perfection, or true and good *for me*, unless it is true and good *in and of itself*. Once I acknowledge this, I can properly begin to *love* the other. Now, in one sense I know myself as a self-possessed freedom, but in another sense, all I know in myself is a partial freedom, one who receives his freedom from another. Do the goods which I acknowledge around me by loving them as themselves give me reason to *hope* that God is revealing himself through these goods? Perhaps the author has placed human beings on this stage in order to present them with a question of his own, which it is theirs to answer:

> If we assume that such a self-revelation of infinite Being . . . has somehow already taken place (this is Paul's assumption in Romans 1.19 ff.), the finite mind would also be faced (right from the start) with an ultimate decision: it would be challenged to see, in the necessary formal object, the manifestation . . . of the absolute, creative and personal ground—that is, God—and thus acknowledge . . . that its own freedom is immanent in not only encompassing Being but in infinite freedom. Furthermore it would be summoned to see the immanence of divine freedom and infinite will in its own, finite free being and will as the ultimate ground of its own, given . . . freedom. Alternatively it would withdraw from an immanence of this kind, aiming to be its own ground . . . but in so doing it would surrender itself to idolatry (Rom 1.21 ff.) by fixing the necessity of the formal object . . . on contingent, finite beings.[77]

[76] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* II, p. 240. [77] Ibid., p. 241.

It is on a reasoned affirmative to such dramatic questions that theology is based. For thus it founds itself, not in an alternative world, but in the real world, shown to be analogous to the Creator. For Hegel, the fact that the truth of freedom is a *movement* or a becoming means that it is a story. For Thomas, 'the Augustinian yearning to possess and behold God appears primarily as the movement of finite freedom toward its formal object, the Good'.[78] There are *theological* gains to be made by starting in human, religated 'freedom': the argument will show that,

> This transcendent reality of the primary cause is an intelligent and free reality. As such it is the absolutely absolute reality. It belongs to nothing but itself. In a word, it is a personal reality. . . . Its character of grounding the world is not the result of any internal necessity, but is rather a free act. The first cause as a personal and free reality: here we at last have God.[79]

6. From Analogy to Theo-Drama

We have claimed, not only that narrative theologies do not succeed on their own terms, but that what they propose can feasibly be achieved without making God a story. The post-Christian world isn't simply secular or a-religious; its melodramatic imagination expresses a yearning for Christian drama. In modern times, writers as various as Zubiri, Gilson, William Lynch, von Balthasar, and Wilhelmsen have sensed this need and each of them laid his own two cents worth into rethinking Christian metaphysics as theo-*drama*.

The counterpart to the religious or theatrical exposition of God's existence is that, unless we first think of the divine in a dramatic way, we shall not have much in the way of human stage-plays; without the energetic side of Greek philosophy from the Ionians on, for instance, no Aeschylus or Sophocles. An analogy is not just a vague *reminder* ('have I seen this movie before?'), but an actual *recollection* ('yes'). One cannot make a connection to an 'I know not what' ('shall I compare thee to a . . . a . . . no, that's not quite right, to a . . .'). The analogy hits the spot, goes all the way to ground, or it does not get off the ground at all. Four features of analogy are important to the development of a theo-dramatic theology as opposed to a melodramatic one. Analogies are cathartic, they are used at once affirmatively and negatively, they are imitative, and they are also expressive.

An experience is called cathartic when it is so awful that it is purifying. Such an experience puts us through the *reality* of the experience it names or recollects so vividly that it takes it out of us, *by binding us to it.* Louise

[78] Ibid., p. 239. [79] Zubiri, *Nature, History, God*, p. 314.

Cowan has said that Aristotle was closer to the mark in his suggestions about the *cathartic* nature of tragedy than he was in defining it as the 'imitation of an action'. But Aristotle's two ideas could also be said to touch on different aspects of the same experience. 'Catharsis' is a medicinal metaphor, and, like some medicines, a cathartic episode is nauseating; it makes us feel sick or dizzy. Hopelessness is an inability to see one's way forward out of one's own situation or perspective. When an analogy for the divine hits the spot, or swings us round from our mundane perspective to something real in God, we are swung off our feet: 'Is it not this sudden switch from one universe to another that causes the vertigo in tragedy that we call catharsis?'[80] The cathartic aspect of analogy is its purging us of our ordinary perspective, showing us what the world looks like upside-down, to us; for then we see, not only realities, but the perfect *source* of realities. We are safely on our own ground as we analogize forward, moving with the world *toward* God; we leave it when we see the running forth of the cosmos from God. As an 'imitation of an action', or of the *actus purus*, drama is on its positive upswing, safely swinging us up to God, from the goodness of this world; as catharsis, drama is the movement of the analogy, and all creation, out from God. It is because it shows us a human situation in all its changes and development that 'action is the soul of the literary imagination';[81] the theologian says that analogy imitates the action of creation and return.

Theologians have sometimes called these the apophatic and the cataphatic elements of analogy. We have kept to less technical terminology, and simply said that analogous language makes both a positive, affirmative statement, and a negative one. For von Balthasar as for Thomas Aquinas, the use of analogies with respect to God contains both an affirmative, which sends our sign for the worldly reality Godward, and a negative, which removes from the sign all creaturely materiality. The positive, affirmative thrust is the first. Without it, we could not know that the first shout needs to be muted or rethought, since we would not know, for instance, that God is transcendent; as Thomas puts it, 'unless the human mind knows something positively about God, it would be unable to deny anything about him'.[82] In affirming the *goodness* or *truth* of some worldly reality, and thus affirming that it is analogous to something in God, it projects something we know of human life Godward; in negating the materiality of our worldly perspective upon goodness, the analogate puts us even more firmly in the dizzying perspective of the divine order.

In Thomist tradition, analogies are not typically thought of as *expressive*; the Western thinker who makes most use of the idea of expression is the

[80] Cowan, 'Introduction: The Tragic Abyss', p. 17.

[81] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, p. 154.

[82] Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 5.

Neoplatonizing Bonaventure. It does not seem far-fetched to say that one way in which something is *analogous* to another is by expressing it; or does it? Did the poet mean to tell the lady that she *expresses* the summer's day to which he compared her? It might seem to strike a more down to earth, Aristotelian note to think of analogies as 'one on one' comparisons of one given person or state with another, in a way that leaves the two external to one another, like comparing two coins. But then again, if tragedy is *cathartic* because it puts us affectively 'in the eye of the storm', or at the dynamic *source* of the comparison, then there is something *energetic* even in Aristotle's idea of dramatic analogy. As *expression*, the movement of analogy is self-reproduction, as a flower *expresses* itself by seeding and as persons *express* themselves by begetting another like themselves.

Although this side of analogy may sound somewhat hyper-theological or rhapsodic, it is not easy to think *why* one thing is analogous to another without at least *imagining* the one as the *cause* of the other. For instance, all the parts of a painting must be analogous to one another, so as to form a unity, and so one thinks of all of these parts as *coming forth* from one single core, its 'absolute point of unity' thus becoming 'entirely and completely present in every detail'. In trying to explain what analogy is like, William Lynch asks us to

> suppose that the human principle is scattering and making itself through the whole of a man. When it comes to the eyes, they are fully human eyes—the eyes of a Mona Lisa. No semi-human principle has shaped such eyes. Nothing else but humanity, and no mere fraction of that, could have produced the hair of Botticelli's Venus. And so with a pair of hands in prayer. And so with the helplessness of the assassinated figure of Marat as painted by David. Only the fully human could have produced so full a death, and this kind of helplessness.[83]

When we think of analogy as issuing from *the spot*, we call it expressive or *revelatory*.

The most well-known *expressive* Christian application of the notion of analogies to the divine is the icon. These sacramental images catch up that energetic side of the Greek mind which, Zubiri suggested, was carried forward more in Platonizing than in self-consciously 'Aristotelian' Christianity. Through their reversed perspective, in which the pictured objects seem to be moving outward toward the viewer, icons indicate that they are intended to *communicate* grace to the viewer; they do not just *show*, they energetically express or convey the divine life. But, by reason of its 'Platonism', an iconic or expressive approach to analogy may appear to be fairly useless for appropriating the *historical* actions of God within theology. An icon is not intended to

[83] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, pp. 145–6.

be an historically realistic picture, but to frame scenes from the life of Christ and the saints in the light of eternity.

A sense for *historicity* is not the strong suit of the Thomistic contribution to modern theology. Colin Gunton and others have thus complained that the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition is unable to permit real *developments* within the life of Christ.[84] For instance, Thomas gives a marvellous, Pauline account of the effects of Christ's baptism on believers, but sees the baptism of Christ as effecting no change in Christ himself, since Christ was filled with the grace of the Spirit at his conception.[85] And yet, the baptism of Christ does seem to be a turning point or a dramatic development in his life. If we stick with 'analogy as resemblance' in the static and horizontal sense, it is hard to see how our Christological theology can be thoroughly *dramatic*. The Platonic or vertical ingredient in the idea of analogy of expression allows us to think that, 'action is the soul' not only 'of the literary imagination' but of the biblical imagination too; unless, that is, we have invested in a static or non-dramatic notion of *eternity*. Seen as expressive analogies, the historical scenes from the life of Christ articulate and dramatize their very source, in the eternal, dynamic life of the Trinity. What makes for drama in the life of Christ, and thus in the history of the world, is that his incarnate person expresses the very action or movement of his eternal procession.[86]

These four features of analogy, as cathartic, imitative, affirmative-negative, and expressive, help us to read scriptural affirmations about God dramatically. The Scriptures describe God as experiencing grief, anger, and weariness (Gen. 6.6; Isa. 7.13; 63.10; Deut. 4.25; Hos. 11.8–9; Jer. 31.20). A univocalist will logically overwrite the moment of *negation* which an analogical reading would spontaneously apply to these descriptions of God, and take God's 'grief' as literally as millennialists take the 'thousand years'. On the other hand, an anti-passibilist who only frequents the static side of the Greek mind may well deny them a *vital* kinship to God. A dramatic reading which takes those Old Testament texts into account might not 'be too quick' to limit 'Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem, his anger . . . or exasperation (Mt 17.17), and . . . his words of abandonment by God (Mk 15.34; Mt 27.46) . . . to his "human nature": after all, are they not a revelation of the "heart" of God?'[87]

[84] Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 37; a recent article notes the difficulties in asserting that Christ only *appeared* to receive the Holy Spirit at his baptism (for the benefit of the bystanders), since he had the fullness of grace from the moment of his conception: Richard Malone, '"Thou art my beloved Son": The Baptism of Jesus as a Trinitarian Event', *Communio* 32/1 (2005), 52–75.

[85] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 39, a. 1, reply 1.

[86] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 201.

[87] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, p. 215.

Like movies about the art of making and viewing movies, the icon, with its reversed perspective, shows by its very style what it is intended to do—to communicate the divine. There are certain Greek tragedies whose very plots are about the possibility of tragedy, as it were, expressing by their plots the nature of expression. 'At the heart of the tragic', Louise Cowan says, 'is the summons to divine inclusion, though it is hardly recognized as such by the victim. The site of entry is made ready by the suffering of a god. There could be no tragedy without the firebringer Prometheus, who crossed over immortal boundaries to bring mortals the gift of comprehension.'[88] Von Balthasar says that one 'approaches' the 'mystery' of the divine drama 'from both sides, that is, from that of negative theology, which excludes as "mythology" any notion that God *has to be* involved in the world process; and from the point of view of the world drama, the possibilities of which must be grounded in God'.[89] Perhaps this '*protagonist*-freedom' in God, to expose or reveal himself to humankind, the freedom to lay bare the ground of analogy, was pinpointed by certain Greek tragedians. Louise Cowan thinks that the very *possibility* or source of tragedy is proposed in such tragedies as *Prometheus Bound*,

> Nailed to the ledge, Prometheus . . . is the iconic figure of tragedy, becoming the visible sign of a suffering that heretofore unknown to the gods can no longer be viewed as the exclusive . . . burden of mortals. It is as though he prepares the way for tragic human suffering, leads the way . . . for mortal being to enter into an immortal ground. Until the final age, the drama makes clear, when a reconciliation will occur, a god is undergoing agony for the human race. . . . The protagonist has crossed the line between the human and the divine, has attempted to remake the human project and redefine the ideal concept of justice, and for his hubris is now isolated on a rocky cliff. . . . The elements of tragic illumination come together in *Prometheus Bound* . . . as an icon—an image of suffering divinity that has haunted the Western mind since the play was first performed. *Prometheus Bound* . . . is about the splitting open of the abyss, this rift in being, where those specially called may be brought for their suffering. In it we apprehend the vertical axis of the cosmos, with the protagonist touching (so to say) both the deepest regions of Tartarus and the highest regions of Olympus.[90]

The gesture which makes tragic *drama* possible is also that which makes dramatic *analogy* possible; theo-drama is possible because God *expresses* himself in creation as he *is* in eternity. A basic principle within Western theological tradition is that the *processions* of Son and Spirit—the Son's begetting and the Spirit's being breathed—are the expressive pattern for their 'tasks' in creating and saving the world. Their 'aptitude' for their particular creating and saving

[88] Louise Cowan, 'Tragedy's Bloody Borders: *The Oresteia*', in Glenn Arbery (ed.), *The Tragic Abyss* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), p. 109.
[89] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 327.
[90] Cowan, 'Tragedy's Bloody Borders: *The Oresteia*', p. 110.

missions is 'latent' in the format of their processions. That is, the processions of the Son and Spirit are the ultimate *cause* of the creating and saving of humankind, the shape of the one echoed or expressed in the shape of the other. Since he did not, as some descriptive Trinitarians imagine, split off the eternal from the economic Trinity, for Thomas,

> naturally, the entire triune God is active in creation, in the wisdom and goodness of his being, but also... according to the order of Persons within the Godhead: 'Thus the Father effects creation by his Word, who is the Son, and by his love, who is the Holy Spirit. Thus it is the processions of the Persons that cause the generation of creatures, to the extent that they include attributes of being, namely, of knowing and willing.' The power of the Creator belongs primarily to the Father by a certain order, '*ordine quodam*'. The birth of the Son from the Father 'is the foundation of every birth out of what is other than itself, for it alone, quite naturally, seizes the entire nature of the One who generates; other births only do this in an imperfect manner... All subsequent births... are deduced from this primal birth by way of a certain imitation... The same is true of the Holy Spirit.' If we consider 'the substance, as it were, of this ability' (to generate), the processions within the Godhead and the creative processions are 'not only to be viewed together: they are actually one. The fact that we call them "analogous" arises from the direction of the act.' 'For the procession of Persons in unity of essence is the cause of the procession of creatures in diversity of essence.'... Thomas always regards world process as a procession (a 'going-out') from God and a 'return to him'...[91]

The expressive, energetic commonality between the shape of the processions and the historical missions of the Son and Spirit is the Trinitarian basis for imagining the great theatre of world history as analogous to God's very being, or as dramatically *revealing* it. Given God's free creation of our cosmos, '*processio* within the Godhead and *missio* outside it are one and the same as far as the Divine Persons are concerned, even at the point where the Son and the Spirit enter the visible realm of creation: "just as the temporal procession is not essentially different from the eternal procession, but adds to it something of a temporal effect, so also the visible mission is not essentially different from the invisible mission." '[92]

But it still seems just to say that Bonaventure had more love for the notion of expression than Thomas did. He goes back to the 'why' of God's expressiveness, and finds in it 'God's inner fruitfulness' or energetic love, and 'it is this inner vitality of God that creatures will reflect more or less

[91] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, citing Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary* on the *Sentences* Ia, q. 45, a. 6, c. and ad 2; *In Boethius de Trinitate*, prol.; *De Potentia*, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3; *Commentary* on the *Sentences* I, d. 2.

[92] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, pp. 63–4, citing Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary* on the *Sentences* I, d. 16, q. 1, a. 1 sol.

obscurely or brightly'.[93] Von Balthasar goes further than either of the medievals, for he has to take on board the fact that, as an historical religion, Christianity has led the West to take history ever more seriously. It seems to us a retreat from history, into the safe arms of the story or eternal idea of Scripture, to reject the proposal that 'all of the events of Christ's life, including even the seemingly negative events of suffering and death which seem characteristic of pure finitude, are . . . an expression . . . of God's eternal life. . . . the event of Jesus' loving the world to the end (John 13.1) through the gift of himself in the Eucharist and crucifixion expresses the original and eternal life of the Father who has eternally "given-himself-away" to the Son. The Father's eternal generation of the Son, imaged and interpreted by the life and death of Christ, is best understood . . . in terms of a total-gift-of-self (*Selbsthingabe*) proper to love.'[94]

7. The Eucharistic Church

Along with many modern scholars, Bernard McGinn notes that the book of Revelation has a liturgical character, both in terms of its implied audience and of its content—the recurrent scenes of worship before the heavenly Lamb. One may even receive from it the indelible if unverifiable impression that the visionary narrator goes through the door (Rev. 4.1) into the body of Christ. And yet, McGinn also claims that Christian exegetes have perennially havered over whether to stress the horizontal-temporal or the eternal-vertical aspect of the text. Should one 'see the book as just a prophecy of what is to come or else to interpret it ahistorically as about the soul's (and the Church's) relation to supernal realities'?[95] Believing that one has to decide between them is a mark of not knowing what to make of its liturgical character. In so far as it has one, the 'plot' of Revelation comes round in circles, repeating itself, but analogically (as with the seven angels with their diverse tasks), making an unhurriedly majestic progress toward a sort of *bass* climax, which sinks lower, integrates more of nature, as it rises higher. If one takes Revelation liturgically or sacramentally, there is no need to apocalypticize it, or to read it as a melodrama of the elect and the damned.

Some sort of drama is going on in the book, something of a ritual combat between good and evil forces, those marked with the sign of the Lamb and

[93] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, p. 65.

[94] Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, pp. 126–7.

[95] Bernard McGinn, 'John's Apocalypse and the Apocalyptic Mentality', in Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (eds.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 12–13.

those bearing the number of the beast. This is how 'liturgy and judgement' go side by side in the book; its only drama is acceptance or refusal of the Lamb, and since the actors seem always already to have made their choice, there is no thrill of suspense. Revelation seems to be describing the Church both at one time and in all times, an eschatological phenomenology of ecclesial life. This is why von Balthasar would 'hesitate'

> to describe the sequence of images as such... as 'dramatic'; at most, the word should be reserved for the confrontation of the... inimical powers between which men find themselves situated and to which they can succumb (11.7, 13.7). The drama only attains its full shape if we relate the sequence of images to the concrete communities addressed in the 'letters' and reflect on their situation as we find it in the images, magnified and projected onto an eschatological canvas—in short, if we accept the Book of Revelation as an integral part of the New Testament. Then the series of 'stills' it gives us will acquire the movement they ultimately signify; then... biblical existence... will reveal its paramount dramatic quality. [96]

The only cinematic part of it, that is, is the matter of *choice* between accepting and refusing the object of human desire, the slain Lamb. No last-minute conversions take place, and one has to read from world to book, allowing present-day anxieties to clamber into the text, to find in Revelation a mentally intriguing plot. The reader of Revelation is given no questions to answer, no intellectual task to perform in reading it. One is just listening.

We have treated the emergence of narrative theologies as an imaginative problem, and it is thus natural to suggest an aesthetic solution. Since the melodramatizing of theology has been posited as the problem, the answer might lie in recovering a sense of what tragedy and comedy actually are. For the melodramatic imagination, comedy and tragedy are in one sense absolutely different—the first with its bright, happy ending, the second closing in unmitigated victimization of the just—and in another sense, profoundly conflatable. They have to be absolutely different, because both are taken as 'absolutes', bearing no analogical relation to one another. They are enabled to be identical, because in both, as conceived by the melodramatic or narrative imagination, the stage of action is transferred to the mind itself. It's the mind which does the work of imitation in both. As von Balthasar puts it,

> Just as the modern era has tended to elevate the... tragic dimension of life into a universal principle, there is also a contrary and related tendency to make the comic the ultimate, overall principle. ... the two attempts... become interchangeable, which leads to one cancelling out the other... in German... idealism...: the 'I' and the world

[96] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, pp. 36 and 50–1.

are subjectivized . . . and comedy is included . . . in the realm of the 'beautiful' in which the (absolute) subject comes to grips with the 'non-I' and identifies itself with it.[97]

A first step away from the absolute bifurcation of tragedy and comedy is to see that baroque, neo-classical tragedy left a fair amount out of the equation by which it sought to recapture the *essence* of tragedy. Its three unities of action, place, and time (a single day) made it impossible for it to harness the insight which some of the Greek tragic *trilogies* provide: tragedy *can* end in reconciliation. Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy ends with the *Eumenides*, in which the 'clear-eyed practical wisdom of the virgin Athena' brings peace to the house of Atreus, indicating 'the way from the bloody borders surrounding the abyss to the cool, clear air of the *polis*'.[98] Although Francis Fergusson's reading of it as a ritual may strike us as solid, *Oedipus the King* could come across as a devastating and titillating melodrama if Sophocles had not *shown that life goes on*, by bringing his hero back on stage, as an aged 'protector' figure in *Oedipus at Colonus*. The Theban outcast in Colonus is both an emigré and polluted by his crimes. The powers that be in Colonus are asked to receive him as such, as accursed as one who has hung from a tree. Where will Colonus root its 'justice', in political power, or in the 'more comprehensive framework' of religion? The 'tragic hero' thus 'becomes a test for the human order, which must decide what it considers supreme: its own order, figured here as cleanliness, or the gods' favor, allied to the stranger. For Sophocles, most intensely in his last two plays, the blessings of the gods are granted only if the outcast is accepted, and the outcast is always to an extent unclean.'[99]

This notion of reconciliation *within* tragedy moves us away from an absolute distinction between the two genres: both tragedy and comedy move in elliptical cycles or carry their beginning into their end. But, whilst concurring in the thought that 'we cannot say that tragedy alone opens up a perspective onto transcendence',[100] reconciliation is not, of itself, *a comic ending*, for where tragedy deals in pathos, comedy is about grace.

Melodrama is a secular or horizontal genre, a genre of endless progressions and digressions within a *single*, univocal frame. It envisions no genuine transcendence, or 'other' to world and history: 'the loss of the metaphysical dimension puts a question mark over both tragedy and comedy and leads to the modern obliteration of the distinction between them.'[101] Within that single frame, or in so far

[97] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* I, pp. 438–9.

[98] Louise Cowan, 'Tragedy's Bloody Borders: *The Oresteia*', pp. 121–2.

[99] Bainard Cowan, 'Through the Unlit Doors of Earth: Sophocles' Transformation of Tragedy', in Glenn Arbery (ed.), *The Tragic Abyss* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), pp. 152–3.

[100] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* I, p. 347.

[101] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* I, p. 445.

as one can conceive no extra-worldly response to the human condition of suffering and sin, tragedy seems the higher, or truer genre. So far as answers to the human condition are only 'provisionally given', comic grace is just the hero's good luck, and tragic suffering is probably just the mark of 'meaninglessness':

> comedy has a happy ending because the tensions which create it are not pressed too far, and tragedy can give the relatively satisfying appearance of a certain immanent justice, even when the hero is doomed: it summons us to face up to the abiding tragic dimension of all existence, while leaving it an open question whether this is a sign of the dignity or of the meaninglessness of all existence. In comedy, the 'gracious' good fortune prevails, which, in tragedy, could equally well be denied and, one day, *will* be denied—in death, 'the last enemy.' To that extent, tragedy is the deeper truth of existence that underlies every tragedy.[102]

But consider tragedy and comedy in the light of the recapitulative liturgy of the Apocalypse, and the roles are somewhat reversed. The *time* in which the tragedy of Christ's passion occurs is eternal—the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world. And yet, flowing from the passion into the broad *space* of history, is the comedy of the Church, in which grace flows from the Eucharistic sacraments of that passion:

> If the once-for-all drama of Christ is exalted as the norm of the entire dramatic dimension of life, two things must happen simultaneously: the abyss of tragedy must be plumbed to the very bottom (which no purely human tragedy can do); and, in it and transcending it, we must discern the element of *gracious destiny* that genuinely touches human existence (and not merely *seems* to touch it).

This seems to be von Balthasar's imaginative or aesthetic response to what he saw as Barth's failure to make grace take a real grip within *history*: 'gracious destiny' enters history through the sacraments of the Church. Only a tragic hero who is actually divine can make tragic reconciliation yield a comic sequel, without conflating the two, but holding them together in the great Christological analogy of exaltation in crucifixion. If the tragic hero's

> being is of such a kind that he is able to descend into the abyss of all that is tragic—far beyond the ability of any tragic hero ... [so] that the tragic overstretching of his person [is] ... absolute, that is, divine ... [then], precisely in this abyss of unsurpassable tragedy, the element of grace asserts itself, that grace which encompasses existence and can persist and penetrate into the conciliatory aspect of tragedy. Both together lead to the absolute Christological paradox: in the horror of dissolution ... we are delivered from the meaninglessness of the world's suffering, and grace and reconciliation carry the day.[103]

[102] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* II, p. 83.
[103] Ibid., pp. 83–4, my italics on *gracious destiny*.

This leads us back to Revelation. For the Joachimite tradition, Revelation is the key to 'the God of the Gospel', because it is about futurity. Irenaeus of Lyons was a thorn in the side of early partisans of Orthodoxy because this anti-dualist was as literal and millennialist as they come. Jerome put his inherited dilemma like this: 'To take it according to the letter is to Judaize. If we treat it in a spiritual fashion, as it was written, we seem to contradict the views of many older authorities: Latins such as Tertullian, Victorinus, and Lactantius; Greeks such as Irenaeus.' Taking up some hints from Irenaeus and a commentary by Victorinus, Jerome decided to transfer *literal* exegesis of the facts described in Revelation into recapitulative exegesis. To take the most dramatic instance, 'antichrist' is apparent in all ages, and not just the last one. Keeping the Irenenaean / Victorinian sense partially intact but treating it analogically 'gave later exegetes the freedom to interpret the text in congruence with the specific tribulations of their ... variant ecclesiastical worlds'.[104] It was through recapitulative or typological exegesis that Revelation became a book about the Church.

The drawback of reading Revelation and thus church history through the lenses of futurity is that, like baroque tragedy, it does not actually move at all, but remains frozen, in outward historical time, whilst moving within the reader's mind. The centre of the historical recapitulation we propose to find in Revelation is not literary, but actual, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It is in this 'mystery' that one 'can best see' that what Irenaeus called 'the Father's two hands' continue 'to work in concert' throughout the ages of the Church. The world and human time are headed forward by the dynamism of the Holy Spirit, acting through the Eucharistic Church. If one puts 'absolute eschatology' or apocalypticism to one side, and makes do, less melodramatically, with a 'relative eschatology', then the eschaton is distinct but not absolutely different from our own time. The *given* 'saving fact was and is present and the Spirit's presence is powerfully pressing the world and history toward the *eschaton*'.[105]

Grace or 'good fortune' is often represented in comedies by a woman. So it makes sense to say that when Christ gives himself in his Passion, he gives himself to a woman, in whose hands he becomes grace, or blessedness. Christ 'gives himself into the hand of the Spirit who brings about the sacrament ... and gives himself into the hand of the Church, who through the ages performs (*hoc facite*) ... what Jesus' gesture of self-giving has placed in her hands'.[106]

[104] E. Ann Matter, 'The Apocalypse In Early Medieval Exegesis', in Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (eds.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 40.

[105] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, pp. 199 and 22.

[106] Von Balthasar, *Glory* VII, p. 149.

This is a Christ who is really historical, both in the span of his life and in the spacious aftermath of the Church, because he is really dependent on others,

> those who are dying no longer have control over themselves; they must let others look after them—if indeed there *is* someone to care for them. And the Son of God . . . freely entered into this condition of dependence when he became incarnate. But even before this is said of the disciples . . . it is true of the feminine Church, to whose loving but powerless care the Crucified One is entrusted. This situation is essential to being human; the Son of God, in becoming man, cannot simply jump over it, but, in him, it is perfected by being raised to the supernatural level, and it will remain such as long as the Church exists in time. In his passion . . . he is sustained by the consent of the feminine Church, suffering with him. So he will be entrusted to the hands of the Church, particularly in his Eucharist.[107]

The 'foundation' of the Church is no epistemic certitude but a reciprocal dependency which expresses the character of the Trinity as love.

8. Melodrama or Theo-drama

The philosopher David Schindler defines reality as *analogous* when he argues that, '*Drama is the expression of the structure of Being*.'[108] We have considered the matter in a somewhat *literary* way as well, since there can be no 'theology that gives a fully valid translation into abstract concepts of the dimensions of poetry and image in Scripture'. A biblical metaphysics will be formed by the revealed images, 'because the verbal form of the Bible is the only proper form for all that is said by God's Son and Word concerning the Father'.[109] For a literary person, an actor's situation will never be nakedly 'dramatic', but always comic or tragic. Louise Cowan and some of her other students have shown us the way through tragedy and comedy in the course of this book. I am indebted to such *literary* minds for their taste for *all* the genres, tragedy, comedy, epic, and lyric, and thus for indicating the aesthetic insensitivity of the gesture of writing off one or more genres on ideological grounds. Attention to actual tragedies and comedies also makes it improper to think in terms of 'hyper-genres', or to account for all the facts at hand by merging the genres. Louise Cowan remarks that, on the one hand, 'Without the tragic there could be no comic resolution', but that, on the other, 'tragedy itself never simply turns into comedy'.[110] Hence, as a theological historian, I have been interested

[107] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, pp. 397–8.
[108] Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, p. 19, his italics.
[109] Von Balthasar, *Glory* VII, pp. 267–8.
[110] Cowan, 'Introduction: The Tragic Abyss', p. 14.

in teasing out where von Balthasar is taking us amongst the genres; which moments of the 'theo-drama' does he see as tragic, and which as belonging to the graced and blessed region of comedy? We have spoken of the Father's eternal self-giving, his plenal gift of himself to his Son: surely, in that eternity, all there is room for is comedy? Not *precisely*, because 'even though this same communication' of himself to the Son 'is an act of absolute love, blessedness consists in *bestowing* itself'. Despite the fact that 'we may have a stereoscopic view of these two aspects', that is, although we can see tragedy and comedy *together* in God, 'we have no right to regard the Trinity one-sidedly as the "play" of absolute "blessedness" that abstracts from concrete pain'.[111]

The literary categories of tragedy and comedy must not only be 'affirmed and negated', but also interpreted in the light of the divine drama which makes them possible: 'the God of theo-dramatic action is neither "mutable" (as in the mythological view) nor "immutable" (in the terms of philosophy). We shall have to see, as the drama unfolds, how it is impossible for him to be either the one or the other.'[112] There is a third possibility. In their efforts to avoid the immutability of the philosophers, some theologians ascribe a philosophical mutability to God, by insisting that God *does* tackle evil, because it is of his *essence* to suffer for us. 'Those who do so,' von Balthasar believes,

> imagine that the divine drama only acquires its dynamism . . . by going through a created, temporal world and only acquires its seriousness and depth by going through sin, the Cross and hell. This view betrays a hubris, an exaggerated self-importance, on the part of creaturely freedom; it has succumbed to the illusion that man's ability to say No to God actually limits the divine omnipotence. It imagines that, by saying No to God, it is *man* who has drawn God into a momentous trap and made him consider how he (God) may extract himself from a trap he himself has set.

A melodramatic theology replaces the static Essence of classical theism with an Essence who is given an opportunity to become passible by human sinfulness; or, more strongly, a God to whom evil makes an offer which God cannot refuse. Von Balthasar wants to affirm, conversely, that to be dramatic is a divine perfection, that is, a *good* which generates and causes the cosmic or worldly good of drama: 'it is the "drama" of the emptying of the Father's heart, in the generation of the Son, that contains and surpasses all possible drama between God and a world. For any world only has its place within that distinction between Father and Son that is maintained and bridged by the Holy Spirit.'[113]

[111] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 325.
[112] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* II, p. 9.
[113] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, pp. 326–7.

Theology steps onto the slippery slope to melodrama once it absolutizes either tragedy or comedy. A *theo-drama*, that is, a drama whose free author and protagonist is *God*, will neither affirm that tragedy is the only *realistic* genre, nor dictate that, because of the Holy Spirit, everything is all right in the end, and we really live in reconciled blessedness without happening to notice that we are in that comic terrain. But, von Balthasar writes,

We are not saying that the eternal separation in God is, in itself, 'tragic' or that the Spirit's bridging of the distinction is the sublation of tragedy, that is, comedy. Nor are we saying, in a Hegelian sense, that the trinitarian drama needs the contradictions of the world in order to go beyond the 'play', or go beyond the 'abstract', and become concrete and serious.[114]

For von Balthasar, as for Thomas, the *ratio* or pattern of the eternal processions of Son and Spirit contain in themselves the *ratio* or patterns of *creation*. They are analogous to them. The *ratio* of human tragedy is the '"risk"' which the Father takes in giving the whole of himself away in begetting the Son:

a world that is full of risks can only be created within the Son's *processio* (prolonged as *missio*); this shows that every 'risk' on God's part is undergirded by... the power-less power of the divine self-giving. We cannot say that the Father is involved in 'risk' by allowing his Son to go to the Cross, as if only then could he be sure of the earnestness of the Son's indebtedness and gratitude. However, if we ask whether there is suffering in God the answer is this: there is something in God that can develop into suffering. This suffering occurs when the recklessness with which the Father gives himself away (and *all* that is his) encounters a freedom that, instead of responding in kind to this magnanimity, changes into a calculating, cautious self-preservation. This contrasts with the essentially divine recklessness of the Son, who allows himself to be squandered, and the Spirit who accompanies him.[115]

When von Balthasar writes that 'there is something in God that can develop into suffering' he means that suffering or tragedy can be taken as a positive analogy for the Triune life.

But, at the same time, one has to mute or negate the analogy, because there is here no glorification of eternal, tragic suffering within God. It is because finite freedom freely rejects God (idolatrously choosing *itself*, in 'calculating, cautious self-preservation' over infinite freedom) that God freely takes the path to the Cross. Like Thomas, von Balthasar treats the *rationes* or patterns of the divine *processions*—the begetting of the Son and the breathing of the Spirit—as the *rationes* or patterns of creation and salvation history; and, as with Thomas, the fact that creation and salvation history are implicit in the

[114] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, p. 327. [115] Ibid., pp. 327–8.

eternal processions does not entail that creating and redeeming the world are eternally necessary for God.

The notion that there is 'something in God that can develop into suffering' does not import *potentiality* into God, any more than does the principle that the creative and historical missions of Son and Spirit are eternally 'latent' in their divine processions. The phrase simply means that the eternal energy of the Triune *love* can be taken as analogous to 'suffering', which can in turn be taken from our perspective as analogous to 'pain'. The eternal love of the persons of the Trinity is not 'painful'; but it is *reciprocal*, the eternal dialogue of the 'I' of the Father and the 'Thou' of the Son, in the Holy Spirit's embracing 'We'. The persons of the Trinity 'suffer' one another in the sense that each 'lets the other be', the Father begetting the Son, out of the fullness of his being, giving the whole of himself away, and receiving in return the reciprocating thanks of the Son; Son and Father breathing the Spirit, and receiving in return the reciprocating gift of the Spirit's love. 'This means, however, that we have in fact overstepped the limits of what we mean by "tragedy"—although the word retains its validity in its own sphere. For in itself, however baffling it may be to the finite mind, the all-embracing reality within which "tragedy" is played out is—eternal blessedness.'[116] What 'can become' suffering in God is the eternal, self-giving love of the persons of the Trinity; as it expresses the persons of the Trinity and communicates the nature and being of God from Father to Son to Spirit this love is the helpless joy of 'blessedness'.

9. Predestination and Eschatology: 'Time . . . must be lived'

We began with predestination as a determinant of the theology of Karl Barth, and it is thus a reasonable spot in which to conclude our journey. We know that, as one theologian complains, 'Barth locates Christ's function as God's centering object not in Christ's final reality but in his primal reality',[117] that is, in the Father's eternal *election* of Christ. It was by his 'doctrine of election, where God freely decides that a certain stretch of history will enclose all other history by containing his own temporal self-repetition' that the great fideist aligns the lens of 'theology through the irreversible *analogia fidei* between God and man' and thereby 'enables the story to be the all-embracing world of meaning'.[118]

Barth's conception of the eternal predestination of all humanity in the election of Christ was not only intended to ward off the seventeenth-century Calvinist theodicy and the subsequent objections thereto, but to echo down to a decision made centuries before, the choice to conceive of the path of the City

[116] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, p. 246.
[117] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 180.
[118] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, p. 154.

of God in this world as a history reflecting the eternal predestination of some to damnation and others to salvation. Augustine's *On the City of God Against the Pagans* is a work of theodicy, and we have proposed that, in many of its moods, as in its discussions of original sin and the fall of Satan,[119] it gave the West a good grip on the contingencies of history and of the evil sown therein. But there is another side to Augustine's mind, which belies his patience with the intermingling of the wicked persons amongst the godly, in the Church, and of the presence of 'sons of the Church' outside it. We have, he says 'less right to despair of the reformation' of the Church's *internal* enemies 'when some predestined friends, as yet unknown even to themselves, are concealed among our most open enemies'.[120] By proposing a *predestined*, two-fold path, to damnation and to salvation, as a theodicial *ultimate*, Augustine constructed an eschatological by-pass over the goodness and love of God which earlier writers like Irenaeus had seen in the entire historical 'drama of salvation', and especially in the historical mission of Christ. This is to give fallen Adam the last word, and not the rescuing Christ.[121] Thus, as O'Regan notes, 'the theodicy center in Augustine is no longer, as it is in Irenaeus, the incarnation and the salvific passion and death of Jesus Christ, but rather the eternal will of the divine which gratuitously elects some souls to salvation out of the mass of perdition of corporate sinfulness and guilt'.[122]

Most historians of ideas think of Augustine and Western 'orthodox' tradition, on the one hand, and Joachim and his heterodox descendants like the Anabaptists on the other as the opposed debating partners who have periodically swung Christian eschatological reflection in favour of eternity and then for history. But from the perspective of the problem of good and evil, the Augustinians and the Joachimites seem remarkably similar: the apocalypticists may want to speed up the process, and begin scything the tares from amongst the wheat right away, whilst the episcopally acceptable tradition advises patience in these matters, but, for both, the ultimate, *founding*, teleological image is of the parting of the ways, some exiting to perdition, others to bliss. The problem, which seems to begin with Augustine, is that the foundational *image* of the heavenly, eschatological Jerusalem, is not an inclusive one.[123] It is not even open to being considered as inclusive, because the founding assessment which makes sense of history contains the certitude that some are lost, some saved.

Barth is clearly trying to reverse this image, with his counter-proposal that *all* are saved in the eternal election of Christ. But this way of going about it

[119] See above, Chapter 4, section 8. [120] Augustine, *City of God* I.35.

[121] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope 'That all Men be Saved': With a Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 72.

[122] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 319–20.

[123] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, pp. 277–8.

does not just lend fluidity to an over-rigid image of the two destinations, but replaces the Augustinian foundational eschatological certainty with a certainty of its own. If what we know, within 'God's story', is that *all* are damned and saved in the eternal rejection-election of the Son of God, 'so that, besides him, no one may be lost', then even if we resolutely refuse to use the expression 'universal salvation', still, one has got a static image of the future, a future of whose outcome one is so certain that the free-flowing dynamics of love cannot enter the picture. Better, then, 'to stay well away from so systematic a statement and limit oneself to that Christian hope that does not mask a concealing knowledge but rests . . . content with the Church's prayer, as called for in I Timothy 2.4, that God wills that all men be saved'.[124] Whether one goes with the Augustinians / Joachimites and proposes that one *knows* for sure that some are to be lost, some rescued, or with the proponents of universal salvation, the motor is still epistemic certainty—the certainty of *knowledge*. Augustine's statement that one cannot *hope* for another's salvation, for one 'cannot *know* whether he belongs to the predestined or not' is best destabilized or shaken off its foundational high-horse, by resting the theological virtue of hope in that of *love*. Thomas did this, when he proposed that one can hope for another when one loves him as one loves God, and through God, loves one's neighbour: once a person's intention is routed through the other, he can hope as much for the other as for himself, for now hope becomes as unrestricted as love itself.[125]

C.S. Lewis gives as good an explanation as any for why neither predestination nor universal salvation are genuine historical or *dramatic* options:

> every attempt to see the shape of eternity except through the lens of Time destroys your knowledge of freedom. Witness the doctrine of Predestination which shows (truly enough) that eternal reality is not waiting for a future in which to be real; but at the price of removing Freedom which is the deeper truth of the two. And wouldn't Universalism do the same? Ye *cannot* know eternal reality by a definition. Time itself, and all the acts and events that fill Time, are the definition, and it must be lived.[126]

As with Hegel's definition of truth as becoming, it is in a way the point of narrative ontotheology to find a way of affirming that 'Time . . . must be lived.' That is why, as we have seen, some grammatical Thomists propose that the 'truth' of the Creeds lies in our promise to abide by them, and our story Thomist contends likewise that God has his reality as the promise of life after death, or death's overcoming by life:

[124] Von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, pp. 44–5, citing Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, p. 551.
[125] Von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, pp. 73–5.
[126] C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, cited in von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope*, p. 93.

For faith, 'God' equals, by definition, 'Whoever raised Jesus.' *That we have a narratable future*, that we live *for* this past and only therefore knowable person, *is itself an occurrence*. It is a temporal occurrence, for it came after Jesus' death and before his appearances. This event is the occurrence of God. And since the reality of the resurrection is the reality of a promise, we must say that God now is real as this promise.[127]

Moreover, *love* is the self's fulfilment, the bliss of achievement and closure in the other's arms, and thus one may say not only that 'love can be the End' or the eschaton, but that 'God is achieved futurity', and this reconciliation of the other in the one 'is love': 'God is *an* achieved futurity, and therefore is the particular act of love.'[128] Thus, going beyond the Joachimites who unadventurously restricted their tale of truth's becoming to worldly history, Hegel and his heirs confess to a deeper 'narrative commitment', one in which the divine constitutes itself by living its own story.[129] In such systems, the Holy Spirit comes out on top: where Arius had subordinated Son to Father, because of the Son's narrative commitments, Jenson subordinates Father and Son to Spirit, who comes last in the serial progress of the Trinity's self-constitution, and thus contains its teleological truth.[130] For Jenson, the Trinity is defined by its relation to a goal. Since 'active personal relations are relations to a future', the 'relation of the Father to the Son in the Spirit is the Father's relation to his future. And the relation of the Son to the Father in the Spirit is the Son's relation to his future. If then God *is* the mutuality of trinitarian relations, then God is his openness to himself as a true future not fixed by any past . . . God is love.'[131] The question is again, however, whether human freedom is given any part to play in this intratrinitarian theodicy. Where Barth put his theodical predestination in the 'past', Jenson, like Hegel, locates it in the future. But, then, we have not moved outside the 'Augustinian' pattern of certainties lodged in a teleological or eschatological explanation of good and evil. One has also to reap the fruits of instrumentalizing an intradivine action to explain *away* human suffering and thus human experience. For what explains and thus rationalizes human suffering and human experience is that 'the divine process of self-constitution qua Inclusive Trinity is self-legitimating': 'Granted eschatological vantage point, Hegel is in no doubt that the so-called negatives in the narrative of historical becoming will disclose themselves as positives, thereby releasing God from accusation. God is justified, if you like, by the charges being dropped.'[132] As Jenson sees it, this enables us to 'arrive at the

[127] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 162. [128] Ibid., pp. 162–3.
[129] O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 305–6.
[130] Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: A Review Essay', p. 173.
[131] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 174. [132] O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 323 and 315.

proposition: God is love. For God is the possibility of death's *future*. He is the reconciliation of death and hope. Which is to say: he is the success of love.'[133] This 'success' consists in the fact that human freedom and thus the reality of human history has been consumed and digested into the path of God's auto-constitution as 'love'.

One could consider Jenson's lively suggestion that 'Being is interpretive relatedness across time; that is, to be is to rise from the dead'[134] in relation to Roberts' criticisms of the Barthian conception of time. As Barth would have it: 'Fulfilled time takes the place of our non-genuine . . . time as genuine . . . time. . . . In revelation time has discovered its origin and its aim.'[135] Roberts' objection to 'let[ting] ourselves be told what time is by revelation itself' is that it 'necessitates a complete reconstruction of reality on theological foundations which . . . stays systematically at one remove from reality as normally experienced'.[136] Could one say anything different about the narrative theological idea of time? It is difficult to conceive what phenomenology of human temporality could find in it a trinitarian experience of resurrection from the dead. Moreover, by equating the phenomenology of lived time with a pure sense of *futurity*, it eliminates the most vital kernel of temporal experience, which is the sense of the continued, persistent even causative *reality* of the past in the present, and of the present, *as present* to the future: that is, the sense of *all* times, present and past, as retaining their goodness and perfection, unlost by the fleeting moment. If all value is located in the *future*, times past and present have no value as they move toward it: it's only 'success' or meeting the future which is valued. If God *is* futurity, then the past cannot be salvaged even as an archaeological substratum left by the bulldozers; it will be entirely erased. Faith in God as 'futurity' is a little too proximate to that old-fashioned belief in 'progress' which is, ultimately 'a flight from time', because the temporal mundanity of the present moment is lent a secondhand excitement from the hope that some 'success' may eventually be snatched out of it. If one asserts that the narrativist's faith in futurity 'flees from everything that, in time, is eternal'[137] one is not just overturning the proposition, and claiming that our empty and secondary time takes its meaning from the divine eternity, but rather affirming that, the very movement of each temporal moment is its way of participating in eternity.[138]

[133] Jenson, *God After God*, p. 164.
[134] Jenson, *Systematic Theology* I, p. 182.
[135] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, pp. 66 and 69.
[136] Roberts, 'Barth's Idea of Time', pp. 123–4, quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, p. 45.
[137] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, pp. 93–4.
[138] Schindler, *The Dramatic Structure of Truth in Hans Urs von Balthasar*, p. 89.

All time is included in God. This increases rather than lessens the reality of created time, because it entails that, even at the eschaton, our historical time will not be brushed away as if it had never been. The 'One who sits upon the throne' in the book of Revelation 'says "Behold, I make all things new." Not: Behold, I make a totally new set of things, but "Behold, I refashion and renew all that is." ' It is because our time flows from eternity that 'even what we call our "drama"... will be *present*, not *past*'[139] and 'the new world will remain *our* world'. Since the reality of our time comes, not from the future but from eternal self-giving love, 'everything that is lived in a fragmentary and incomplete way on earth has always had its ultimate ground in heaven'.[140] Even 'the animal', which philosophical rigour will not permit even certain theo-dramatists to allow to 'rise above the water level of time' to eternity,[141] must be given its place. Whatever Aristotle thought, 'the Old Testament sense of solidarity between the living, subhuman cosmos and the world of men (Ps 8; Ps 104; Gen 1, and so on), the prophetic and Jewish ideas of divine salvation in images of peace among the animals (Is 11.6-9; 65.25)' indicates that everything good which has been included in our history will be included in paradisial eternity. In every pleasing and comedic way, then, 'our earthly existence... will be present in an unimaginable and unimaginably true manner' in heaven.[142] For the heart of the drama consists, not of sin, and evil, but of that dialogical 'interplay', 'found in the permanent, reciprocal relationship between finite freedom—once it has been finally liberated—and infinite Freedom'.[143] This settles the Manichaeans.

> There is one casual anecdote about St. Thomas which illuminates him... It... shows him as a character, and even as a comedy character... They steered that reluctant bulk of reflection to a seat in the royal banquet hall; and... he... was soon forgotten in the most brilliant and noisy clatter in the world: the noise of French talking... and then suddenly the goblets leapt and rattled on the board and the great table shook, for the friar... had cried out in a strong voice,... 'And that will settle the Manichees!'
>
> Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*

[139] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, p. 200.
[140] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, p. 413.
[141] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, p. 82.
[142] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, pp. 421 and 413.
[143] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, p. 201.

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In *God Is Not a Story* Francesca Aran Murphy offers an original critique of narrative theologies, including the works of George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson, and Herbert McCabe. She contends that to describe Christian doctrines as 'stories' is to undermine the reality of such doctrines, and that those who use the paradigm of story or narrative in theology are more interested in theological method, or what they are 'doing when they do theology', than in the content of theological affirmations. Murphy argues that, instead of speaking of, for example, the Trinity or the Resurrection, narrative theologies tend to focus on methods for speaking of the Resurrection, the Trinity (and so on), and that this linguistic concern transforms these facts or events into 'stories'. 'Story' is conceived as plot, and, within these terms, 'God' is envisaged as the major plot vehicle within the 'story' of Christian theology, subserving its methods and techniques. Yet the Scriptural revelation on which Christian theology depends is not a story or a plot but a dramatic encounter between mysterious, free and unpredictable persons. Murphy develops an alternative approach, making use of cinema and film theory, and engaging in particular with the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

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