

## The Destiny of Christian Metaphysics: Reflections on the *Analogia Entis*

David Bentley Hart

### I: The Analogy as a Principle of Christian Thought

In that small, poorly lit, palely complected world where the cold abstractions of theological ontology constitute objects of passionate debate, Erich Przywara's proposal regarding the *analogia entis* is unique in its nearly magical power to generate inane antagonisms. The never quite receding thunder of Karl Barth's cry of "antichrist!" hovers perpetually over the field of battle; tiny but tireless battalions of resolute Catholics and Protestants clash as though the very pith and pulp of Christian conviction were as stake; and, even inside the separate encampments, local skirmishes constantly erupt among the tents. And yet it seems to be the case that, as a rule, the topic excites conspicuous zeal—especially among its detractors—in directly inverse proportion to the clarity with which it is understood; for, in itself, there could scarcely be a more perfectly biblical, thoroughly unthreatening, and rather drably obvious Christian principle than Przywara's *analogia entis*.

What, after all, are the traditional objections to the analogy? What dark anxieties does it stir in fretful breasts? That somehow an ontological analogy between God and creatures grants creaturely criteria of truth priority over the sovereign event of God's self-disclosure in time, or grants the conditions of our existence priority over the transcendent being of God, or grants some human structure of thought priority over the sheer *novum* of revelation, or (simply enough) grants nature priority over grace. Seen thus, the *analogia entis* is nothing more than a metaphysical system (which we may vaguely denominate "Neoplatonist") that impudently imagines there to be some ground of identity between God and the creature susceptible of human comprehension, and that therefore presumes to lay hold of God in his unutterable transcendence. But such objections are—to be perfectly frank—total nonsense. One need not even bother to complain about the somewhat contestable dualities upon which they rest; it is enough to note that such concerns betray not simply a misunderstanding, but a perfect ignorance, of Przywara's reasoning. For it is precisely the "disjunctive" meaning of the analogy that animates Przywara's argument from beginning to end; for him, it is the irreducible and, in fact, *infinite* interval of difference within the analogy that constitutes its surprising, revolutionary, and metaphysically shattering power. Far from constituting some purely natural conceptual scheme to which revelation must prove itself obedient, the *analogia entis*, as Przywara conceives of it, is nothing more than the largely apophatic, almost anti-metaphysical ontology—or even meta-ontology—with which we have been left now that revelation has obliged us to take leave of any naïve metaphysics that would attempt to grasp God through a conceptual knowledge of essences or genera. A more plausible objection to the analogy might be the one that Eberhard Jüngel attributed (unpersuasively) to Barth, and that even Hans Urs von Balthasar found somewhat convincing: that so austere and so vast is the distinction between the divine and human in Przywara's thought that it seems to leave little room for God's nearness to humanity in Christ. This is no less mistaken than other, more conventional views of the matter, but at

least it demonstrates some awareness of the absolute abyss of divine transcendence that the analogy marks.

At its most elementary, what Przywara calls the *analogia entis* is simply the scrupulous and necessary rejection of two opposed errors, each the mirror inversion of the other: the equally reductive and equally “metaphysical” alternatives of pure identity and pure dialectic. For neither approach to the mystery of God—neither the discourse of God as the absolute One nor the discourse of God as the absolute “Wholly Other”—can by itself truly express the logic of divine transcendence; both resolve the interval of difference between God and creation into a kind of pure and neutral equivalence, somehow more original and comprehensive than that difference, and so more original and comprehensive than God in himself *as God* (though this is perhaps easier to see in the case of the metaphysics of identity).

As Przywara understands the analogy, it is first and foremost an affirmation that creation comes about *ex nihilo*, and that God therefore is not merely some “supreme being,” but is at once utterly transcendent of all beings and also the only source of all beings. Thus the analogy presumes what no self-sufficient and perfectly systematic metaphysics could ever properly admit into its speculations: the radical contingency and non-necessity of the created order. One cannot begin to understand the principle of the *analogia entis* unless one first grasps that, before all else, it is the delightful and terrible principle of the creature’s utter groundlessness; it is the realization that we possess no essence, no being, no foundation that is not always, in every moment, imparted to us from beyond ourselves, and that does not therefore always exceed everything that we are in any moment of our existence. Or, said differently, essence and existence never coincide in us as they do in God, but subsist, from our perspective, only in an altogether fortuitous synthesis, and are given to us at once, separately and together, in a movement of purest gratuity, from a transcendent source upon which we have no “natural” claim. Thus the sheer dynamism of creaturely existence (which is the constant and guiding theme of Przywara’s thought) can never be resolved into the stability of any ground of identity belonging to us; only in him do we live, and move, and have our being. Of course, to understand even this much, one must avoid falling into any of the common misunderstandings that have attached themselves to the concept of the *analogia entis* since at least the days of Barth. Before all else, one must grasp that, for Przywara, the ontological analogy does not treat “being” as some genus under which God and the creature—or the infinite and the finite—are placed as distinct instances. Quite the reverse, in fact: it is precisely *being* that is to be understood as analogous; and it is precisely any univocal concept of being—any notion that God and creatures alike are “beings” comprehended by “being as such”—that the *analogia entis*, as a principle, denies. The proper proportion of the analogy, after all, is that of the *maior dissimilitudo* (or, as Przywara would prefer, the *semper maior dissimilitudo*) that separates God from any creature. So transcendent is God, one might say, that *even being*—that barest, most basic, most primordial of attributions—is *only analogous* between him and his creation. And this is an absolute impoverishment for any traditional metaphysics that would hope to lay hold of God within human concepts, for there is no discrete being called God, within the fold of “being as such,” whose nature we can conceive *per analogiam essentiarum*.

Nevertheless—and this touches upon the other “false path” to transcendence—the being of the creature must indeed be *analogous to God’s* pure act of being; otherwise all talk of God would be confined within an arid dialectical theology of the “Wholly Other” so extreme as to posit—even if only tacitly—a logically absurd equivocality of being. Absolute otherness is not transcendence, but merely a kind of “negative immanence”; for true transcendence must be beyond all negation. If creation were somehow something simply “outside of” or “other than” God, like one object outside another, then logically one would have to say that there is something more than—something in addition to—God; God, thus conceived, would be a kind of thing, less than the whole of things, a being embraced within whatever wider abstract category is capacious enough to contain both him and his creatures under its canopy, without confusing their several essences (and inevitably that category will be called “being”, in the barren univocal sense). It is one of the great oddities of most debates concerning the *analogia entis* that those who reject the principle in order to defend God’s sovereign transcendence against the encroachments of human reason are in fact effectively denying God’s fully ontological transcendence and replacing it with a concept of mere ontic supremacy. If being is not susceptible of the interval of the analogy (even though it is an interval of ever greater unlikeness), then God and creation exist in a reciprocal real relation to one another, which means an extrinsic relation between two mutually delimiting objects; not only is this a degrading concept of God, but inevitably it must presuppose the mediations of some *tertium quid*, some broader context of “reality” that somehow exceeds the difference between God and creatures. Nor is it enough to answer such concerns with the essentially magical claim that the “divine will” alone mediates between God and world; for, unless God is understood as the ontological source and ground of creation, creation itself must be understood as a thing separate from God, founded upon its own potentiality, and the creative will of God must then be understood simply as the spontaneous and arbitrary power of conjuration possessed by a very impressive—but still finite—divine sorcerer.

The actual terms of the analogy, moreover, are of a sort that could not possibly give offense to any Christian, however piously certain he is of his own nothingness before God. The proportion of likeness within the analogy subsists simply in the recognition that God alone is the source of all things, while we are contingent manifestations of his glory, destined for a union with him that will perfect rather than destroy our natures; entirely dependent as it is upon his being—receiving even its most proper potentiality from him as a gift—our being declares the glory of He Who Is. The proportion of unlikeness, however, which is the proportion of infinite transcendence, subsists in the far more vertiginous recognition that God is his own being, that he depends upon no other for his existence, that he does not become what he is not, that he possesses no unrealized potential, that he is not a thing set off against a prior nothingness, that he is not an essence joined to existence, and that he is not a being among other beings; and that we, in our absolute dependence upon him, are not timeless essences who “demand” existence or who possess any actuality of our own; neither essence nor existence belongs to us, and their coincidence within each of us is an entirely gratuitous gift coming to us from beyond ourselves; we have no power to be, no *right* to be, no independent ground that gives us some sort of natural claim on being.

Of all the accusations laid against the *analogia entis* by its most redoubtable foes, none is more peculiar (nor, in my experience, more common) than the claim that the analogy is simply a pagan—specifically Neoplatonist—metaphysics of participation, to which Christian motifs have been at best cosmetically applied. I am not entirely certain, however, what reply to make to such an indictment. It is so thoroughly irrelevant to Przywara’s argument that it is not even clear that it could be characterized as wrong; one must simply assume at this point that the very concept of an “analogy of being” has become equivocal, since those who reject it on these grounds are clearly talking about something altogether different from what Przywara means when he uses the same words. It is true that Przywara presumes some sort of “metaphysics of participation”, as any clear theological concept of the contingency of finite existents must involve some idea that all finite things “partake of” being rather than intrinsically possess it, and that God alone—and in himself—is the source of all being as such. And it may be perfectly fair to describe many of the philosophical premises of Przywara’s thought as—in a very general and excruciatingly imprecise sense—“Platonist” or “Neoplatonist”, since some such metaphysical scheme has been part of Christian discourse since the days of the New Testament itself. But this most definitely has nothing to do with the distinct and distinctive principle of the *analogia entis*, which no one (at least, no one who actually understands the concept as Przywara does) could possibly mistake for some metaphysical system of natural likenesses established upon and sustained by the supposition of a prior identity between the absolute and the contingent. In fact, it is precisely this that the analogy is not and can never be.

I say this with some care, I should add, since—anxious though I am to do full justice to Przywara’s insight—I am equally anxious to avoid conceding any legitimacy to the terms in which this particular rejection of the analogy is couched. Speaking entirely for myself, I am quite happy to embrace a metaphysics that might loosely be called the metaphysics of traditional Platonism, or even the metaphysics of certain kinds of Vedanta philosophy; indeed, I would argue that, as far as a philosophy of essences goes, any attempt to speak intelligibly of God and creation, one that does not ultimately dissolve into childish mythology, requires some such metaphysics. And, in fact, if we confine ourselves entirely to questions of the causality of created things, we must ultimately conclude that, speaking purely logically—purely metaphysically—there is no significant difference between the idea of creation and that of emanation (unless by the latter one means some ridiculously crude, intrinsically materialist concept of a divine substance that merely “expands” into universal space and time). The basic structure of *exitus* and *reditus*, *diastole* and *systole*—as, among many others, the Areopagite and Thomas both understood—is as inevitable for a doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as it is for a Plotinian metaphysics of the One. Moreover, I would go on to say that it is impossible to speak meaningfully of a God who is all Goodness and Truth, the source of all being and knowing, without acknowledging that our being and our knowing are sustained from within by a God who is for each of us *interior intimo meo*, and that at the level of *nous* or spirit (or whatever one would call the highest intellectual principle within us) there is that place where the *Fünklein* or *scintilla* resides, where (as Augustine says) *nihil intersit*, where our ground is the divine ground, where *Brahman* and *Atman* are one, and in regard to which one may say of all things “*Tat tvam asi*”. Indeed, if we were simply to confine ourselves to purely *metaphysical* questions regarding the relation between the Absolute

and the dependent, and never asked the still more fundamental *ontological* questions regarding the difference between divine and human being or the difference between God as God and each of us as *this* particular being, we would never have to venture speculatively beyond the conceptual law of *methexis*, within which both absolute dialectic and absolute identity have their parts to play, as the two mutually sustaining poles of a single philosophical grammar. For both are equally true, in their distinct ways, of the unmoving ground of being: we are wholly other than God (“He is in heaven and thou art on earth”, he is all and we are nothing, he is absolute and we are contingent) and, at the same time, the highest level of our being abides in God (in the eternal act of God being and knowing God). And, indeed, if we were never to concern ourselves with anything other than the unmoving ground—if we were to regard the givenness, fortuity, transience, and irreducible particularities of our being as utterly subordinate and even sub-philosophical matter for thought—we would never be obliged to consider many subtler, more disturbing questions of difference or identity, or of what real divine transcendence ultimately entails. We could remain ever thus, at the level of a purely natural metaphysics. But the *analogia entis* is not a principle native to any purely natural metaphysics.

Again, this is the wonderful—and, in a sense, liberating—novelty of the ontology Przywara finds within the Christian philosophical tradition. Any metaphysics can discern some order of participation uniting the here below to the there beyond, but not every metaphysics can grasp the analogical interval that disrupts the continuity of being within that order of participation. And this is a distinction of the greatest spiritual import. To the degree that any metaphysics remains confined to the oscillation between total otherness and total identity, it can conceive of no “resolution” of the difference between the absolute and the contingent that is not in some sense tragic; for—as both Western and Eastern philosophies attest—such a metaphysics must affirm either the “necessary” violences of historical dialectic or the final nothingness of perfect identity or the perfect void. Without the interval of ontological analogy, the only alternative to the interminable and pointless disruptions of multiplicity is the final repose of simple unity. The ascent from unlikeness and finitude is necessarily a retreat not only from all transient attachments, but also from the disposable chrysalis of one’s empirical self; within the terms of such a metaphysics, to find identity there is to negate it here. The nous must leave soul and body behind to enter into a bliss beyond self, in the journey of the alone to the alone. Atman must pass beyond the veil of *maya* and the boundless play of Isvara in order to return to its deep and dreamless sleep in Brahman, and so pass from self to Self. Or, if not this, the force of becoming—the ceaseless phenomenal succession of mental and physical states—must finally be extinguished in the *nibbana* of the Hinayana. Whatever the case, the nearer the creature approaches that ultimate terminus, the less creaturely it becomes.

The *analogia entis*, however, introduces an unclosable ontological caesura into what mere metaphysics treats (quite unconsciously) as a seamless ontological continuum. And this is the interval of being that lets us *be* as the creatures we are, that sets us free from our “own” ground; for, without it, all we are—insofar as any one of us is “this” rather than “that”—are deficient, remote, but ultimately recuperable moments within the eternal odyssey of the One’s alienation from and return to itself, and our “redemption” in God is our annihilation as beings. This disruption—this infinite qualitative distinction

between God and creatures—is one that, within the *ordo cognoscendi*, we must call “analogy,” but only in order that we may see it properly as, within the *ordo essendi*, the mystery of the perfect gift: the gift of real difference whose “proportion” is that of infinite charity. For if there is no simple, uninterrupted ontological continuum as such between God and creation, and no sense in which the divine is diminished in the created, then creation is a needless act of freely imparted love, and so can be understood as an act not of alienation from God, but of divine expression. In this utter ontological difference from God—this merely analogous relation of our being to the God who is his own being—our identity is given to us as the creatures we are, who precisely as such give glory to and manifest God. The other language of identity—of simple unity or simple negation—belongs (again) to the unmoving ground of being. But, in truth—so says the analogy—the ceaseless dynamism of our existence is not something accidental to what we “more truly” are, dissembling a more essential changelessness within; we *are* that dynamism, liberated in every instant from nothingness. Our “return” to God is nothing other than our emergence into our own end, and our difference from God is the very revelation of the God who infinitely transcends us and who freely gives us to ourselves.

All of which, in the abstract, seems as if it ought to be quite inoffensive to those who persist in their distrust of the “invention of antichrist”; but I suspect that, as yet, this would still not be enough to calm their fears. So it would probably not go amiss to note that, for Przywara, the *analogia entis* is not a principle simply consistent with Christian thought, but is in fact a principle uniquely Christian, one that follows from the entire Christian story of creation, incarnation, and salvation; and, as such, it describes a vision of being that is not merely an option for Christian thought, but an ineluctable destiny.

## II: The Analogy as the Destiny of Christian Thought

I think it fairly uncontroversial to say that, in the intellectual world of the first three centuries before Nicaea, especially in the Eastern half of the empire, something like a “Logos metaphysics” was a crucial part of the philosophical *lingua franca* of almost the entire educated class, Pagan, Jewish, Christian, and even Gnostic (even though the term generally preferred was rarely “logos”). Certainly, this was case in Alexandria: the idea of a “derivative” or “secondary” divine principle was an indispensable premise in the city’s native schools of Trinitarian reflection, and in the thought of either “Hellenized” Jews like Philo or of the Platonists, middle or late. And one could describe all of these systems, without any significant exception, pagan and Jewish no less than Christian, as “subordinationist” in structure. All of them attempted, with greater or lesser complexity, and with more or less vivid mythical adornments, to connect the world here below to its highest principle by populating the interval between them with various intermediate degrees of spiritual reality. All of them, that is, were shaped by the same basic metaphysical impulse, one sometimes described as the “pleonastic fallacy”: the notion that, in order to overcome the infinite disproportion between the immanent and the transcendent, it is enough to conceive of some sort of *tertium quid*—or of a number of successively more accommodating quiddities—between, on the one hand, the One or the Father or ὁ Θεός and, on the other, the world of finite and mutable things. In all such systems, the second “moment” of the real—that which proceeds directly from the supreme principle of all things: logos, or nous, or what have you—was understood as a

kind of economic limitation of its source, so reduced in “scale” and nature as to be capable of entering into contact with the realm of discrete beings, of translating the power of the supreme principle into various finite effects, and of uniting this world to the wellspring of all things. This derivative principle, therefore, may not as a rule properly be called ὁ Θεός, but it definitely is θεός: God with respect to all lower reality. And this inevitably meant that this secondary moment of the real was understood as mediating this supreme principle in only a partial and distorted way; for such a Logos (let us settle upon this as our term) can appear within the totality of things that are only as a restriction and diffusion of—even perhaps a deviation or alienation from—that which is “most real,” the Father who, in the purity of his transcendence, can never directly touch this world. For Christians who thought in such terms, this almost inevitably implied that the Logos had been, in some sense, generated *with respect to* the created order, as its most exalted expression, certainly, but as inseparably involved in its existence nonetheless. Thus it was natural for Christian apologists of the second century to speak of the Logos as having issued from the Father in eternity shortly before the creation of the world. And thus the essentially Alexandrian theology of Arius inevitably assumed the metaphysical—or religious—contours that it did: the divine Father is absolutely hidden from and inaccessible to all beings, unknowable even to the heavenly powers; and only through the mediation of an inferior Logos is anything of him revealed. What was fairly distinctive in Arianism was the absence of anything like a metaphysics of participation that might have allowed for some sort of real ontological continuity (however indeterminate) between the Father and his Logos; consequently the only revelation of the Father that Arius’s Logos would seem to be able to provide is a kind of adoring, hieratic gesture towards an abyss of infinitely incomprehensible power, the sheer majesty of omnipotent and mysterious otherness.<sup>1</sup> The God (ὁ Θεός) of Arius is a God revealed *only* as the hidden, of whom the Logos (θεός ὁ λόγος) bears tidings, and to whom he offers up the liturgy of rational creation; but, as the revealer of the Father, his is the role only of a celestial high priest, the Angel of Mighty Counsel, the coryphaeus of the heavenly powers; he may be a kind of surrogate God to the rest of creation, but he too, logically speaking, cannot attain to an immediate knowledge of the divine essence.

Even, however, in late antique metaphysical systems less ontologically austere than Arius’s, in which the economy of divine manifestation was understood as being embraced within a somewhat more generous order of μετοχή or μετουσία, the disproportion between the supreme principle of reality and this secondary principle of manifestation remains absolute. Hence all revelation, all disclosure of the divine, follows upon a more original veiling. The manifestation of that which is Most High—wrapped as it is in unapproachable darkness, up upon the summit of being—is only the paradoxical manifestation of a transcendence that can never become truly manifest: perhaps not even to itself, as it possesses no Logos immanent to itself. It does not “think”; it cannot be thought. This, at least, often seems to be the case with the most severely logical, and most luminously uncluttered, metaphysical system of the third century, that of Plotinus. For the One of Plotinus is not merely *a* unity, not merely solitary, but is oneness as such, that perfectly undifferentiated unity in which all unity and diversity here below subsist and by which they are sustained, as at once identity and difference. Plotinus recognized

---

<sup>1</sup> I am largely persuaded by the portrait of Arius that Rowan Williams paints in his *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, revised edtn. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002).

that the unity by which any particular thing is what it is, and is at once part of and distinct from the greater whole, is always logically prior to that thing; thus, within every composite reality, there must always also be a more eminent “act” of simplicity (so to speak) that makes its being possible. For this reason, the supreme principle of all things must be that One that requires no higher unity to account for its integrity, and that therefore admits of no duality whatsoever, no pollution of plurality, no distinction of any kind, even that between the knower and the known. This is not, for Plotinus, to deny that the One is in some special and transcendent sense possessed of an intellectual act of self-consciousness, a kind of “superintellection” entirely transcendent of subjective or objective knowledge.<sup>2</sup> But the first metaphysical moment of *theoria*—reflection and knowledge—is of its nature a second moment, a departure from unity, Nous’s “prismatic” conversion of the simple light of the One into boundless multiplicity; the One itself, possessing no “specular” other within itself, infinitely exceeds all reflection. Nor did philosophy have to await the arrival of Hegel to grasp that there is something fundamentally incoherent in speaking of the existence of that which is intrinsically unthinkable, or in talking of “being” that possesses no proportionate intelligibility: for in what way is that which absolutely—even within itself—transcends intuition, conceptualization, and knowledge anything at all? Being *is* manifestation, and to the degree that anything is *wholly* beyond thought—to the degree, that is, that anything is not “rational”—to that very degree it does not exist. So it was perhaps with rigorous consistency that the Platonist tradition after Plotinus generally chose to place “being” second in the scale of emanation: for as that purely unmanifest, unthinkable, and yet transfinite unity that grants all things their unity, the One can admit of no distinctions within itself, no manifestation *to* itself, and so—in every meaningful sense—*is* not (though, obviously, neither is it not *not*).

In truth, of course, even to speak of an “ontology” in relation to these systems is somewhat misleading. Late Platonic metaphysics, in particular, is not so much ontological in its logic as “henological,” and so naturally whatever concept of being it comprises tends towards the nebulous. “Being” in itself is not really distinct from entities, except in the manner of another entity; as part of the hierarchy of emanations, occupying a particular place within the structure of the whole, it remains one item within the inventory of things that are. Admittedly, it is an especially vital and “supereminent” causal liaison within the totality of beings; but a discrete principle among other discrete principles it remains. What a truly ontological metaphysics would view as being’s proper act is, for this metaphysics, scattered among the various moments of the economy of beings. One glimpses its workings now here and now there: in the infinite fecundity of the One, in the One’s power to grant everything its unity as the thing it is, in the principle of manifestation that emanates from the One, in the simple existence of things, even in that unnamed, in some sense *unnoticed* medium in which the whole continuum of emanations univocally subsists. But, ultimately, the structure of reality within this vision of things is (to use the fashionable phrase) a “hierarchy within totality,” held together at its apex by a principle so exalted that it is also the negation of the whole, in all of the latter’s finite particularities.<sup>3</sup> What has never come fully into consciousness in this tradition is (to risk a grave anachronism) the “ontological difference”—or, at any rate, the

<sup>2</sup> See Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.vii.37.15-38.26; ix.6.50-55.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.vii.17.39-43; ix.3.37-40; cf. V.v.4.12-16; 11.1-6.; κτλ.



analogy of being. So long as being is discriminated from the transcendent principle of unity, and so long as both figure in some sense (however eminently) within a sort of continuum of metaphysical moments, what inevitably must result is a dialectic of identity and negation. Again, this is the special pathos of such a metaphysics: for if the truth of all things is a principle in which they are grounded and by which they are simultaneously negated, then one can draw near to the fullness of truth only through a certain annihilation of particularity, through a forgetfulness of the manifest, through a sort of benign desolation of the soul, progressively eliminating—as the surd of mere particularity—all that lies between the One and the noetic self. This is not for a moment to deny the reality, the ardor, or the grandeur of the mystical relations that Plotinus describes, or the fervency with which—in his thought and in the thought of the later Platonists—the liberated mind loves divine beauty.<sup>4</sup> The pathos to which I refer is a sadness residing not within Plotinus the man, but within any logically dialectical metaphysics of transcendence. For transcendence, so understood, must also be understood as a negation of the finite, and a kind of absence or positive exclusion from the scale of nature; the One is, in some sense, *there* rather than *here*. To fly thither one must fly hence, to undertake a journey of the alone to the alone, a sweetly melancholy departure from the anxiety of finitude, and even from being itself, in its concrete actuality: self, world, and neighbor. For so long as one dwells in the realm of finite vision, one dwells in untruth.

It is precisely here, however, that the advent of Nicene theology began to alter—altogether fundamentally—the conceptual structure of the ancient world. The doctrinal determinations of the fourth century, along with all of their immediate theological ramifications, rendered many of the established metaphysical premises upon which Christians had long relied in order to understand the relation between God and the world increasingly irreconcilable with their faith, and at the same time suggested the need to conceive of that relation—perhaps for the first time in Western intellectual history—in a properly “ontological” way. With the gradual defeat of subordinationist theology, and with the definition of the Son and then the Spirit as coequal and coeternal with the Father, an entire metaphysical economy had implicitly been abandoned. These new theological usages—this new Christian philosophical grammar—did not entail a rejection of the old Logos metaphysics, perhaps, but certainly did demand its revision, and at the most radical of levels. For not only is the Logos of Nicaea *not* generated with a view to creation, and *not* a lesser manifestation of a God who is simply beyond all manifestation; it is in fact the eternal reality whereby God is the God he is. There is a perfectly proportionate convertibility of God with his own manifestation of himself to himself; and, in fact, this convertibility is nothing less than God’s own act of self-knowledge and self-love in the mystery of his transcendent life. His being, therefore, is an infinite intelligibility; his hiddenness—his transcendence—is always already manifestation; and it is this movement of infinite disclosure that is his “essence” as God. Thus it is that the divine Persons can be characterized (as they are by Augustine) as “subsistent relations”: for the relations of Father to Son or Spirit, and so on, are not extrinsic relations “in addition to” other, more original “personal” identities, or “in addition to” the divine essence, but are the very reality by which the Persons subsist; thus the Father is eternally and essentially Father

---

<sup>4</sup> There are rather too many passages on this mystical *eros* in the *Enneads* to permit exhaustive citation; but see especially VI.vii.21.9-22.32; 31.17-31; 34.1-39; ix.9.26-56.

*because* he eternally has his Son, and so on.<sup>5</sup> God *is* Father, Son, and Spirit; and nothing in the Father “exceeds” the Son and Spirit. In God, to know and to love, to be known and to be loved are all one act, whereby he is God and wherein nothing remains unexpressed. And, if it is correct to understand “being” as in some sense necessarily synonymous with manifestation or intelligibility—and it is—then the God who is also always Logos is also eternal Being: not *a* being, that is, but transcendent Being, beyond all finite being.

Another way of saying this is that the dogmatic definitions of the fourth century ultimately forced Christian thought, even if only implicitly, towards a recognition of the full mystery—the full transcendence—of Being within beings. All at once the hierarchy of hypostases mediating between the world and its ultimate or absolute principle had disappeared. Herein lies the great “discovery” of the Christian metaphysical tradition: the true nature of transcendence, transcendence understood not as mere dialectical supremacy, and not as ontic absence, but as the truly transcendent and therefore utterly immediate act of God, in his own infinity, giving being to beings. In affirming the consubstantiality and equality of the Persons of the Trinity, Christian thought had also affirmed that it is the transcendent God alone who makes creation to be, not through a necessary diminishment of his own presence, and not by way of an economic reduction of his power in lesser principles, but as the infinite God. He is at once *superior summo meo* and *interior intimo meo*: not merely the supreme being set atop the summit of beings, but the one who is transcendentally present in all beings, the ever more inward act within each finite act. This does not, of course, mean that there can be no metaphysical structure of reality, through whose agencies God acts; but it does mean that, whatever that structure might be, God is not located within it, but creates it, and does not require its mechanisms to act upon lower things. As the immediate source of the being of the whole, he is nearer to every moment within the whole than it is to itself, and is at the same time infinitely beyond the reach of the whole, even in its most exalted principles. And it is precisely in learning that God is not situated within any kind of ontic continuum with creation, as some “other thing” mediated to the creature by his simultaneous absolute absence from and dialectical involvement in the totality of beings, that we discover him to be the *ontological* cause of creation. True divine transcendence, it turns out, transcends even the traditional metaphysical divisions between the transcendent and the immanent.

And, as I have said, this recognition of God’s “transcendent immediacy” in all things was in many ways a liberation from that sad pathos native to metaphysics described above; for with this recognition came the realization that the particularity of the creature is not in its nature a form of tragic alienation from God, which must be overcome if the soul is again to ascend to her inmost truth. If God is himself the immediate actuality of the creature’s emergence from nothingness, then it is precisely through becoming what it is—rather than through shedding the finite “*idiomata*” that distinguish it from God—that the creature truly reflects the goodness and transcendent power of God. The supreme principle does not stand over against us (if secretly within each of us) across the distance of a hierarchy of lesser metaphysical principles, but is present within the very act of each moment of the particular. God is truly Logos, and creatures—created in and through the Logos—are insofar as they participate in the

---

<sup>5</sup> See Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII.i.2. Or, as John of Damascus puts it, the divine subsistences dwell and are established within one another (*De Fide Orthodoxa* I.14).

Logos's power to manifest God. God is not merely the "really real," of which beings are distant shadows; he is, as Maximus the Confessor says, the utterly simple, the very simplicity of the simple,<sup>6</sup> who is all in all things, wholly present in the totality of beings and in each particular being, indwelling all things as the very source of their being, without ever abandoning that simplicity.<sup>7</sup> This he does not as a sublime unity absolved of all knowledge of the things he causes, but precisely *as* that one infinite intellectual action proper to his nature, wherein he knows the eternal "*logoi*" of all things in a single, simple act of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> God in himself is an infinite movement of disclosure, and in creation—rather than departing from his inmost nature—he discloses himself again by disclosing what is contained in his Logos, while still remaining hidden in the infinity and transcendence of his manifestation. When we become what we are, it is through entering ever more into the infinitely accomplished plenitude of his triune act of love and knowledge. And to understand the intimacy of God's immediate presence *as God* to his creatures in the abundant givenness of this disclosure is also—if only implicitly—to understand the true difference of Being from beings.

For Przywara, however, even this Trinitarian warrant for the *analogia entis* would be invisible to us were it not for the full revelation of God's transcendent immediacy to his creatures provided by the incarnation of the Son of God—understood in a truly Chalcedonian way. Balthasar's claim that Christ is in fact the "concrete *analogia entis*" is far more than a vague but pious nod in the direction of scripture. Fully developed Christology is, when all is said and done, impossible to conceive apart from a proper understanding of the true difference between transcendent and immanent being. Of course, it is not entirely clear that Balthasar himself always grasped this, inasmuch as he did occasionally wonder whether a coherent Christology could be enucleated from Przywara's principle of the "*ever* greater difference" between God and creatures. In truth, it is precisely that word "*ever*" that lifts the doctrine of the incarnation out of the realm of myth, for it marks the difference between the divine and the human as an infinite qualitative distance, and as such makes intelligible the claim that there is no conflict or rivalry between Christ's divinity and his humanity, and that the latter participates in the former so naturally that the one person of the Son can be both fully divine and fully human at once. If the difference between God and man were a merely quantifiable difference between extrinsically related beings, the incarnation would be a real change in one or both natures, an amalgamation or synthesis; but then Christ would be not the God-man, but a monstrosity, a hybrid of natures that, in themselves, would remain opposed and unreconciled. But, because the difference between the divine and human really is an infinite qualitative difference, the hypostatic union involves no contradiction, alienation, or change in the divine Son. Because the difference between God and creation is the difference between Being and created beings, Christ is not an irresolvable paradox fixed within the heart of faith, or an accommodation between two kinds of being; in his one person—both God and man—there is neither any diminishment of his divinity nor any violation of the integrity of his humanity. In a sense, in Christ one sees the analogy with utterly perspicuous brilliance: that is, one glimpses at once both the perfect ontological interval of divine transcendence and also the perfect fittingness of the divine image to its

---

<sup>6</sup> Maximus, *Ambigua*, PG 91:1232BC.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1256B.

<sup>8</sup> See *idem*, *Centuries of Knowledge* II.4, PG 90: 1125D-1128A.

archetype. For the perfect man is also God of God: not a fabulous demigod, but human in the fullest sense because divine in the fullest sense. And it is here, ultimately, in the mystery of Christ the incarnate God, the irreducible *concretum* of infinite, self-outpouring charity, that the analogy of being finds its true and everlasting proportion.