



MERE METAPHYSICS: AN ECUMENICAL PROPOSAL

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Abstract

This is the second part of an essay that appeared in *Modern Theology* in October, 2018, entitled “After Heidegger and Marion: The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today.” Whereas the first part made a case for the importance of metaphysics to Christian theology (specifically in the form of an analogical, proto-Christological metaphysics), and hinted at its ecumenical potential, the point here is twofold: first, to provide a more detailed argument for analogical metaphysics as the kind of metaphysics Christianity in fact implies; secondly, to elaborate its ecumenical potential – now, though, more specifically, with regard to the Christian East. Whereas the previous essay sought to overcome while respecting the difference between Catholic analogy and Reformed dialectics by arguing for a dialectical analogy as the proper form of Christian metaphysics, here the specific task is to show a formal compatibility between the analogical metaphysics of the Christian West and the sophiological metaphysics of the Christian East. Accordingly, the goal is to show that there is such a thing as a mere metaphysics – a common metaphysics – of the Christian tradition, notwithstanding real differences and mutually enriching emphases.

1. Introduction

Roughly seventy-five years ago, in an effort to distill the basic elements of the Christian faith, C. S. Lewis delivered a series of radio talks for the BBC, which became what we now know as *Mere Christianity*. What I mean here is something similar; I mean something like the “mere metaphysics,” the common metaphysics, to which all Christian confessions implicitly subscribe. Admittedly, the importance of metaphysics to Christianity cannot be taken for granted today – neither in Protestant theology, which, excepting the Anglican tradition, has traditionally been averse to it, nor even in Catholic theology, which has traditionally been hospitable to it. Indeed, after Heidegger and Marion, the significance of metaphysics to Catholic theology has been seriously called into question, notwithstanding the calls for the renewal of metaphysics in *Fides et Ratio*. For this reason it was necessary to address both theological and philosophical critiques of metaphysics in a previous article.¹ Having there called for greater precision in our use of the term “metaphysics,” clarified the difference between philosophical and theological metaphysics, and reaffirmed the legitimacy of metaphysics (rightly understood) as a service to the

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¹ John R. Betz, “After Heidegger and Marion: The Task of Metaphysics Today,” *Modern Theology* 34, no. 4 (October 2018): 565–97.

understanding of the faith (the *intellectus fidei*), my purpose here is to set forth in more detail the kind of metaphysics that I think is not only best suited to the task of Christian metaphysics, but that also holds the most ecumenical promise, being the metaphysics that the *intellectus fidei* calls for and Christianity, in fact, implies.

While metaphysics lends itself to different forms, which we may generally classify as univocal, equivocal, and analogical, it is only an *analogical* metaphysics, I argued, that is adequate to this task: firstly, because it respects the abiding *difference* within any similarity between God and creation, uncreated and created being – not, I hasten to add, in such a way that God and creatures fall under a common and ultimately comprehensible concept of being, but rather in such a way that God is recognized as the primary and incomprehensible analogate of what we mean, without ever fully comprehending, by being; secondly, because it is able to bridge without negating the difference between reason and faith, nature and grace, and the corresponding difference between philosophical and theological metaphysics; thirdly, because it can help us think through the metaphysics of the hypostatic union and thus Christ himself as, in Balthasar's words, the concrete *analogia entis*, in whose person God and creation, however different, are marvelously one.² And so I argued that an analogical metaphysics, which can in principle be demonstrated on philosophical grounds, is a philosophical type that is fulfilled in *Christological* metaphysics.

In keeping with the radical and ultimate dissimilarity proper to any genuine analogy, however, I also affirmed a dialectical moment proper to analogical metaphysics, specifically, regarding the analogy between philosophical and theological metaphysics. For Christ as the Word made flesh, and *a fortiori* as the Word of the Cross, spells the end of philosophical metaphysics – the end, that is, of any metaphysics that presumes to get along without the light of revelation, once it is given, and so ends up positing itself, i.e., one or another construct, idolatrously in its place.³ There is therefore something to be said for the concerns of the Reformers, the dialectical theology of Barth, and every critique of onto-theology inspired by Heidegger. But this ending of philosophical metaphysics, I argued, is at the same time its real beginning. For if philosophy relinquishes its presumption to grasp the divine on its own terms (Gen. 3:6-7) and submits to the passion of faith, in short, if it dies to itself, it is also born again as *theological* metaphysics. In other words, philosophical and theological metaphysics are bridged through a kind of death. Hence I argued for a *dialectical* analogy as the proper form of the relationship between them, and therewith for the possibility of an ecumenical metaphysics that is able to do justice to the concerns of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions, as represented by theologians as different as the Reformed Barth and the Lutheran Oswald Bayer, but also philosophical critics of metaphysics such as Heidegger and Marion.

Admittedly, such a metaphysics would appear to be exclusive to the West and its history. But if an analogical metaphysics is the *de facto* metaphysics of the Christian faith, then it applies not only to the churches of the West, but also *mutatis mutandis* to the churches of the Christian

² See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 4: *Spirit and Institution* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1995), 287.

³ As Oswald Bayer puts it, “Concepts of metaphysics can become idolatrous. Even the teaching of the church and theology can produce idolatrous images out of the divine attributes if we ignore the cross of Christ when speaking about such attributes as power, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness. In Luther’s exposition of the twentieth thesis of the 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation* we read that ‘none of us can talk adequately or profitably about God’s glory and majesty unless we see God also in the lowliness and humiliation of the cross.’” See Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 23.

East.⁴ I do not mean to suggest that an ecumenical metaphysics will have much, if any, bearing on particular confessional differences, which will likely remain; indeed, metaphysical differences will also remain. Nevertheless, it is my contention that the metaphysical differences between the Christian East and the Christian West (and perhaps even confessional differences) are ultimately *complementary* within a universal, analogical metaphysics of creation and deification. For analogy, as a literary and philosophical figure for Christology, means unity-in-difference. In addition, therefore, to serving the *intellectus fidei* in the way described in the preceding article, my aim here is to show how the Church's metaphysical traditions can be thought together in a manner that might contribute in some small way to the unity that Christ desired for the Church (cf. John 17:21).

Needless to say, this is no modest proposal, which is why it is an essay – an attempt – and nothing more. It is also a proposal that stands to be rejected *a limine* by at least two groups: on the one hand, by Christians and non-Christians alike for whom the age of metaphysics is over or who think that metaphysics is extrinsic to properly Christian concerns; on the other hand, by Christians of the East and West, respectively, who define themselves largely by opposition (e.g., Catholics are *not* Protestants, and Orthodox are *not* Catholics, and so forth), and who will invariably judge it to be too ecumenical. With regard to the first group, I can only repeat the argument I made in the previous article: that theology needs metaphysics both for apologetic purposes (however minor and insignificant its role may be compared to the preaching of the gospel and the testimony of the saints), and for the *intellectus fidei*. This does not mean that metaphysical reasoning must precede faith in the *ordo cognoscendi*, which it practically never does, much less that faith requires metaphysics for its justification. Rather, to use a traditional idiom, it is a matter of seeking to understand what faith itself, once given, implies, in the way that a person working on a puzzle labors to see the *logos* that is already *in* the pieces. As Rowan Williams puts it, “metaphysics is not extrinsic to the task. It is not an extra hurriedly brought in to provide justifications for commitments; it might better be called *the underlying intelligible structure of the commitments themselves*, what constitutes them as more than arbitrarily willed options.”⁵ Accordingly, what is at issue here is not metaphysics as a foundational enterprise, but metaphysics as an exercise in the *intellectus fidei* and an attempt to lay bare the metaphysical structure that Christianity implies.

But if this (one hopes) goes a long way toward addressing the concerns of the first group, what are we to say to the second? Can we really say that all Christians share the same understanding of the God-world relation? Admittedly, here things get trickier, especially between Catholics and Protestants concerning the effects of original sin. But however great these differences may seem, they are by no means insuperable. In fact, following the landmark study of Otto Hermann Pesch on Thomas and Luther, whose ecumenical implications have yet to be appreciated fully,⁶ I would argue that the differences between Catholic and Protestant theology

⁴ By East and West I mean here, chiefly, the ancient churches of Rome and the Orthodox East, though it is my contention that the metaphysics here proposed, inasmuch as it is commended by Scripture, is also the implicit metaphysics of the Protestant tradition. For an important volume in this direction, see Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider, eds., *Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World through the Word* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). From the Orthodox side, see also Brandon Gallaher, “Graced Creatureliness: Ontological Tension in the Uncreated/Created Distinction in the Sophiologies of Solov’ev, Bulgakov and Milbank,” which explores much of the terrain discussed here, in *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 47 (2006): 163–90.

⁵ My emphasis. See Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 56f. See also John Milbank, “Between Purgation and Illumination,” in Kenneth Surin, ed., *Christ, Ethics, and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 189f.; *Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*, 18f.

⁶ See Otto Hermann Pesch, *Die Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 1967).

can largely be reduced to differences between essential (sapiential) and existential (prophetic) standpoints. For example, while from an essential standpoint the world, inasmuch as it remains in being, remains in God (otherwise, it would not be at all), from an existential standpoint it is possible for individuals and the world as a whole to be perilously, even totally, alienated from the Logos, the very one in whom they “live and move and have their being” (Acts 17:28). To be sure, we tend to think of essential and existential standpoints as antithetical. From the standpoint of an analogical metaphysics, however, which is able to unite genuine differences, we can see that each is true and offers valuable insights from its own perspective.

The matter is similar with regard to the Christian East. For it would be absurd to say that the Christian East and the Christian West, which believe in the same God, worship the same Lord, share the same baptism, and have received of the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12), had *toto caelo* different visions of reality. Certainly, there are differences to be noted here as well with regard to original sin, in which respect Catholic theology turns out to be a kind of middle between Orthodox and Reformation theology.⁷ And, of course, there is the longstanding difference between the more Aristotelian scholasticism of the Latin West and the more Platonic theology of the Byzantine East – a difference that is not infrequently cheapened into a polemical dichotomy between the “rational-scientific” theology of the West and the “mystical-sapiential” theology of the East. But these differences are exaggerated. The Neo-Platonic Augustine lives on in Aquinas, however much Aristotle is privileged as the “philosopher,” and we scarcely need to point out that Aristotle was a student of Plato.⁸ In other words, the metaphysical differences between the Christian East and the Christian West turn out to be differences largely of emphasis, and so, too, therefore, like the differences peculiar to the West, can be integrated within the dynamics of a comprehensive analogical metaphysics.⁹

Which brings me to the proper subject of my proposal: a comparison of the *analogical* metaphysics of the West and the *sophiological* metaphysics of the East – not because these are the only examples of philosophical or theological metaphysics, but because I take them to be the most important and promising contributions to Christian metaphysics of the Christian West and the Christian East, respectively. I hasten to add that, while analogical metaphysics is most obviously associated with Aquinas, and Sophiology with Solov’ev and Bulgakov, each signifies a tradition of thought that includes many others. Finally, I wish to underscore that, while “analogical metaphysics” is the overarching term for the comparison, this does not mean a colonization of the metaphysical contribution of the East by the metaphysics of the West – first, because Sophiology is a form of analogical metaphysics in its own right, and, second, because the final, comprehensive analogy is an analogy of analogies, one more distinctive to the East, the other more distinctive to the West. Accordingly, what makes the method of the present proposal different from Lewis’s method in *Mere Christianity* is that here *differences* genuinely matter. Indeed, it is precisely the differences between the East and West (like those of a divided West)

⁷ For instance, while the Orthodox tend to criticize the West for its Augustinian doctrine of original sin, the Reformers radicalize this same doctrine.

⁸ For the most vigorous attempt in recent years to reclaim the Platonism in Aquinas, and to do so for the sake of a metaphysics of participation, see John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2001). For a rejoinder, which precisely illustrates the dynamics at issue here, see Bruce Marshall’s review in *The Thomist* 66 (2002): 632–37.

⁹ For example, if the West tends to emphasize the reality and integrity of the natural order, to the point that some have spoken of “pure nature,” thereby paving the way not only for the birth of modern natural science and the reign of modern technocracy, but (inadvertently) modern secularism as well, the East tends to place so much emphasis on deification that the natural integrity of the creature qua creature tends to get blurred in the blinding radiance of uncreated light. In short, whereas the one tends toward a realism of the here and now, the other tends in the direction of an idealism of eternal life as the only real life. Both, however, are really differences of *emphasis* within a single analogical metaphysics, which turns on the unity-in-difference between essence and existence.

that show the final metaphysics to be a genuinely (dialectical) *analogical* metaphysics in which mutually enriching differences are not negated but – if an Hegelian idiom may be permitted – preserved. And so the task here is to see what this final metaphysics, as the formal basis of a “mere metaphysics,” might look like.

Of course, one cannot be naive about the difficulties such a proposal faces. It would be tragic, however, if there is such a thing as a common *Christian* metaphysics, but misunderstanding, absurd caricatures, and mutual recriminations have kept either side from seeing it. And so the task of clearing away obstacles remains. And it remains, above all, I would argue, because the Church cannot do without metaphysics – not only because of its apologetic importance, but because the Church itself does not live by orthodoxy and orthopraxy alone, but *also* by a metaphysical imagination, however inchoate, that, like the love of beauty, serves to connect dogmatic propositions (truth) to holy actions (the good). For the sake of mere metaphysics, therefore, let us first consider what analogical and sophiological metaphysics individually have to offer, specifically in terms of a metaphysical grammar of creation and deification. Then, it is hoped, we may be able to see how these traditions could complement one another and even help to correct one another: how Sophiology can help to fill out the fairly bare and abstract doctrine of the *analogia entis*, and how the sobriety of the *analogia entis*, in turn, can temper Sophiology with regard to its doctrine of creation.

2. Analogical Metaphysics

As an essay in analogical metaphysics, the current proposal is naturally bound up with what the Catholic tradition means by the *analogia entis* – a term that originated in the Thomistic tradition and has been interpreted over the centuries in different ways, depending upon how one understands the relation between essence and existence (e.g., as a real or merely formal distinction), and whether one understands the analogy itself in terms of an analogy of proper proportionality, following Cajetan, or an analogy of attribution, following Suárez, or, more interestingly, following Erich Przywara, in terms of both. It is therefore a metonym for a complex set of metaphysical issues and traditions of thought.

Of course, the *analogia entis* can also be cheapened into a slogan, as Heidegger rightly observed, which conveniently excuses one from thinking about the very *Seinsfrage* it is meant to address: “The *analogia entis*, which nowadays has sunk to the level of a catchword, played a role, not as a question of being [*Seinsfrage*], but as a welcome means of formulating a religious conviction in philosophical terms.”¹⁰ This is a legitimate and understandable criticism given the kind of scholastic metaphysics to which Heidegger was exposed as a young Catholic and quondam Jesuit novice; after all, the question of being is not answered by a handy formula. But it is hardly a fair criticism, much less summary of the exceedingly intricate and profound form of analogical metaphysics one finds in Przywara, with whom Heidegger, we may regret, never ventured to tangle (though they were exact contemporaries, having been born only a few weeks apart). For that matter, as I sought to show in the preceding article and elsewhere, Przywara’s understanding of the *analogia entis* is impervious to the kinds of criticisms that are typically

¹⁰ See Martin Heidegger, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics Θ 1-3: On the Essence and Actuality of Force*, trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 38. For more on this topic, see Jean Jean-François Courtin, “La Critique Heideggérienne de l’Analogia Entis,” in *Les Catégories de l’Être : Études de Philosophie Ancienne et Médiévale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), 213-39. While I may not agree with his conclusions about Heidegger, thanks to Daniel Adsett for his helpful research on this topic. See his “Milbank and Heidegger on the Possibility of a Secular Analogy of Being,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 59 (June 2019): 155-73.

advanced against it, stemming from Barth and Heidegger, respectively.¹¹ Yet, curiously, Heidegger rarely discusses it, just as Barth rarely discusses it; and when they do neither of them presents it in a form that Przywara (or Aquinas, for that matter) would have recognized.¹² It is certainly not dismissed by the magical invocation of “onto-theology,” which can likewise be cheapened into a catchword, indeed, into a ready excuse for unbelief; much less is it dismissed simply by calling it, as Barth did, “the invention of Antichrist.” All such criticisms are more a matter of rhetoric than thought, and have been sufficiently addressed elsewhere. Since what is at issue here, however, is the *ecumenical* potential of the *analogia entis*, we cannot avoid responding to Barth’s criticisms once more here.

2.1. Ecumenical Obstacles to Analogical Metaphysics

Although Barth nowhere discusses his rejection of the *analogia entis* at length – perhaps he did not think he needed to do so because it follows from the premises of his theology – he provides a sufficiently clear explanation in the following passage from the second volume of the *Church Dogmatics*:

This presupposition of the Roman Catholic construction is in every respect unacceptable. Strong opposition must be made to the idea that the metaphysics of being, the starting-point of this line of thought, is the place from which we can do the work of Christian theology, from which we can see and describe grace and nature, revelation and reason, God and man, both as they are in themselves and in their mutual relationship. The harmony in which they are coordinated within this system is surreptitious. For what has that metaphysics of being to do with the God who is the basis and Lord of the Church?¹³

In other words, the charge is that the *analogia entis*, “the presupposition of the Roman Catholic construction,” construes some sort of relationship between God and creatures in *rational* terms *prior* to revelation – the effect of which is that it makes a metaphysical theory (not revelation) the presupposition of theology, and bridges the incommensurable difference between God and a sinful creation in some other way than through faith in Christ. Hence the strong polemical language of the “invention of Antichrist.” In sum, according to the standard narrative stemming from Barth, the *analogia entis* is a form of metaphysical Prometheanism that preempts revelation – blunting its force and sublime novelty – and therefore in the name of revelation, which can never come second to a human theory, it must be rejected.¹⁴

¹¹ See John R. Betz, “After Heidegger and Marion: The Task of Metaphysics Today,” especially, 582-91; editor’s introduction to Przywara, *Analogia Entis, Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John Betz and David B. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), especially, 74-83; “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being,” in two parts, *Modern Theology* 21, no. 3 (July 2005): 367-411, and *Modern Theology* 22, no. 1 (January 2006): 1-50, especially 12-20.

¹² See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1971), 233, where Heidegger construes the God of the *analogia entis* as “a being,” the highest entity among other entities, rather than as Being Itself; for a discussion of this passage, see John R. Betz, “Beyond the Sublime (Part Two),” 14.

¹³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, vol. II/2: The Doctrine of God, Part 2*, eds. G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 530f.

¹⁴ For a standard Barthian account, see George Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity: A Hermeneutical Proposal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015). Unfortunately, Hunsinger’s remarkably brief appendix on this complex topic, entitled “*Analogia Entis* in Balthasar and Barth,” perpetuates the myth that for Balthasar (and, presumably, for Przywara as well), God is a kind of “being” related to the creature by a “common scale.” This is a misunderstanding that needs finally to be put to rest. For Catholic theology, God is not “a being,” or even the highest being, but Being Itself (*Ipsum Esse subsistens*), compared to whom, as Thomas says in *De Potentia* Q. 1., a. 1, the being of creatures, being a gift, is precisely *non subsistens*. For this reason alone, there is no common scale.

Now it may be that Barth's rejection of the *analogia entis* was shortsighted and based upon a caricature of Catholic theology, which led von Balthasar to defend his mentor and engage Barth – first in correspondence, then in a series of articles, and, finally, in his famous book, *Karl Barth*. For that matter, the whole matter could rather easily be resolved by underscoring, as we have already done, that the *analogia entis* ultimately involves a dialectical analogy between philosophical and theological metaphysics. And should there be any lingering worries that the *analogia entis* somehow mediates between God and creation without Christ, one need only read carefully to see that, for Przywara, too, the analogy of being is centered in Christ, the Mediator.¹⁵ But the basic concerns of the Swiss Reformed theologian are nevertheless legitimate, because they turn on the fundamental question of which discourse, philosophical or theological, is ultimately in control: whether a philosophical metaphysics is dictating the terms for revelation, or vice versa. In other words, the entire debate about the *analogia entis* boils down to the basic question of how faith and reason, grace and nature, God and world, are related in Christian theology. So, before proceeding any further, let us get down to the brass tacks of the confessional differences, which Keith Johnson has helpfully illuminated.¹⁶

For Barth reason can have no propaedeutic role whatsoever, which means that natural theology, understood as providing some kind of basis for revealed theology, is methodologically ruled out. By the same token, there can be no ordering of reason to faith, or of nature to grace, according to the ontic or noetic versions of the Thomistic principle *gratia (fides) non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam (rationem)*.¹⁷ Indeed, not only is nature *not* ordered to grace, for Barth nature of itself does not even have any capacity to receive it. For, according to Barth, as a consequence of the Fall, the *imago Dei* is not just “destroyed apart from a few relics,” which was the position of Emil Brunner, but “totally annihilated.”¹⁸ In other words, as a result of the Fall, the human being has not merely suffered a mortal wound that in the absence of a physician's intervention will lead to death; rather, the human being is already (spiritually) dead, beyond all hope of resuscitation, and so there can be no question of any interplay or cooperation between God and human beings in the matter of salvation. This being so, Barth avers, “the event of revelation [cannot be regarded] as an interplay between God and man, between grace and nature. On the contrary [...] this event represents a self-enclosed circle. Not only the objective but also the subjective element in revelation, not only its actuality but also its potentiality, is the being and action of the self-revealing God alone.”¹⁹

From this purely dialectical position, which admits of no *Anknüpfungspunkt* and whose formal stringency is not mitigated by Barth's later adoption of an *analogia fidei*, as Bruce McCormack has decidedly shown,²⁰ it almost goes without saying that any ontological analogy between God and the world that could be established on the basis of creation – any philosophical *analogia entis* – is ruled out. The same is true at the noetic level as regards faith: faith, for Barth, is not a clarifying illumination of what fallen reason dimly perceives at twilight, as it were, but

¹⁵ See Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis: metaphysics: original structure and universal rhythm*, translated by John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Company, 2014), 301f.: “...all of these revelations of God as middle fall short of the personal revelation of God as middle in ‘the mediator.’ Christ appears as the reality of the way in which God-the-middle takes up the All...”

¹⁶ See Keith Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

¹⁷ For Przywara's later formulation of this maxim, see “Der Grundsatz, ‘*Gratia non destruit sed supponit et perficit naturam*.’ Eine ideengeschichtliche Interpretation,” *Scholastik* 17 (1942): 178–86.

¹⁸ Barth, CD I/1, §6, 238.

¹⁹ Barth, CD I/1, §17, 280.

²⁰ See Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

an in-breaking from above like lightning out of pitch darkness.²¹ It is a miracle in the strictest sense: it does not come about *through* reason and its evidences, but *without* them.²² Accordingly, Barth concludes in a striking recapitulation of the Reformed-Lutheran teaching on justification – only now applied to theological epistemology – that it is by *faith alone* that we can have any knowledge of God.²³ And so we are confronted once again with the same *sola* that was at issue for Luther, and *eo ipso* with all the confessional troubles that this entails.

How, then, in the interest of analogical metaphysics, is one to respond? If one adopts a dialectical analogy as the proper form of the analogy between philosophy and theology, then the matter is already resolved. For then one can concede that Barth has a rhetorical point – one that becomes all the more necessary when theology is threatened by what Newman called in view of the Enlightenment the “usurpations of reason.” But the Catholic tradition also has a point, as Przywara sought to show in his *Analogia Entis*: namely, that it is theoretically possible from the side of philosophy to demonstrate the *relativity* of creaturely being with regard to the *absolute* being of God, and therewith a philosophical *analogy* of being. Therein lies reason’s minimal service: in showing that reason cannot ground itself – whether in the minimalist version of Kant or in the maximalist version of Hegel – but points inexorably beyond itself to a *greater* Logos. Hence Przywara’s repeated formulation of the *analogia entis* vis-à-vis Hegel as a *reductio* not to a Concept, but *in mysterium*.

From a Catholic standpoint, Barth’s worry that in Catholic theology reason has somehow gained the upper hand over faith is therefore misplaced, as is the worry at the level of ontology that Christ has been subordinated to a metaphysics of being. For *all* Christians insofar as they are Christian confess both the priority of the revelation of the Logos – in Scripture and Christ – over every fallen and relatively opaque human logos, and the ontological priority of Christ, the Logos, as the formal and final cause of creation (John 1:3). Indeed, for Catholic theology there is ultimately no reason independent of the Logos, for we reason only to the degree that we participate in the Logos, and so the notion of a purely natural, secular, non-analogous reason turns out to be a pure, self-flattering, and ultimately self-deceiving fiction. By the same token, there is no such thing as a purely natural, secular, non-analogous order that exists apart from its ordination to Christ, the formal and final cause of creation. This, too, is a secular fiction.

So let us be clear: the ecumenical difference has nothing to do with the order of being (the *ordo essendi*), but only with the order of knowledge (the *ordo cognoscendi*), being a matter of possible starting points, following from different conceptions of the relationship between nature and grace, reason and faith. Whereas Barth’s method obliges one to begin with dogmatics and forsake apologetics, for Catholic theology it is at least possible to engage in apologetics, as Paul did in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), in order to show that faith is not unreasonable. One could even argue that it is a matter of *charity* to do so, to provide an Ariadne’s thread that leads through the labyrinth of fallen reason to the portal of faith, which is what Przywara’s *Analogia Entis* (as an exercise, *nota bene*, in *philosophical* rather than dogmatic theology) was intended to do, to show how thought leads inexorably from phenomenology by way of philosophical metaphysics to the threshold of theological metaphysics. This is not to deny that philosophical metaphysics could be conducted in a way that is perilous to faith *if* it is separated from dogmatic theology

²¹ Barth, CD I/2, § 15, 199: “God Himself creates a possibility, a power, a capacity, and assigns it to man, where otherwise there would be sheer impossibility.” Cf. CD I/1, §6, 277.

²² Barth, CD I/1, 247: “Man must be set aside and God himself presented as the original subject, as the primary power, as the creator of the possibility of knowledge of God’s word.”

²³ See Karl Barth, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes im Zusammenhang seines theologischen Programms*, ed. Eberhard Jüngel and Ingolf U. Dalferth (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1981), 28.

and ecclesial context; but in Catholic theology these bonds of obligation are presupposed, and so there is no risk other than the risk of ceasing to be Catholic.

My chief concern here, however, is not to defend philosophical metaphysics as a propaedeutic to dogmatic theology, but to show how metaphysics can also be conducted in a way that Barth would presumably allow, namely, as an exercise in the *intellectus fidei* for the sake of the *pulchritudo fidei*.²⁴ In keeping with this usage, metaphysics is not a prolegomenon to revelation but a *postlegomenon* that follows from it. To use Barth's quasi-Hegelian term, it is a *Nachdenken* of revelation, i.e., a second-order reflection upon it. In other words, understood along these lines, metaphysics is simply an attempt to render intelligible – which should not be confused with exhaustive comprehension of – what is *already* believed on the basis of Scripture and Tradition. We are thus presented with two basic uses of metaphysics: metaphysics as apologetics (reason → faith) and metaphysics under the aegis of dogmatics as an exercise in the *intellectus fidei* (faith → understanding). In order to avoid misunderstanding between the confessions it is imperative that these be carefully distinguished, lest all metaphysics be seen as a rationalist-foundationalist enterprise, as Barth's disciples tend to view it.

Of course, as important as it may be to distinguish between these two uses, it does not follow that one must then choose between them. For even in Anselm the lines are blurred, as is evident from the fact that he could inspire not only the more fideistic Barth, but also the arch-rationalist Hegel. They are also blurred in Thomas, which explains why Thomas has been appropriated by Neo-scholastics as well as by language-game fideists.²⁵ But this much should be conceded in light of Barth's concerns: of the two uses, the latter must have ultimate priority over and cannot be contradicted by the former. For what is reasonable to a person informed and enlightened by the Logos will not necessarily be reasonable to a person uninformed by the Logos and lacking his light. Granting such qualifications, one might hope that even the most anti-Catholic of Barthians could be assuaged – and *a fortiori* when it is understood that the *analogia entis* originated in the context of faith as a conciliar attempt to safeguard the faith, specifically with regard to the difference between God and creation. I will discuss this in due course. First, though, let us consider the analogy of being at its simplest: as a metaphysical articulation of the Catholic doctrine of creation.

2.2. The Analogia Entis in the Catholic Tradition

At its simplest, the analogy of being is a concise way of affirming two things essential to the Christian doctrine of creation, which all Christian confessions would presumably affirm: on the one hand, the radical gratuity of creation, and so the *ex nihilo* in *creatio ex nihilo* (cf. 2 Macc. 7:28); on the other hand, the fact that creation is God's creation and proceeds *ex Deo* as a manifestation of God's glory: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). Consequently, inasmuch as God is at once "in" creation and "beyond" it – analogous to the way in which an artist is in his or her work, expressed in it and invested in it, but abidingly other than it – it is a way of affirming the double mystery of divine *immanence* and *transcendence*, or, in Przywara's idiomatic shorthand, the mystery that God is at once "in-and-beyond" creation. At the same time, it is a way of avoiding the Scylla of deism

²⁴ Barth famously affirms this use of reason in his book on Anselm. But, of course, the same Anselm who wrote the *Proslogion* also wrote the more obviously apologetic, if not downright rationalistic *Monologion*. Whereas Catholic theology has always been happy to think in both directions – to faith from reason, and from faith to understanding – Barth allows only one.

²⁵ There are indeed, as Fergus Kerr has aptly shown, many versions of Thomas. See Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 210: "Thomas' thought, perhaps over a range of issues, contains within itself the Janus-like ambiguities that generate the competing interpretations which can never be reconciled."

or Gnosticism (insofar as creation, however fallen, remains *God's* creation) and the Charybdis of monism or pantheism (insofar as God *freely* creates and is therefore “beyond” it).

Certainly, one may dispute the extent to which the *analogia entis*, as a concise formula for the relation between God and creation, can be understood apart from faith. From the perspective of faith, however, such questions are beside the point, since the *analogia entis* is simply a way of affirming what *revelation itself implies*: that God is at once hyper-transcendent, dwelling *beyond* the world in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), but also “near” (Phil. 4:5) – so near, in fact, that Augustine could say that God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves: “*tu autem interior intimo meo et superior summo meo.*”²⁶ For that matter, it is something that all the doctors of the Church have in one or another way affirmed: on the one hand, the radical transcendence of God, who is *exterior omni re* (Augustine), *extra omne genus* (Aquinas), and in the words of Vatican I, “in reality and in his nature distinct from the world”;²⁷ on the other hand, the radical immanence of God, who is not just *interior omni re* but, more personally, *interior intimo meo* (Augustine) as the king dwelling in the deepest center (John of the Cross) or innermost mansion (Teresa of Avila) of the soul. As Thomas puts it, summarizing both aspects, *Deus est supra omnia per excellentiam suae naturae, et tamen est in omnibus rebus ut causans omnium esse.*²⁸ But, *nota bene*, this double affirmation is not simply a matter of metaphysics, because if it is true – and the Catholic tradition is unanimous in this regard – then, for Przywara, following Augustine, it comes with a personal entailment as well: it means that the proper *disposition* of the soul is simultaneously one of love for the God who is so lovingly near in Christ (John 1:18; 14:9; 20:23) through the gift of the Spirit who “dwells *in* you” (Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 3:16), and reverence for the same God who “dwells *on high*” (Isa. 33:5), “enthroned on the Cherubim” (Ps. 80:1), “whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). Such is the direct spiritual import of what on the face of it appears to be an abstract metaphysical doctrine.

In any event, it should now be obvious that the *analogia entis* is not — or certainly not only — a matter of rational speculation about the God-world relation, but follows from Scripture itself, and that to reject it, as Barth did, is to reject not only a principle of philosophical metaphysics, but *also* a principle that revelation itself implies. Furthermore, as Przywara repeatedly points out, it is to reject a doctrine promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council, which in 1215 censured Joachim of Fiore for failing to observe it.²⁹ Against the otherwise holy abbot, the Council declared that, however great a similarity one might observe between God and creatures, one must always observe a greater dissimilarity between them: *inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior dissimilitudo notanda* (DH 806). In other words, one must always observe the *analogy* between the Creator and the creature, ever mindful of the *greater* dissimilarity in the midst of whatever similarity one might note between them; and this means that analogy applies even and precisely in the case of mystical union with God in the beatific vision, which is the creature’s supernatural end. For even in mystical union, which is a union with God by grace (*unio caritatis in gratia*), not by nature (as with the intra-trinitarian relations), God is God, and the deified creature, however deified and perfected, is still a creature.

Having shown that the *analogia entis* has a scriptural and dogmatic basis, following Przywara we can now be more precise as to *why* the *maior dissimilitudo* obtains as a kind of inviolable

²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* III, 6 (11).

²⁷ Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, c. 1 (April 24, 1870).

²⁸ Aquinas, “God is above all things by the excellence of his nature, but in all things as the cause of their being.” *Summa Th. I*, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1. Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 7 c.; *De ver.* q. 8, a. 16 ad 12. Cf. Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt.*, viii, 26; 48: *interior omni re, quia in ipso sunt omnia, et exterior omni re, quia ipse est super omnia.*

²⁹ See Przywara *Analogia Entis*, 348–99.

rule within every *similitudo*, however great – whether the similarity be affirmed merely on the basis of creation, according to the principle that every effect bears some likeness to its cause (*omne agens agit sibi simile*), or on the basis of grace whereby God likens nature to himself. To this end, since Przywara regards Aquinas as “the teacher” of the *analogia entis* – even if the exact term is not found in Thomas’s corpus³⁰ – let us now consider the *analogia entis* as it is implied in the thought of the Angelic Doctor: first as regards the distinction between primary and secondary causality,³¹ and, secondly, as regards the distinction between essence and existence in creatures commonly known as the “real distinction” (*distinctio realis*). Both of these distinctions are fundamental to Thomas’s metaphysics.

Adopting Przywara’s idiomatic shorthand, the first form of the *analogia entis* may be stated as follows: As *Causa Prima* God the Creator is “in-and-beyond” the secondary causes (*causae secundae*) of creation. That is to say that, while transcending created causes as the *first* cause, God as the first *cause* also works mysteriously in and through them (cf. John 5:17) – and all the more mysteriously in that secondary causes are analogously *free* causes capable of resisting their proper end. The purpose of God’s working in them, however, is for the sake of their own perfection and that of creation as a whole. Accordingly, God is intimate to creation not only as its first efficient cause, but also as its final cause – as the cause of created perfections and the one to whom they *intrinsically* point. For this reason, inasmuch as it is bound up with an analogy of intrinsic attribution, whereby God causes the perfections of creatures and likens them by grace to himself, the *analogia causalitatis* is that form of analogy that underwrites the *similarity* of creatures to God – even to the point of mystical union, if not identity, in their end.

Following Przywara, however, the full form of the *analogia entis* is a rhythm between similarity and dissimilarity, proximity and distance, immanence and transcendence. And so, in order to do justice to the *maior dissimilitudo* – and the final apophatic stress – of the *analogia entis*, we have to ascend, as it were, beyond the realm of aetiology, however analogical, to the second and more proper form of the *analogia entis*, which stresses the radical *ontological* difference between God and creatures. Specifically, we have to underscore the radically different proportionality, now in the form of an *analogia proportionalitatis*, between God as an *identity* of essence and existence and creatures as a *non-identity* of essence and existence. For here it is not a matter of inferring that God is the cause of creaturely perfections. Rather, here there is only a proportion of diverse proportions, i.e., a relation of mutual alterity (*ἄλλο πρὸς ἄλλο*), between what it means for God to be and what it means for creatures to be.³² Nor is “being” a *tertium comparationis*, as so many critics of the *analogia entis* mistakenly assume, because following Thomas’s reading of Exodus 3:14 God is Being itself (*Ipsum Esse subsistens*). By contrast, the being of the creature is, in Augustine’s words, a “cascading torrent” that only “was” or “will be,” but never “is” (*antequam sint non sunt, et cum sunt fugiunt, et cum fugerint non erunt*).³³ The

³⁰ For an obvious foundation for the doctrine in Thomas, see *S.T. I*, q. 4, a. 3; *De potentia* q. 7, a. 5 ad 7; *Scriptum super sententiis* I, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3 *sed contra* 1; II, d. 4, q. 1, a. 1 c. Thanks to Richard Cross for several of these references.

³¹ See Erich Przywara, *Ringens der Gegenwart: gesammelte Aufsätze 1922-1927*, 2 Volumes (Augsburg: B. Filser-Verlag, 1929), Vol. 2, 909f.

³² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 6, 1016b.

³³ See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 265, in reference to Augustine *In Ps.* CIX, xx and *De libero arbitrio* III, vii. See *Exposition of the Psalms 99-120*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002), 284: “[W]hat torrent is this? The cascade of human mortality. A stream is formed from rainwater; it swells, roars, rolls swiftly, and as it surges forward it is running downward to the end of its course ... Can we hold on to anything? Is there anything that does not slip through our fingers? Or anything that does not disappear into the ocean?” Cf. *De libero arbitrio* III, vii. See *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 85: “[T]hey are nothing before they exist, and then, once they do exist, flee from existence until they exist no more.”

analogy of being is thus *not* between two kinds of being, much less between two “beings” in the sense of *Seiende*, as though God were just another property-bearing entity (as analytic philosophy tends to describe him), but between Being as such and being as becoming, between the one who IS, whose essence *is* his existence (*sua igitur essentia est suum esse*),³⁴ and the creature which, in Augustine’s words, “is and is not” (*est non est*).³⁵ What is more, underscoring the ontological difference, Thomas says that creaturely being *has* no subsistence (*non subsistens*),³⁶ following in the venerable tradition of Gregory of Nyssa (who in *The Life of Moses* obviously subscribes to what is meant here by the *analogia entis*)³⁷ and Augustine (who says, commenting on the words of the Psalmist: “‘And my substance is as nothing in your sight.’ In your sight, Lord, it is as nothing”).³⁸

On the face of it, the *analogia proportionalitatis*, as a proportion between Divine Being and creaturely becoming, would thus appear to be a purely negative *disproportion*. Indeed, it would seem to underscore the tragic aspect of the creature, which vis-à-vis the Being of God never really “is.” But what appears to be negative turns out to be a positive. For the *analogia proportionalitatis* underscores even more radically than any *analogia attributionis* that every created thing is a pure *gift*, making everything suddenly more wonderful – making everything, including oneself, a gift that comes with the divine possibility of being eucharistically returned. In other words, the negative disproportion provides the positive space (and time) for the finite creature not only to be freely itself (a mutable creature as opposed to God), but also to give itself back to God, and therein, by following Christ, to realize itself in God. In sum, the negative disproportion – in Kierkegaard’s phrase, “the infinite qualitative difference” between God and creatures – is the positive condition of the possibility of the creature’s movement *coram Deo in Deum*.

To be sure, we are never essentially outside of God, the finite is never *essentially* (as opposed to *existentially*) alienated from the infinite. Therein lies the *particula veri* of Hegel’s critique of the “bad infinite”: his recovery vis-à-vis Kant of the theological truth that “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), which makes nonsense of finite categories (and the idea of a purely secular politics for that matter) set up over against the infinite. But *contra Hegel*, the analogy between God and creation, the infinite and the finite, must nevertheless be held open: not only in the name of divine transcendence, but also for the sake of the creature’s own integrity and life, as it journeys *as a finite creature* into the infinite. And in this respect, *nota bene*, the East and West are one. The most obvious example of this is again Gregory of Nyssa, who writes in the *Life of Moses*: “He would not have shown himself to his servant if the sight were such as to bring the desire of the beholder to an end, since the true sight of God consists in this, that the one who looks up to God never ceases in that desire”;³⁹ on the contrary, “since no limit to the Good can be found,” “every desire for the Good which is attracted to that ascent constantly expands as one progresses in pressing on to the Good.”⁴⁰ In short, “This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him.”⁴¹ But, though less cited in this regard, Augustine says the same. Commenting on Ps. 105:4, he writes: “*Ut inveniendus quaeratur*,

³⁴ Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 3, a. 4.

³⁵ See Augustine *In Ps.* 121, 12; *Confessions* XII, 6; see *AE*, 190.

³⁶ Aquinas, *De pot.* q. 1, a. 1 corp. “[...] esse significat aliquid completum et simplex sed non subsistens...”

³⁷ See Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* §23.

³⁸ Augustine, *In Ps.* 38, 6.

³⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Everett Ferguson and Abraham Malherbe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 115f.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

*occultus est; ut inventus quaeratur, immensus est. Unde alibi dicitur, 'Quaerite faciem ejus semper.'*⁴² Thus, following Augustine, the Ignatian “*Magis*,” and the corresponding logic of analogical metaphysics, Przywara avers that God is revered properly only as *semper maior*⁴³ – not as an abstract infinity, but as the “unsearchable depths” of an infinite love, in response to whom the proper disposition of the believing soul is one of “reverent trust and trusting reverence.”⁴⁴

2.3. Human Being in the Analogy of Being: The Drama of Becoming

Thus far we have seen how the difference between essence and existence (the “real distinction”) opens out meta-physically into a *second* difference, which one might call *pace* Heidegger the *real* ontological difference, between God (as Being Itself) and creatures (which are *in fieri*).⁴⁵ Before returning to the second difference, however, we need to elaborate this first difference and, along with it, the metaphysical structure of becoming. For creaturely being is not sufficiently explained simply by saying that creatures are constituted by a non-identity of essence and existence. If it were, analogical metaphysics would need no development beyond the teaching of Thomas in *De ente et essentia*. But, according to Przywara, the great developer of the concept of the analogy of being, it does; and so, following Przywara, we need to explicate the full range of significance that the real distinction implies.

In order to do this well, however, we need to draw upon all the resources of the Catholic tradition – not by opposing one school to another, but by synthesizing their varied insights. And, if Przywara is right, we need especially to supplement Thomas with Augustine: we need to bring together the more systematic, architectonic thinker, whose sober *summae* intimate the completion of the universe in God (the *perfectio universi*), and the more Romantic existential thinker, who was familiar with the struggles, contradictions, and perplexities of existence, and for whom the creature is a restless, surging sea vis-à-vis God in whom essence and existence, movement and rest, are one.⁴⁶ If the one is a Bach, generating endless fugal distinctions from the serene perspective of the creature’s end, the other is a Beethoven, passionately striving for an end that seems ever out of reach. But both are for good reason canonical. So, following Przywara, let us go back to the real distinction and specify it in a way that allows us to pick up the Augustinian resonances in the Thomistic analogy of being.

Although we ordinarily think of the *analogia entis* as a formula for the transcendent analogy between God and creatures, following Przywara it important first to observe that the real distinction between essence and existence is itself a kind of analogy (let us call it an “immanent analogy” in contradistinction to, but intersecting with, the “transcendent analogy”). For every concretely existing entity is in fact a contingent *unity-in-difference* between “what it is” and “that it is.” For the sake of illustration, let us think of the immanent analogy in terms of a more concrete and familiar analogy: that of the unity-in-difference between man and woman, who according to Genesis together constitute the full material *imago Dei* (their nuptial union being analogous not only to the cosmic union of the fullness of God in Christ and the fullness of

⁴² Augustine, *In Jo. Tract.* LXIII, i. *N.B.*, the standard narrative of a supposedly “static” *visio beatifica* of the West and an “epektatic” *visio beatifica* of the East is therefore an unhelpful caricature. Again, we are talking at most of differences of emphasis.

⁴³ See Augustine, *In Ps.* LXII, xvi. *Deus Semper Maior*, 3 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1938).

⁴⁴ See Erich Przywara, “Grundhaltungen der Seele 2. Ehrfurcht,” in *Seele. Monatschrift im Dienste christl. Lebensgestaltung* 6 (1924): 299-303.

⁴⁵ See John R. Betz, “Overcoming the Forgetfulness of Metaphysics: The More Original Philosophy of William Desmond,” in (eds.) Christopher B. Simpson and Brendan T. Sammon, *William Desmond and Contemporary Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 57-92.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, 4.

Christ in the Church, but also to the microcosmic union of the spiritual and the material in the individual human being, whose very nature is a type and bearer of this profounder promise).⁴⁷

Our next step is to understand that the immanent analogy, understood as a contingent unity-in-difference of essence and existence, is for Przywara an inherently *dynamic* analogy, and that while this is true of all creatures insofar as they are creatures, it is nowhere so evident as in the human being, the dynamic middle of creation, in whom the *analogia entis* becomes manifest, so to speak (one might even say self-conscious), and the real distinction becomes a real *tension*. For the essence, which makes whatever is *what* it is, is not exhausted by its manifestation, but transcends it, being at once “in” existence and “beyond” it. In other words, the immanent analogy of the *analogia entis* resonates with all the philosophical and historical tension between Plato and Aristotle, specifically, between the Platonic *eidos*, which emphatically *transcends* whatever participates in it, and the Aristotelian *morphē*, which is emphatically *immanent* to a given substance, making it what it is. Thus, in a striking and innovative synthesis of the entire metaphysical tradition, whose diagnostic and speculative power has scarcely begun to be appreciated,⁴⁸ Przywara speaks of the real distinction not simply as a unity-in-difference but as a “unity-in-tension” – a *Spannungseinheit* – between essence and existence. What is more, *nota bene* not *a priori* but *a posteriori*, he identifies “essence in-and-beyond existence” as *the* formula of creaturely metaphysics, embracing all individual forms of metaphysics (e.g., every conceivable essentialism and existentialism, idealism and realism, etc.) within its comprehensive span.⁴⁹

Let us now try to summarize the foregoing. Having first identified the most obvious meaning of the *analogia entis*, namely, that created being is analogous – and *only* analogous – to the Creator who is “in-and-beyond” it [*Gott in-über Geschöpf*], we then came to identify a second “in-and-beyond,” whereby the creature’s essence is, so to speak, “in-and-beyond” its existence [*Sosein in-über Dasein*]. We thus have an analogy of an analogy. And, in fact, for Przywara, the *analogia entis* is at the end of the day precisely an analogy between *two* analogies: as God is “in-and-beyond” creation, so the creature’s essence is “in-and-beyond” its existence, the former “in-and-beyond” vertically intersecting the latter as its beginning and end. The full form of the *analogia entis* thus has, not coincidentally, a Christological form, which is encoded in it, as it were, from the beginning as the Logos of its logos.⁵⁰ And so in a final, mystical step we could say that the more the creature *ex-ists* beyond itself in Christ (Matt. 16:25), the more it enters into its essence, and the more the creature *ex-ists* beyond itself in God, the more God *ex-ists* beyond himself in the creature, which has become his holy temple (2 Cor. 6:16) and therein fulfilled the logos of its existence.

Admittedly, all of this is highly abstract and needs to be worked out, but once one unpacks all that that the *analogia entis* implies, the significance of Przywara’s creative innovation of the Thomistic tradition is considerable. For what was hitherto a scholastic technicality is now

⁴⁷ The analogicity of creation is so thoroughgoing that it extends from creation’s metaphysical foundation in the real distinction to the unity-in-difference of male and female (throughout nature), and all the way up to its crown in the human being.

⁴⁸ See John R. Betz, “Erich Przywara and the *Analogia Entis*: A Genealogical Diagnosis and Metaphysical Critique of Modernity,” in Bálažs Mezei, Francesca Murphy, Kenneth Oakes (eds.), *Christian Wisdom Meets Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 71–92.

⁴⁹ Admittedly, this is where Przywara’s pithy idiom can get arcane – to the point of unintelligibility. It begins to make more sense, though, in light of Aristotle’s term *entelechy*, according to which the *telic* form or shape (*morphē*), which is “in” a substance making it what it is, is also that to which the substance, in dynamic self-transcendence, is underway. But it implies still more: not just the tensions between Plato and Aristotle, but the whole dramatic tension between the ideal and the real, between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, between the immutable and the mutable, between immutable logical truth and history in all its relativity and flux, in short, between Parmenides and Heraclitus.

⁵⁰ See Bernhard Gertz, “Kreuz-Struktur: Zur theologischen Methode Erich Przywaras,” *Theologie und Philosophie* 45 (1970): 555–61.

a pithy expression not only for the God-cosmos relation, including the dynamic of creaturely becoming and fulfillment within this relation, but even for the rhythmic structure of the history of ideas – for all the essentialisms and existentialisms, all the idealisms and realisms, all the rationalisms and empiricisms, in short, for the whole dynamic range of human thought, which is in turn (whether consciously appreciated or not) a result of and response to the dynamic nature of creaturely being. Even the tensions between the analytic and continental philosophical traditions – the one tending toward logical and essential determinations, the other toward hermeneutical questions of socially embodied existence – are prefigured in its span.

For present purposes, however, Przywara's most important innovation is to have constructively synthesized the metaphysical charisms of Thomas and Augustine, the thinker of the real distinction and the thinker of the *cor inquietum*.⁵¹ For, drawing out all the existentialism in Augustine, to say *analogia entis* is to say that the human being is precisely – as *mutatis mutandis* for Nietzsche – a being-in-tension as a being-in-transition. For to be a human being is to be constituted by “a tension (that defies conceptual mastery) between a being that is ‘such’ [*so*] and ‘there’ [*da*], yet whose ‘such’ in fact always remains ‘to be attained,’ so that in its purity it is never really ‘there.’”⁵² Accordingly, we have here a metaphysics every bit as existential as Heidegger's phenomenology of being-in-the-world as being-towards-death, but instead with a horizon of eternal life.⁵³ This is not to say that we have no enduring self-identity over time or that self-identity is an illusion; Heraclitus and his postmodern heirs do not win out entirely over Parmenides. It is, though, to say that human identity is an *identity in change*, and that our very selfhood is in some sense constituted by the *différance* – to borrow Derrida's neologism – between essence and existence. In other words, our essence is not just different from our existence, but given as *deferred*, such that, mysteriously, we are underway to what we are. For, being precisely an analogy of being, the human being is never totally self-identical, which can be said of God alone; rather, the human being is a being-in-deferral, an existing in view of an apocalyptic definition: “Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is” (1 John. 3:2).

In the meantime, therefore, the human being is precisely a “stretch,” an *epektasis*, to use the Pauline image beloved of Gregory of Nyssa (cf. Phil. 3:13), a stretching in response to an “upward call” (Phil. 3:14) between what it is and what it will be. And so with this fuller understanding of the creaturely dynamic we may finally summarize the *analogia entis* by saying that whereas God is Being Itself (*Ipsum Esse subsistens*), creaturely being is being-in-becoming (*ens in fieri*), and that whereas *God is who God is*, the “I am who I am” of Exodus 3:14, creatures are forever *becoming who they are*, until they are perfected in Him who is Perfect. All of which is surely accomplished in due time by the Spirit: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

⁵¹ This belies the notion that Przywara represents an older, static Catholic metaphysics based upon reason as opposed to a dynamic, relational Protestant metaphysics based upon the *analogia fidei* as an *analogia relationis*, as the difference between Barth and Przywara has sometimes been portrayed. Differences may remain, but they have nothing to do with one being more dynamic and relational than the other. See, for example, Eberhard Mechels, *Analogie bei Erich Przywara und Karl Barth. Das Verhältnis von Offenbarungstheologie und Metaphysik* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1974).

⁵² See Erich Przywara, “Die Problematik der Neuscholastik,” *Kant-Studien* 33 (1928): 81. Nietzsche's case presents an ironic analogy: while he abjures divine transcendence, he nevertheless longs, like few others, for human transcendence, speaking himself of the human being as a being-in-transition, as an *Übergang*. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Preface, §4.

⁵³ For Przywara's engagement with Heidegger on this score, see Erich Przywara, *Crucis Mysterium: Das christliche Heute* (Vienna: Ferdinand Schöningh-Paderborn, 1939).

3. “Become What you Are”: The Metaphysics of Self-Identity

As odd as this notion of becoming oneself might be – am I not already myself? – it is well attested in the western tradition, beginning with Pindar, who in his second Pythian Ode exhorts Hieron of Syracuse to “become what you are”: γένοι’ οἷός ἐσσι. (Needless to say, Pindar was not encouraging Hieron to be what he *in fact* was, namely, an infamous tyrant; rather, he was exhorting the king to be what a real king *is and should be*, namely, a virtuous king.) It is implied, furthermore, in the fundamental moral teaching, common to Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, that an “ought” follows from an “is,” and that the human being as a rational animal should act accordingly, i.e., *rationally*, and hence according to that Good (Plato) or Logos (the Stoics) of which reason is an image and to which it is ordered. But it is by no means limited to antiquity. In modern guise the same hortatory principle reappears as the foundation of Kant’s moral philosophy, famously expressed in the slogan of his 1784 manifesto, “What is Enlightenment”: *Sapere aude!* – Dare to think! In other words, *dare to be what you are* as a rational agent. And at a more popular level we see it in the adage, made famous by Shakespeare, “To thine own self be true” (*Hamlet*, Act 1, scene 3) – as though one could fail to be oneself.

All of which goes to say that the question of “becoming what one is,” though *prima facie* odd, is very much part of the tradition – appearing even in the subtitle of Nietzsche’s *Ecce homo*. And it appears with such consistency for good reason: it is arguably the fundamental question of philosophical anthropology. More to the point here is the question to which the gospel is the answer, according to the terms of a correlational theology that even Barth presumably could affirm (as long, that is, as revelation not only answers the question of the human being but radically proposes it to the human being as well).⁵⁴ To be sure, as the admirable Jean Borella pointedly observes, “Some modern exegetes and [even] theologians do not understand how someone can become what one is,” and yet, he avers, “this is a major key of human destiny: by being actively identified with our essence, we gain access to the freedom of the children of God.”⁵⁵ From the standpoint of a questionable humanity, the question of “becoming what one is” is thus in some sense the question of questions.

But what, concretely, does it mean? If it depends upon some kind of correspondence theory of truth, what would it mean to correspond to oneself? For that matter, who or what is the “self” to which one corresponds? To answer this question we would have to decide whether there is such a thing as a real, unitary self that endures through time, or whether this “self” is itself an illusion and its “being” is nothing more than a fleeting succession of thoughts, sensations, and desires. Is it a fixed, unchanging identity along the lines of Parmenides? Or is there no self or essential human nature at all, if Heraclitus is right and everything, including any self-identity, is in flux. Evidently, as soon as we attempt to answer these questions we are thrown back upon fundamental questions of metaphysics that admit of no easy answer.

For present purposes, therefore, let us simply indicate in the barest of outlines a metaphysical grammar for a more dynamic anthropology – again, I hasten to add, not as something imposed on revelation, but as an explication of what it already implies. And to this end, let us again take Przywara as a guide, not simply because there are few Christian thinkers of his caliber in the twentieth century, but because of the direct pertinence of his metaphysics to anthropology, more specifically, because his analogical metaphysics may hold a key to the puzzle of human identity.

⁵⁴ For apart from grace one may not even be able to ask the question that one must ask. In addition to the *Church Dogmatics*, e.g., IV/1, §60, see especially Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. T.A. Smail (New York: Collier Books, 1957).

⁵⁵ Jean Borella, *Guénonian Esoterism & Christian Mystery*, trans. G. John Champoux (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 386.

Needless to say, this is a big claim to unpack. But what I mean, building on the foregoing, is this: Przywara's analogical metaphysics provides the metaphysical grammar for an *analogical* account of self-identity as being-in-transition, more precisely, as essence-in-and-beyond existence. As such, it is able to do what any philosophical anthropology must do, namely, incorporate the *particula veri* of the positions noted above, whose prototypes are Parmenides, the essentialist philosopher of static identity, and Heraclitus, the existentialist philosopher of difference and dynamic flux. In other words, by uniting being and becoming, Przywara's analogical metaphysics is able to underwrite an analogical anthropology, according to which human *being* is constituted through *change*. More to the point, his analogical metaphysics provides a grammar for saying what a *theological* anthropology *must* say, and about which a philosophical anthropology can only speculate: that the self is *hypostatically* constituted *to the extent* that it relates itself, as existing, to itself in its essence, and so becomes what it is. In other words, according to an analogical account of selfhood, we become the uniquely existing *persons* we were created to be *to the extent* that our existence is united with our essence in a manner analogous to God whose tri-hypostatic existence is eternally identical to his essence. But what then is this essence to which human existence is ordered? To what is the human being *qua human being* underway? In short, how does a human being become himself or herself?

Since any theological answer derives from revelation, let us go back to the first creation account. According to Gen. 1:26, human beings are said to be made "in God's image, according to his likeness." But what does this mean? While many scholars and translators have come to the conclusion that "likeness" is a pleonasm that adds nothing to the meaning of "image," there is nevertheless good reason to believe that the two are not semantically equivalent.⁵⁶ Following the standard Orthodox reading, for example, we would do well to understand the image as the potential and the likeness as its realization.⁵⁷ For what is often lost in modern translations and commentaries, I would argue, is precisely what is fundamental to an analogical (theological) anthropology: the notion that the human being is *not* fixed like a stone or the other animals (in which we find no conscious tension between essence and existence), but created with a dynamic vocation *to be* what he or she is, i.e., to realize the divine likeness (i.e., the human essence) in a concrete form. In this regard the Vulgate presents a felicitous contrast. Following the Septuagint (κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν), Jerome renders the verse as *ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*. The difference between the older and more contemporary translations consists not only in the presence of the "and," which more clearly distinguishes the two terms, but in the use of *ad*, which suggests a directed movement and that the human being is created, literally, "to" or even "toward" the image and likeness. And this, in fact, is how some of the greatest church fathers and mystical doctors of the West, from Augustine to Ruusbroec, have understood it.⁵⁸

Though it is impossible to decide here which translation is best – since it is quite possible that the Septuagint may have been working from a more original Hebrew text than the Masoretic edition – Jerome's translation is unquestionably the more dynamic and evocative. It also accords

⁵⁶ Many thanks to Avi Winitzer for helpful conversations about the meaning of the Hebrew, particularly, about the more concrete sense of "image" (*selem*), with its roots in the royal statuary of ancient Mesopotamia, as opposed to the more abstract sense of "likeness" (from the feminine noun *demuth*).

⁵⁷ See, for example, Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 51.

⁵⁸ "From this it is clear that the image of God will achieve its full likeness of him when it attains to the full vision of him." See Augustine, *De Trin.* XIV, 17 (24), trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 392. Augustine is referring here to 1 John 3:2. See also Jan Van Ruusbroec, *The Spiritual Espousals*, trans. Helen Rolfsen (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 117: "And the Holy Trinity has made us to this eternal image and to this likeness. And therefore God would have us go out of ourselves in this divine light and supernaturally pursue this image – which is our own life – and possess it actively and enjoyably with Him in eternal blessedness."

better with New Testament paraenesis – as when Paul tells the Romans and the Galatians to “put on Christ” (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27), reminding them to live in a way that accords with who they *are* by virtue of their baptism (baptism enabling them to return to their true natures, i.e., who they were created to be in Christ); or when he reminds the Corinthians that they *are* the temple of the Holy Spirit and so to live accordingly (1 Cor. 6:19); or when he tells the Ephesians to put on the “new self, which is created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 3:24). In all of these cases the paraenesis is formally the same: “become what you are.” And the matter is no different for the Church fathers of the East and the West, who speak in the same realistic idiom. Thus, for Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius the Great, the Christian life consists in becoming what one is by virtue of baptism, namely, a God-bearer.⁵⁹ And we find the same logic in Augustine, who famously tells the members of his congregation that they should “be what they are,” namely, the body of Christ, so that their own lives might correspond to the one they receive in the Eucharist: “Be what you can see,” he says, “and receive what you are.”⁶⁰ According to Scripture and tradition, then, the point of human existence is not just to live according to the *logos* of the philosophers and realize one’s rational nature, but more profoundly to live through the Spirit and so become who one is as the *imago Dei*, like unto Christ, *the Logos and Image of God* (Heb. 1:3).

Now, to return to the real distinction at the heart of the analogy of being, if the human being is uniquely created among all living things as a “gerund,” so to speak, with the vocation *to be* what it is, namely, the image of God, and if this image can be fulfilled only when conformed by the Spirit to *the* image, which is Christ, we can better appreciate the spiritual import of Przywara’s dynamic, analogical formulation of the real distinction as “essence in-and-beyond existence.”⁶¹ For we can now see that, metaphysically speaking, we exist in a state of tension between our essence (nature) as it now exists in us and the transcendent reality of our essence,⁶² which is found in its archetypal fullness only in Christ, the Logos. We can also appreciate why Przywara liked to hear resonances of the adverb *ἄνω* – upwards – in the analogy of being, signaling thereby that the human being has a *transcendent* vocation, which Paul called an “upward call” in Christ (Phil. 3:13). In sum, we can now see in what sense we are *analogies* of Being: how paradoxically we are and are not yet what we are, which is to say, how we are the image of God, but do not yet fulfill the meaning of the image of God. For “*what* we will be has not yet been revealed” (1 John 3:2). But in the interim, as we wait for the parousia in which our being will be revealed (1 John 3:3), we have hope that what the Spirit did in Christ, he will do with us (Rom. 8:11). For the same Spirit who is the eternal bond of love between the Father and the Son is also the Spirit who hovers over the creaturely abyss between essence and existence, which was opened at the moment of creation, and who, as Hopkins saw, broods over the world with “ah! bright wings” in order to analogize it to God by conforming it to Christ.

⁵⁹ See Theo Kobusch, “Metaphysik als Lebensform” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes. An English Version with Commentary and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa* (Paderborn, 14–18 September, 1998), eds. Hubertus R. Drobner and Albert Viciano (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 467–85.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Sermo* 272.

⁶¹ N.B., this formulation is so comprehensive as to pertain not only to individuals, but also to the Church, whose essence (to be the bride of Christ) is given and deferred, like the kingdom, which is “already” and “not yet.”

⁶² See Jan Van Ruusbroec, *Werken III, Een Spiegel der Eeuwigher Salicheit*, ed. L. Reyens (Tielt: Lannoo, 1947), 167. As Rik Van Nieuwenhove puts it with regard to this text, “Our eternal life in God’s Image is characterized as the supra-being (*overwesen*) of our created being.” See Nieuwenhove, “Meister Eckhart and Jan Van Ruusbroec: A Comparison,” in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 7 (1998), 184. See also Rob Faesen, “‘Poor in Ourselves and Rich in God’: Indwelling and Non-Identity of Being (*wesen*) and Suprabeing (*overwesen*) in John of Ruusbroec,” in *Medieval Mystical Theology* 21 (2012): 147–69.

4. Sophiological Metaphysics

Now what does any of this have to do with Russian Sophiology? Needless to say, I cannot hope to give an adequate account of this rich tradition of speculative Russian thought here – especially since, if Judith Kornblatt is right, “there can be no single definition of Sophia, but only a pastiche of possibilities put into historical, literary, and theological context.”⁶³ Nor can I hope sufficiently to address the understandable concerns of Florovsky and others that Sophiology is a crypto-Gnosticism (given the prevalence of the figure of Sophia in virtually all Gnostic systems from Valentinus to Kabbalah) that involves a heterodox reconfiguration and categorical *metalepsis* of Christian doctrine. (To allay such fears would require not only a number of important qualifications, but also perhaps as much ink as has been spilled defending the *analogia entis* against the charges of Barth and his disciples.) Nor, even assuming that Sophiology is theologically defensible, can one bank on a welcome reception in the West.

Certainly, appreciation for it is growing, owing in part to its favorable reception by Balthasar – who once described Solov’ev to Przywara as “a summit as high as Newman and Baader”⁶⁴ – and, more recently, by Anglicans such as Rowan Williams, John Milbank, and Adrian Pabst.⁶⁵ But others have been more guarded; indeed, Przywara himself had concerns about Sophiology, which in his view tended toward “theopanism,” i.e., a dissolution of the creature into God, and a blurring of the very distinction between Creator and creature that the *analogia entis* strictly maintains.⁶⁶ It is therefore highly doubtful that Sophiology can be redeemed to the satisfaction of all parties (East and West). More problematic still, Przywara’s own reservations about Sophiology would appear to call this entire proposal (as an attempt to put analogical and sophiological metaphysics into conversation with one another) into question.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, acknowledging these difficulties, it is my contention that it is possible to redeem those aspects of Sophiology that correspond to what, following Przywara, I have called analogical metaphysics, and that lend themselves to a common metaphysics – a “mere metaphysics” – of creation and deification. Moreover, I would argue that such an attempt is an ecclesiological necessity. For if the churches of the East and the West were never meant to be isolated from one another (John 17:21), neither should we understand the metaphysics of the Christian East and that of the Christian West in isolation from one another. On the contrary, I would suggest that the particular truth of each metaphysical tradition only becomes evident, and its shortcomings rectified, when brought into relation with and relativized by the other: when the more abstract metaphysics of the Christian West (with its final ontological distinction between God and creatures) and the more poetic metaphysics of the Christian East (with its Sophianic vision

⁶³ Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovoyov* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 93.

⁶⁴ Letter dated March 3, 1962. See Lochbrunner, *Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Theologen-Kollegen* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2009), 86. For a study of Balthasar’s favorable but qualified reception, see Jennifer Newsome Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

⁶⁵ In addition to John Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon,” and the volume already noted (*vide supra* note 4), see Sergii Bulakov, *Towards a Russian Political Theology*, edited and introduced by Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) and Michael Martin, *The Submerged Reality: Sophiology and the Turn to a Poetic Metaphysics* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015).

⁶⁶ For Przywara’s reading of Berdyaev’s *The Meaning of History*, see *Ringel der Gegenwart*, vol. 1, 342–73, esp. 349–51. Admittedly, it is questionable how well Przywara knew Bulgakov, whom he mentions only infrequently in connection with Berdyaev and what he refers to as Russian Trinitarian Gnosticism, but such concerns call for serious consideration, and *a fortiori* given their similarity to the concerns of Florovsky and Bulgakov’s Orthodox critics.

⁶⁷ *Nota bene*, Przywara’s reservations about Sophiology should not be taken to disqualify such an attempt: firstly, because reservations, instead of disqualifying engagement, are often enough precisely its presupposition; secondly, because his own correlational understanding of analogy and corresponding method of engagement call for it.

of all things in God) are conjoined. The goal of mere metaphysics, accordingly, is a metaphysical coordination of union and difference in keeping with Przywara's own analogical coordination of mysticism and distance.⁶⁸

To the end of mere metaphysics, then, let us first consider who or what the sophiologists understand by Sophia, beginning with the Wisdom literature that inspired it. While other texts could be adduced, the most obvious starting point is Proverbs 8:22-30, in which Wisdom (Sophia) speaks in the first person as a kind of hypostasis, created by God in the beginning:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. / Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. / When there were no depths I was brought forth, / when there were no springs abounding with water. / Before the mountains had been shaped, / before the hills, I was brought forth; / before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. / When he established the heavens, I was there, / when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, / when he made firm the skies above, / when he established the fountains of the deep, / when he assigned to the sea its limit, / so that the waters might not transgress his command, / when he marked out the foundations of the earth, / then I was beside him, like a master workman; / and I was daily his delight, / rejoicing before him always / rejoicing in his inhabited world / and delighting in the sons of men.

Since Sophia appears in the form of a primordial figure through whom God made the world, patristic and medieval theologians naturally tended to interpret Sophia as a reference to the second person of the Trinity, the Logos of John's prologue, "through whom all things were made" (John 1:3). But while exegetically understandable, it is also problematic for the obvious reason that in v. 22 Sophia is said to be created (*qānāh*), which has created a headache for any number of exegetes, from the Cappadocians to Aquinas, who have had to bend over backwards to avoid the Arian implication of suggesting that the eternal Logos is created. All of which would seem to argue for a Sophiological interpretation of this passage. But if Sophia is not the Logos, who is she? Is she a "fourth hypostasis" in God as many fear? And is the Holy Trinity then a Quaternity? In view of such questions, which are understandable after any first reading of just about any of the sophiologists, one can readily understand why Sophiology has elicited such critical reactions, ranging from disquiet to outright alarm.

For his part, given that his formulations were less guarded than those of Florensky and Bulgakov, Solov'ev is not free of blame for having generated this suspicion, as when he says in his lectures on Divine Humanity that Sophia is "the eternal body of God and the eternal soul of the world."⁶⁹ Indeed, with such formulations, Solov'ev would seem to flirt not only with a heterodox doctrine of God, but with pantheism and a collapsing of the distinction between God and creation. On a charitable reading, however, what Solov'ev is trying to say is not inconsistent with orthodoxy. For, as he puts it in his seventh lecture, Sophia is the "idea which God has before Him in His [work] of creation, and which he, consequently, realizes."⁷⁰ In other words, Sophia represents either the totality of the *ordo essentiarium*, the world of essences as eternally imagined by God, or that which God realizes through the economy of salvation. In either case, however, we are not far from what the Greek and Latin fathers would have understood by

⁶⁸ See Erich Przywara, "Mystik und Distanz," in *Stimmen der Zeit* 110 (1926): 346-62; reprinted in Erich Przywara, *Schriften*, vol. 2 (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962), 66-90.

⁶⁹ See Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia*, 46.

⁷⁰ Vladimir Solovyov, *Lectures on Godmanhood*, with an introduction by Peter Peter Zouboff (San Rafael: Semantron, 2007), 155.

rationes seminales (logoi spermatikoi): one figure who represents both the eternal origin of the world in the mind of God and the historical realization of this order through Christ.⁷¹ Rightly understood, therefore, Sophia is not a fourth hypostasis but the name for creation in its protological and eschatological beauty – a beauty it possesses by virtue of its nuptial relationship with the Logos, who came to redeem it from the bondage of sin and restore it to himself. As Florensky put it, “Sophia is the beginning and center of redeemed creation, the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷² Granting this admittedly rudimentary understanding of Sophia, let us now turn to Bulgakov to see more concretely how a sophiological metaphysics maps onto the analogical metaphysics outlined above, beginning with his understanding of the relationship between immanence and transcendence.

Already in *Unfading Light*, published in 1917, it is clear that Bulgakov subscribes to the kind of relationship between immanence and transcendence for which the *analogia entis*, as we have seen, is an abbreviated formula. Indeed, he holds that the whole of religion and philosophy is in some sense bound up with how one relates or fails to relate these two concepts: “A pair of correlative concepts, transcendent and immanent, plays a most substantial role in the definition of religion . . . one can expound the whole history of philosophical thought as the history of these concepts . . .”⁷³ What is more, he not only understands them, as Przywara does, in terms of a dynamic polarity,⁷⁴ the language he uses to describe the polarity is indistinguishable from Przywara’s own. Consider, for example, Przywara’s programmatic 1923 essay, in which he proposes the relating of the poles of immanence and transcendence as a Catholic solution to the dialectical ills of modernity which, lacking a sober Catholic metaphysics, he saw reeling drunkenly between a world-intoxicated pantheism (or secular immanence) and a fanatical world-denying Gnosticism (i.e., an exclusive transcendence): “[T]he *analogia entis*, which is proper to the Catholic concept of God, entails a mysterious tension between similar and dissimilar, corresponding to the tension between God in us and God beyond us.”⁷⁵ In *Unfading Light* Bulgakov affirms the same thing: “God, as the Transcendent, is infinitely, absolutely remote from and alien to the world”; at the same time, by virtue of his condescension, God is “infinitely close to us . . . most close, most intimate, most immanent in us . . . closer to us than we are to ourselves. God is outside us and God is in us, the absolutely transcendent becomes the absolutely immanent.”⁷⁶ Bulgakov’s similarity to Przywara here – not to mention his allusion to Augustine – is obvious.

Bracketing more controversial aspects of Bulgakov’s theology, we have thus found a minimal basis for a common metaphysics. If there is any appreciable difference to be noted at this point with regard to the relating of immanence and transcendence, it is that Bulgakov is more emphatic that this relation is a matter of faith: “The logic of religious consciousness demands that God be found as the unconditional not-world and the world as the unconditional not-God in order *then* to see the world in God and God in the world.”⁷⁷ Przywara, on the other hand, is more

⁷¹ As Rowan Williams puts it in *Sergii Bulgakov: Toward a Russian Political Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 119: “Sophia is the concrete presence of the ideal world – primarily in the mind or purpose of God, derivatively therefore in the created order itself.”

⁷² Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 253.

⁷³ Sergii Bulgakov, *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*, translated, edited, and introduced by Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 20.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 20: “. . . if one pole corresponds to transcendence, immanence is located at the other, and vice versa.”

⁷⁵ See Erich Przywara, “Gott in uns oder Gott über uns: Immanenz und Transzendent im heutigen Geistesleben,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 105 (1923): 343–62; reprinted in a revised form in Przywara, *Ringens der Gegenwart*, vol. 2 (Augsburg: Benno Filser Verlag, 1929), 543–78 (554).

⁷⁶ Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

willing to maintain with Vatican I that this relation (which is certainly *more* apparent to faith) is – or at least should be – evident to reason.⁷⁸

But if Bulgakov implicitly subscribes to the “transcendent analogy” of the *analogia entis*, whereby God is both in-and-beyond creation, what about the immanent analogy, whereby (according to Przywara’s dynamic formulation) essence is in-and-beyond existence? Is there any accord here? Indeed, there is. For, just as Przywara can render the immanent analogy in terms of the implied exhortation to “become what you are,”⁷⁹ i.e., to *be* the image of God, for Bulgakov the very idea of the world, as God eternally intends it, is that it “become Sophia.”⁸⁰ In other words, just as Przywara’s immanent analogy entails a dynamic interpretation of the real distinction, so too, for Bulgakov, there is a real distinction between the world in its sophianic essence (what it most truly is according to its essence as the *causa finalis* of creation), and the world in the process of *becoming what it is* – between what Bulgakov calls the “divine or heavenly Sophia” and the “creaturely Sophia,” which is struggling in a fallen world to become what it is and to be restored to its original beauty.⁸¹ Here again, therefore, sophiological metaphysics proves to be congruent with the analogical metaphysics outlined above. There the emphasis was upon the individual human being who is made *ad imaginem*, and, as such, called to become what he or she is in Christ; here the emphasis is upon the whole of creation, which through union with Christ (the Lamb of God) is “to become Sophia” (the Bride of the Lamb). One could even argue that, notwithstanding their different emphases, the analogical metaphysics of the West and the sophiological metaphysics of the East are *formally identical*. If the formula of analogical metaphysics was “essence in-and-beyond existence,” here it is “Sophia in-and-beyond creation.”

But we can draw an even tighter comparison: for even if Sophiology has a more cosmic emphasis on what creation as a whole is meant to become, for Bulgakov this cosmic process is also played out at the level of individuals who are called to realize their given vocation. As he puts it in *The Bride of the Lamb*, “Every element of creation has from God its own theme or character [and] is eternally given [. . .] as a task to itself.”⁸² Indeed, Bulgakov does not hesitate to use precisely the language we used above. On the one hand, he speaks of the creature’s essence as rooted in eternity: “the roots of a person’s being are submerged in the bottomless ocean of divine life.”⁸³ On the other hand, he says that the human person “lives in time, in which he becomes himself” – in a becoming that “embraces both the meta-empirical and empirical world.”⁸⁴ For Bulgakov, too, therefore, the human being exists in a state of tension between ideality and reality, between essence and existence, until by grace the human being finds the way to himself or herself in Christ – which is to say, loses himself or herself for Christ’s sake (Matt. 10:39).⁸⁵

⁷⁸ As much as Przywara maintains a philosophical *analogia entis*, i.e., that a transcendent God should be evident from creation, even this is a rather severely qualified position, requiring a distinction between formal and material knowledge of God, since the god of Aristotle is not even transcendent. See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 55 (note 149) and 212 (note 95).

⁷⁹ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 124.

⁸⁰ Sergii Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 161.

⁸¹ In the words of the symbolist poet A. K. Tolstoy (1817-1875), recalled with slight inaccuracy by Solov’ev, “And I understood with a prophetic heart / That all that is born from the Word, / Pouring out the rays of love, / Thirsts to return to him again. / And every stream of life, / Submissive to the law of love, / Rushes irrepressibly to God’s loins / With all the strength of being. / And sound and light are everywhere, / And there is only one principle for all the worlds, / And there is nothing in nature / That would not breathe with love.” Quoted in Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia*, 89.

⁸² Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 56.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸⁵ While the essence of the creature is created to exist in Christ and so “to become what it is,” it should be underscored that this is a destiny that is given in the form of a vocation, which the creature remains free to accept or reject.

At which point ideality and reality, hitherto separate, begin to coincide – in the One in whom the ideal and the real world are perfectly one, in whom the essential ideality of the world really exists, and in whom the sophianic splendor of the world, which was lost in Adam, again begins to shine.

5. Conclusion

The point of the foregoing has been to show, in the barest of outlines, a formal compatibility between the analogical metaphysics of the West and the sophiological metaphysics of the Christian East – in order to suggest that, at the end of the day, there is indeed such a thing as a common metaphysics, a mere metaphysics of the Christian tradition, notwithstanding its different emphases. In the language of the Christian West, it is a metaphysics for which creation is originally an analogy, which Christ came to redeem. In the language of the Christian East, it is that Sophia who was “brought forth when there were no depths, no mountains, and no hills” as the original beauty of the world – a beauty that faded with sin, but that glimmers again in the saints and is all-luminous in Christ and the Mother of God. But as important as it is to see how much the Christian East and West have in common, the differing emphases of each tradition should not be lost. For if there really is one basic metaphysics of creation and deification, it appears in its fullness only when each tradition makes a gift of what it has to the other, offering to the other the insights it has received from the Holy Spirit, which one might venture to summarize as follows: whereas Sophiology provides a more glorious vision of the end of creation in nuptial union with God, the *analogia entis*, in turn, with its sober emphasis on the *maior dissimilitudo* between God and creatures, can help to allay fears that Sophiology, in speaking of the eternity of the world, blurs the difference between God and creation.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to those friends of many confessions who have read or commented on this essay, including David Hart, Charles Lewis (my first teacher *sine qua non*), Aaron Pidel, SJ, Alexis Torrance, and Roberto De La Noval.