Reason’s Developing Self-Revelation

Reason's Developing Self-Revelation: Tradition in the Crucible of Absolute Idealism

By

Stephen Theron

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Reason's Developing Self-Revelation:
Tradition in the Crucible of Absolute Idealism,
by Stephen Theron

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4809-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4809-1

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS AND LIVING PHILOSOPHY

Creation out of nothing, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the sacramental system, these and other doctrines and practices are offered down the ages to the minds of believers for contemplative assimilation. This process, to occur at all, will be a matter of integration with the prospective believer´s living system of thought. Each will cover the other for the future. There will even at times emerge, therefore, systems of thought, call them theological or call them philosophical, which either seem entirely coloured by the advent of faith or make a philosophy out of the denial of philosophy´s independent credentials, e.g. on account of the total depravity of human nature. Both of these backward swipes at existing thought derive from crises of belief engendering a wish to stifle dissent. Thus the Thomist revival, c. 1879, was a conscious blow against existing and active philosophical schools such as idealism and ontologism in Italy. The analogue is the earlier Lutheran preaching against Aristotelianism.

In contrast with such institutional sclerosis we find creative thinkers who, having admitted Christian traditions and claims into their minds, struggle to understand them. Whatever one has admitted, however, we are faced with conceptions derived from the imperfect efforts of believers down the ages to understand what they in turn were faced with. Spirit, seeking to understand spiritual things spiritually, has gone to work on canonized texts purporting to deliver divine law, histories of divine or prophetic intervention inclusive of slayings of false prophets, massacres, sacrifices of son or daughter. It has gone to work on Church definitions regarding physical resurrections and "assumptions", real presences, infallibilities via magically guaranteed apostolic successions, and so on.

Any system, however, should begin at a more fundamental level, for which existence or being seem optimal conceptual candidates. For, as Hegel says, even existence or being are "mediated" (formed by an abstraction, let us say) insofar as we talk about them, whatever our primal, wordless intuitions. Thus in Thomism these concepts are cornerstones of

the philosophy of God. God is being itself, even though transcending common being as "pure act", which also is as much a mediated notion as anything else, as indeed is mediation itself. Thomas does not escape this necessity, of dialectic, as Scotus early on pointed out. Being remains a mediated concept, even where one wishes to speak of an extra-mental being or of an *actus essendi*. The attempted realism, criticism today begins to see, reflects a prior dualism between faith and reason, actually a refusal of openness of enquiry. Faith as a bond must, ethically, be perceptual, not conceptual.

Only God IS by nature and name, it is claimed, and here the influence of a famous Exodus text is plain. Yet in Thomism, the texts show, a more fundamental category than being is that of infinity, as it had been for Anselm. God would have to exist of necessity if he were all-perfect or infinite and not otherwise. But the infinite being, whether believed in or not, is just what all agree in calling God, writes Thomas. Hegel confirms this:

> *Sein ist zwar selbst das Unbestimmte aber es ist nicht unmittelbar an ihm ausgedrückt, dass es das Gegenteil des Bestimmten sei. Das Unendliche hingegen enthält dies ausgedrückt, es ist das* Nicht-*Endliche.*[1]

McTaggart will specify that the existent and the real are related as species and genus (*The Nature of Existence* 629), a view basic to Meinong´s philosophy or to the new discipline of "sistology". Phenomenology, that is, is not a return to "things themselves" (this is just what is in question) but to a more discriminating posture than any ontology, even an ontology of ideas. This is why it is not to be restricted to an "ideosophy", as Maritain claimed. It recalls rather the Neoplatonist posture.

If being is not first as concerns God, then it might not be so with us either. Otherwise the thought that"our very existence itself is the direct result of a social act performed by two other people whom we are powerless to choose or prevent"[2] is well-nigh unbearable to our natural sense of freedom as lying at the basis of our ethical personality. In other words, am I, to the extent that I know that I am free, my existence? We say, after all, "I exist", as we say we play tennis, something we do. A

---

[1] "Being is indeed itself the indeterminate, but it is not immediately expressed by the term 'being', that it is the opposite of the determinate. The infinite, on the other hand, includes expressed that it is the non-finite" (my translation from *Wissenschaft der Logik*, I, 1, 2c, *Der Übergang*, *Anm*. 1, *Werke* 5, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1969, pp.169-170.

[2] B. Magee, *Popper*, Fontana Modern Masters, London 1973, p.69.

traditional way of shoring up personal freedom against parental despotism or traducianism was to postulate a soul or "soul-thing", our innermost self, as proceeding directly from God each time (creationism).

Hegel, however, defends human freedom without recourse to a soul-thing, which he disparages as a concept both for its quasi-materiality and for its abstract simplicity, a concept which "as little corresponds to the nature of the soul, as that of compositeness" (*Encycl. Logic* 34). Hegel states, without any reference to the soul, that "the principle of personality is universality", something he sees as brought by Christianity as, he considers, the absolute religion of free men and women or "sons" and daughters.

On this matter of freedom Hebraists tell us that the *Exodus* text "I am who I am" is better translated as "I will be what I will be", something approached by Spinoza´s conception of God as a se or causa sui, since God does not passively find himself in being. But the question is, do we so find ourselves? Would we want to?

By the principle of *praemotio physica* as Aquinas expounds it God makes our actions our own or free because they are his own too, i.e. he determines them to be free from influence of intervening secondary causes. Hegel will make this more explicit in the area of human and absolute thinking. These, in free action as in intellectual (free) judgement, are identical. Will is an aspect of the category of cognition, as in Aquinas it is the inclination of the intellect itself, i.e. that alone is what will is, and not some other "faculty". But should not this principle, once understood and become transparent, extend even to our very being or existence as individuals, since this, the *actus essendi*, is our first and most perfect act? The Absolute, that is, exists in and even as us, the prepositional relation reciprocally modifying the existential act. We might view the New Testament as the temporal or "religious" representation of this spiritual ever so stable reality, the perfection of a freedom that takes possession of existence eternally or rather immortally, since it has never been without it. Death, then, is indeed merely "the last enemy to be destroyed", not the supreme instance of a divine decree or badge of our finitude. It attests the imperfection, the finitude, of life as a conceptual category, as contrasted with spirit, the "absolute idea". In fact, Hegel shows, any real finite entity is also infinite and vice versa, since the real infinite is, qua real and not abstract, necessarily differentiated. Incarnation directly instantiates this principle. Here we find philosophy overcoming the otherwise mystical paradox, "This also is thou, neither is this thou," which it seems might be said to any person whatever, not simply to a putatively divine one, i.e. to

one infinite in the "abstract" sense merely. "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these you did it unto me."

Fate, after all, on this perspective, is a bogey, while if death were correlate with "sin" then the deeper view would be that the saviour, the one who gets to the bottom of things, as the Idea incarnate, would be "made sin for us", as we in fact find Paul of Tarsus saying, this being an image of the total reconciliation which it is the task of philosophy to envisage. It corresponds to our aspirations and natural capacity, to which grace belongs as perfecting it. There are no extrinsic principles, that is, of free actions (in terms of which Aquinas distinguished grace from "natural" virtue), nor grace outside of freedom.

An existence dependent upon our parents, therefore, cannot be our true reality. Our first beginning, that purposing of us, of ourselves, which is our own, transcends time, even if we should hypothesise a pre-natal past. Our true self, if we should have come so far, is the atman, one with the Absolute, in the sense in which we, or one of our number, "saw Satan falling from heaven".

Our being alive is not then due merely to a divine willing, as thought in bondage to causality, the category, will have it, contradictions notwithstanding (*causa sui* again). It is this willing, with which the infant´s cry for air is one. Only so could we be "loved with an everlasting love".

Yet it is not, of course, that the empirical self chooses its own parents. The absolute self, rather, manifests both us and our parents together, as we indeed manifest it. In their difference all are identical in that absolute, in having the whole within them, without whom it could not be, "that all may be one" indeed. This phrase, like "I in them and they in me" or "members one of another", can bear no other sense than identity. The constancy of human intuition is striking at least.

To speak with Hegel, to follow his conclusions, we might say that the perception of our multitudinous separateness, as in a "community of animals", is naturally transcended or sublated in "the unity of the essence with self-consciousness". This entails that we are, rather, "articulated groups of the unity permeated by its own life, unsundered spirits transcendent to themselves, stainless forms and shapes of heaven, that preserve amidst their differences the untarnished innocence and concord of their essential natures" (*Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. Baillie, 452). *Anima mea est quodammodo omnia*, it was truly said. For spirits, indeed, identity in difference is the rule, overcoming the division between self and other (knowing is having the other as other, says Aquinas, as intellect or sense

indifferently in act is one with what is actually being understood or sensed).

We have characterised the ultimate as infinite, infinity, rather than as necessary being. Of course the infinite is a being, if it is at all, but this is no more than a formality of thinking, of predication. God will be whatever he chooses to be. But then there is no need for him to be other than his creation, as prior and independent. Of course he is prior as principle, as choice, but why should our own choice, such as our choice to be, then be duplicated here? The duplication was needed where we thought we had an idea of infinity as necessarily infinite being, wisdom and so on, as a plenitude. But God can make himself to anything, the "still small voice", the opposite of anything we care to think, as Nicholas of Cusa expresses better than the nominalists of the century previous to his.

Not everything real exists or has being. Some ideas impose themselves by their nobility or naturalness independently of whether they are thought as of something existent. The thought itself can produce a future existent. Hence it was said that God is pure form. Now form gives being but not as having it itself. This is the difficulty, the ambiguity, with Thomist angels.

If God does not just find himself in being (he does not) then he is self-caused, or so we must say so long as our minds are bound to causality as a category. How though could the God of traditional belief find in himself such a "reason of being"? As utter freedom, in his infinitude, anything is possible and so we should start from those results, those choices, which we know of, *viz.* ourselves.

To say that God is necessarily a Trinity, for example… how should this be? Yet, while calling this in question, we seem to want to say of God that he, she or it is necessarily infinite, perhaps therefore necessarily one. It might follow from this, from Hegel´s good infinite, that it is identical with an other, with its other, a finite one, or with finitude, which might be many.

But if the others were many, and in this perfect relation with each other which would itself be love, spirit, then the need for just the Father would be eliminated. Men are in fact in a closer relation to one another than brothers or sons as such (cf. "You are all one person in Jesus Christ"). That is to say, the concept of God evaporates unless we hold to the actus essendi as the most perfect and all-inclusive of acts. But then either God just finds himself in being, which is impossible, or he freely exercises this act in such a way as we have seen, viz. to eliminate himself in our favour, i.e. to be identical with us, each one of whom is thus absolute, *atman*.

For just as the divine thoughts are identical with what they are thoughts of (i.e. they are not intentional, as if there were anything beyond or added to God which might be intended), so these thoughts, each one, are identical with what God is. Here we have the whole in each part, the atman (if only we spirits exist, a position held by McTaggart). God does not think these thoughts, since he is each one (as for Frege a thought can exist on its own), and each one of us is he. This is the union of parts in a perfect whole, mirroring itself (and not just by representation but as being) at all points, without divisibility. It is the union, the reconciliation, of the one and the many. The cement here is love, superior to knowledge (i.e. a better candidate for perfect awareness in eternity, as McTaggart expressly argues) as first overcoming the subject-object duality in cognition, though insofar as sense and sensible, knower and knowable, are united we are already envisaging a species of love. By love one is in the other, same and other are transcended, we are "members one of another", not of one organic whole merely but "one of another". Thus in Christian theology the whole Church or assembly (*qahal*) is present in each locality, at every eucharist (*sumit unus sumit mille*) and in each person. The now discredited custom of "private" masses, i.e. intentionally celebrated by the ordained priest on his own, witnessed to this at least. *L'église c'est moi*. Could only a Pope, a mere spiritual Napoleon, say that?

We began by considering the life of the individual and its origins. Life, if seen from the outside, can be seen as the project of imitating, perhaps displacing, reality, the world. Life, "the immediate idea", is even, in a Hegelian perspective, reality´s ultimate coming to itself, in the ante-room of the absolute idea, after the long journey from the bare initial notion which just is being, a mental formality. This in fact is why by the ontological argument infinity, once conceived, has to be. Being, whatever else it "is", is a formality of thought, as "the value of a variable" (Quine). What then is this variable (unless that which is not)? This dialectical journey, in which nothing will survive, nothing does survive, but the last "category" of all (which is maybe not yet known to us[3]), has nothing directly to do with the journey through time of evolution as we now perceive it, bound as this is to the imperfect and finite category of life, to be superseded by cognition and spirit in the dialectic. This necessity appears to be glimpsed by Teilhard de Chardin when he sees evolution within the biosphere as about to lead on to the "noosphere", although this for him appears to be a temporal process within the ambit of essence only

[3] Cf. J.E. McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic*, 1893.

and so not really dialectical at all. But if life is the precondition for spirit, whether in time or in notion, then it must prefigure it if seen rightly.

But reality is infinite, since nothing not itself real could bound it. Life though, or anything individual, indicates reality as present, omnipresent, in each organism or structure. Being, it was anciently realised, has no parts and so neither has life (*viventibus esse est vivere*). Space and time are here shown to be mere abstract categories. Life is also, or therefore rather, the application of reason, which is absolute, at each point or part, since the part here first studies, its behaviour shows, how to maintain itself in imitation or appropriation of infinitude. This movement, in the sense of a campaign, is however "cunningly" concealed, everything happening as if by chance or, at most, by the wish of the organism alone.[4] This notion can as well be applied to a specifically divine Providence as to the collective unconscious or, indeed, to "the selfish gene".

The organism thus emerges as, or simply is, a kind of world over against its containing world which, indeed, it seeks to devour or appropriate, at the level of the "society of animals". Each one severally, as later reason, always in individuals, will know itself as truly all things anyhow. Finally, indeed, by the principle of incarnation, we find the rational creature identified with the absolute, finite with infinite, from which, in alienation or objectification, all creation comes forth as it is manifested in "petrified" form to common-sense, bound as this is to the perspective of essence. Even Aquinas allows that more than one human nature, i.e. in principle all, might be hypostatically united to the absolute.[5] As regards such incarnation, however, we should avoid dualist models, noting rather that flesh, much more than abstract "body", is nothing other than spirit´s medium of exchange and communication, whereby we become one with one another and take to ourselves what we suppose at first to be an external environment (as if we might be conceivable apart from it). This is the true way to understand incarnation, not so much an emptying as the showing, simply, "in the fullness of time", of infinity´s face in finitude.

To maintain itself, all the same, the would-be separate organism must replenish itself from what surrounds it. So it tries various solutions, like theories or devices when we are trying to understand or explain. Correspondingly it develops mouths or other organs, which it retains as long as they serve. Theory is here, for Popper for example, a form of praxis, as Aristotle too had observed. The organism also begins to modify

[4] Cf. Hegel, *Encycl*.209, on the "cunning of reason".
[5] Aquinas, *Summa theol*. IIIa.

the environment by means of external structures, webs, dams, nests, houses and cities, fuelled by an intentional language it also develops. These resemble theories more closely still, as conscious solutions to problems. Problem-solving, in theory or praxis, is the pursuit of happiness.

Consciousness, and therefore also the pre-conscious organism and the world it displaces or brings to itself, is summoned in its essence to become absolute, not merely collective but absolute. Nihil humanum alienum puto ; consciousness is at home with itself precisely in the other, Hegel stresses. Thus as rational everything is human (though the converse of this is the prior truth), as being object for "the rational creature", whose true self, *atman* again, is the absolute.

In seeing life as a project of duplicating the whole we confirm the philosophies of coincident monads, of coincidence of opposites, of identity in difference. Any consciousness is the whole as self-knowing, i.e. to the extent that it is consciousness. A finite consciousness is *ipso facto*, or thus far, a false consciousness. "How can the gods see us face to face until we have faces?" it is asked in C.S. Lewis´s novel of that name. The true self is simply Self.

Susan Sontag wrote of Hegel´s intellectual failure, though where he failed she failed to say.[6] His thought, rather, has laid bare the failure of intellect at the level of (absolute) intellect itself. This is an achievement though. Dialectical thinking opens the way to that universal affirmation (Hegel´s "at homeness") which is love (having the other as other: knowledge has only the "form of the" other as other), and to a reality beyond, though not excluding, existence, such as Neoplatonism or Buddhism have best charted. "Nothing must bind me to life," wrote Beethoven in his notebook, though we know, again, that viventibus esse est vivere. Nothing must bind me to being, he might have written. It is reason, thought, which is prior.

Thus all forms of objective representation show themselves to be provisional, in flux like the evolutionary process itself. The selfish gene theory is a last ditch holding-out for the philosophy of being as against the freedom which is infinity (it is a gene which is being). This, and not some other thesis, is the true "unity of philosophical experience".

It might seem an anomaly that in biology we simultaneously postulate the emergence of life from non-life at some past time and reprobate theories of spontaneous generation from "matter" now. Life, we say, is always a re-production, the laying of eggs, the splitting of cells. Yet the reproductive

[6] In her booklet recalling her trip to the former North Vietnam.

process which carries such production is itself subject to evolution and now, increasingly, to conscious management and further adaptation, illustrated, if nightmarishly, in Huxley´s *Brave New World* of 1937 but already discussed in Plato´s Republic, at least under its social aspect.

Thus, again, life did not always come from life either, in our linear natural history. This is so whether we prefer the view of one of the discoverers of DNA that life originated extra-terrestrially, in view of the improbability of the intra-mundane evolutionary time-scale, or whether we incline to explanations of a self-cancelling opening to the development of life through the atmospheric change producing oxygen and actually induced by the proliferation of the first organisms, algae, themselves. These first organisms could thus only have been produced within an atmosphere which would have been deadly poisonous for any subsequent life-form.[7]

But viewed from an absolute idealist standpoint (the philosophical standpoint, Hegel claims[8]) neither the anomaly nor its solution signify unless aesthetically merely. We choose the more harmonious and elegant explanation, even in logical theory itself. Here, if the explanation of life shall involve more than the earth and one star, the sun, this will be much more fitting for this view that life reflects, even is, the universe as a whole. It has become conscious of itself in the part because the part is the whole. Science thus requires that it ("things") be explained holistically.

Thus by the anthropic principle, as it is called, "life in the universe would be impossible were the nature of the universe (i.e. its physical constants, dimensions, etc.) only slightly different"[9]. We have a clear circle here, man discovering himself. This finds some confirmation in cosmology, where the human observers within the perspective of quantum physics can be thought to generate the universe supposedly outside of them. The ontology of space and time tends thus to be modified accordingly in an "idealist" direction, as is suggested already in Ludwig Boltzmann´s (1844-1906) theories, reprobated by the realist Popper.[10]

---

[7] Cf. D. Attenborough, *Life on Earth*.

[8] *Wissenschaft der Logik* I, 1, ch.2, *Anmerkung* 2; *Encycl*. 67. Such idealism succeeds to the "metaphysic of understanding" and is now reinforced by quantum physics. "The battle of reason is the struggle to break up the rigidity to which the understanding has reduced everything," Hegel writes, somewhat recalling Wittgenstein.

[9] Stephen J. Dick, "Worlds, Possible Worlds" in *Handbook of Metaphysics and Ontology*, ed. Burkhardt & Smith, Munich 1990, Philosophia Verlag, pp. 949-950.

[10] See, for example, B.S. DeWitt, "Quantum Mechanics and Reality", *Physics Today* 23, 9, 1970, p.30. De Witt describes how theories of Hugh Everett and John

Thus viewed, final understanding must transpose evolutionary development to a dialectic process of thought corresponding to a non-temporal if matching series, one even of a certain necessity though imposed by the freedom of infinite intelligence, with which the true self of each and all eternally corresponds. Within this, our mode of perception and explanation, we dig up the fossils and journey in space with more or less virtuality. Thought itself is transposed, again, from a purely intentional and thus partial mode to a reality overcoming all limitation of parts over against a supra-organic whole, at once infinitely simple and infinitely complex. To this corresponds a view of love as mind in a higher mode. We would claim, for example, that the divine ideas of Augustine and Aquinas cannot be intentional but, rather, intend themselves.

So Popper, in his feeling that a scientist has to be a naive realist like Winston Churchill, upon whose argumentation, comparable in relevance to that of Berkeley´s stone-kicking opponent, he appears to depend[11], is decidely old-fashioned, to say the least. He sees the physicists as succumbing to the "temptation" of idealism.

Absolute idealism, however, leaves science and everything else just as it is. Of course this is true of realism too so that Popper is within his rights when berating physicists. They should not, that is, allow their physics to influence their philosophy. Physics could only confirm a philosophy if physics were independently established. Absolute idealism, in fact, is the drawing of the consequences of infinity as a reality, inadequately approached from within realism, theology principally, by the theory of an analogy of being. A limited being is a false being, as Quinean holism tends to confirm.

Popper is quite right in saying that Hegel´s background is theological, but no objection can derive from this. The fact that mind, to be true, has to think absolutely is not determinism. Augustine and Aquinas grounded human freedom more immediately than anything else is so grounded in divine omniscience, which in free actions operates without any other causal mediation. Quantum mechanics confirm and strengthen this pre-Leibnizian vision. For that the particles move randomly, as it appears, confirms that they are free, divinely moved without intermediary, if the

---

A. Wheeler, for example, deny the existence of any physical reality at all, though they speak in terms of many worlds constantly dividing up, parts mirroring the whole and so on, just such a picture as idealism yields. This applies *a fortiori* to the putative "scientific realism" of David Deutsch´s possible universes. If every possibility is as such actual then there is no distinction between thought and the physical. Deutsch seems not to see this.

[11] K.R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, ch. 2.

infinite must know actively all things, and to this extent they appear as microcosms of "the rational creature". It is in this sense that we would have an "ordainer of the lottery", in a universe of real chance nonetheless perfectly known and controlled, Geach´s chess-player who will conclude the game in just his fore-chosen way from whatever position the "created" opponent cares to take up.[12] Here we have Hegel´s cunning of reason again, the controlling mind or spirit. Whose mind or minds are involved here is not at issue. But rationality indeed just is freedom, poised in judgment between alternatives, not confined to any behavioural or corresponding environment. By the same token though it is necessity. The two coalesce.

These particles though are in the mode of our perception, a misperception in its unanalysed form, as is matter as such. All finite things in fact fall short of truth in themselves. Popper´s remark about idealism betraying people in poverty is a total, even a vulgar non sequitur, only comparable to his revealing remark that theology as such seems to him a lack of faith.[13]

Having come so far along the path from being to reason, which in infinitude is spirit, we should take account of the necessary differentiations of spirit as tackled in McTaggart´s *Studies in the Hegelian Cosmology*, for example.[14] Spirit, he argues, is differentiated, besides being reason itself, into will and even emotion. This recalls us to the "conscious content" sense of "idea" in the early modern period. Aquinas of course had argued that in God intellect and will are the same, while emotion was restricted to flesh and blood creatures.

It has been stressed of late that for Aquinas and the ancient tradition thought was not seen as an empirical process at all. This stress is a reaction to a supposed crass psychologising of logic. Yet timeless ideas can be personal beings such as we ourselves. In this regard the angels did duty for us (hence each of has an angelic "guardian", it was claimed, as in the Gospel, where the rights of children are founded on the prior right of their angels, who see the Absolute, God). The angels themselves have no history. Yet if time is not real then our own history too is a cipher for something else.

The question of salvation hinges very much upon the dichotomy of thought and being. How shall I be or become what I am thought of absolutely, as being, become what I should or ought to be, in other words?

[12] P.T. Geach, *Providence and Evil*, Cambridge 1977.
[13] Karl Popper, *Unended Quest*, Fontana 1976, London.
[14] Cambridge 1903.

Yet we are what we are and each one of us is his idea, though, like God, we will be what we will be. The picture, that is, is not ultimate, either in time or in whatever series time-perception represents. As a man sows so does he reap, indeed, but we are reaping already, as thieves are set for prison (Hegel´s example). The sowing is the reaping and thus to them that have shall be given; they have it already.

The opposition between theory and practice disappears as one approaches the ground of things. There is great relief in this realisation, corresponding to the saying, "Whether we live or die we are the Lord´s". This corresponds to the contemplative ideal of medieval times, which should not undermine normal processes of education or of activating youngsters to virtue. Still, in the temple of the mind one must learn to see that all is well and as it should be, this being the only way to mean that God is God or, as Hegel and McTaggart see it, that reality is rational, the presupposition of all science. An objector might argue that quantum determinism has pushed us back to Platonic dualism here, but there too the unreality of the changeable and chaotic was specifically postulated.

In McTaggart´s system God, or being the Lord´s, corresponds to our own eternal necessity, a rocklike security indeed. The Absolute there, spirit, is not a self but is necessarily differentiated into just that particular plurality made up by ourselves, each one of whom is necessary and eternal though, qua differentiation, finite. One might say of God also on the old system that he is not a self, as are the three Trinitarian persons. He is a nature, not abstractly however. And so here too we might say that humans, the spirits, are the divine persons making up the Absolute. But then one could not say that they were finite, in so far as each one is *atman*. McTaggart´s concept of part is possibly not sufficiently analogical. For he himself says that the unity here connecting the individuals is not outside of them but has "to be somehow in the individuals which it unites", in each individual, I take him as meaning. But by such a unity each individual transcends his finitude. He is finite and infinite at once and this is in perfect accord with Hegel´s logic, which McTaggart is attempting to draw out here in relation to immortality.[15] This will be, as he says, the most perfect unity of whole and parts, mirrored by our cognitive processes, where mind, each mind, is quodammodo omnia and we are, again, members one of another.

Hegel´s logic, says McTaggart, "involves a mystical view of reality", more than Hegel himself realised. Yet if there was ever a need for mysticism then philosophy thus liberated does away with such a need. It is

[15] McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Cosmology*, 11.

what mysticism, cramped by social and dogmatic pressures, was beginning to be. Contrariwise even Aquinas´s system has a certain "impurity" as a philosophy, corresponding to an epoch where an authoritarian theology was judged "queen of the sciences". When he said that he could write no more in view of what he had seen we may suspect that he had reached insights no longer compatible with the enforced orthodoxy although, we have been claiming here, they may already be derived or developed from the writings he has left us.

Even if, however, we ascribe infinity to McTaggart´s parts of the Absolute, ourselves, there remains a problem as to the number of the eternal spirits. Should not this too be infinite, unless we can suppose that the number could have some of the necessity and hence infinitude of the Trinitarian three, if indeed an infinity can be truly ascribed to this, as is assumed although Moslems and others would most likely not agree, finding triplicity of any kind, as against flat unity, an all too finite condition? Yet if we cannot then suppose this of the number of spirits we must again take up the old question of an actual infinite multitude. If there can be an actual infinity, then why not an infinite multitude? There is the objection that this is harmful to the principle of particular personality (though Hegel explains personality in terms of universality anyway), a correlation being drawn between the Christian stress on this and the discovery that mankind had a beginning within evolution, as it did with Adam of old, in supposed contrast with the cyclic Greek vision of things. But there are many possible variants here.

If indeed one allows, with McTaggart, reincarnation, then one can as well allow a plurality of simultaneous incarnations of one spirit, equally unaware of his or her whole being at this moment (recall Plato´s divided androgyn) and we might indeed arrive at the one hundred and forty four thousand of Scripture, or the one hundred and fifty three fishes or indeed the mystical one person in Jesus Christ, the problem thus evaporating. This might harmonize quite well with Hegel´s lack of interest in immortality at which McTaggart exclaims, though he finds it clear that Hegel believed in it. One again thinks of love, as life in the other. Then the question whether we or I survive or not might also evaporate, for, as a Buddhist might say, I do not exist now, I was never born: "no birth, no death", a view permitting positive interpretation, they claim. "I live yet not I…." Again, the "in" relation of Scripture can only be one of identity. "It is not you but God who worketh in you". This Absolute though, for McTaggart, is not a self, *atman*. He might be relying too heavily on the part-whole alternative here. Is there an Absolute which is not a person? This is surely a strange conception. Or is each person the Absolute, as having the unity, i.e. the

whole, within him, in McTaggart´s own words? This might also seem the logical conclusion to the Kantian philosophy of the person as end pure and simple.

One of the real cleavages in experience is that between thought and being. It may not be the greatest. There are also those between life and death, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil, truth and falsity, male and female, finite and infinite…

So we say, you only thought you did that, we call thoughts entia rationis merely, and so on. Yet Aristotle described the first principle as nous, as the thought which thinks itself. This means it is not a substance in being, or being as such, producing thoughts as accidents. Each or any thought (*idea divina*) is identical with what Aquinas later called the essentia divina, not really, however, an Aristotelian way of speaking. Why should such a being have an essence, apart from a general prior assumption of essentialism? Yet Aquinas too affirms that God is actus purus; this act is what God is, though such a predication effectively negates what it was intending to say, *viz*. that God is not anything, not he that acts but the act itself. Aquinas though calls it an actus essendi, misleading unless we remember that esse itself (or essendum) is actus actuum, the act of acts; i.e. Aquinas denies any tie or bond to the predicative attributiveness of our language, agrees in effect with Hegel that all particular predications falsify.[16] For Nicholas of Cusa God both is and is not.

So it is only on the surface that Aquinas treats being as a quasi-essence, identifying it indeed with a spurious divine essence. He goes on from there though to say that being is God´s proper effect, a view one can suspect either of vacuity (since Hegel shows that being is a first formality of thought, of thinking, the value of a variable in a later language) or of being an indirect way of stating that God is a creator and properly too, i.e. of necessity, at least "moral" necessity.

The Buddhist D. Suzuki could not understand why God had to create the world. This prevented him from becoming a Christian, he tells us.[17] Yet Scripture insists we have our being in God, i.e. there is no "ontological discontinuity" as imagined in popular religion, a view ultimately able, we have shown, to accommodate the supposed atheism of a McTaggart. The Absolute, says Hegel, is necessarily differentiated. This then must be taken as the meaning of creation, the processio ad extra

[16] Cf. *Encycl.* 168f.
[17] D.T. Suzuki, *The Field of Zen*, Harper & Row, New York 1969, p.. 2-3.

analogous to the processio ad intra of the Word and somehow itself in that Word since there is no outside (extra) of God and nothing extra even in the English sense of that term. This is the meaning of the tag that creation brings more beings but not more being, which otherwise would be an unintelligible paradox, one of the things one "must say". In passing we may observe that the processio ad intra concept might be applied to the spirits, ourselves, of McTaggart´s Absolute, the unity with the whole which each one has then being a passing into the others as quodammodo omnia, or even omnes, each as all or all as each. *Sumit unus sumit mille*, "members one of another".

If, however, thought is primal then both being and death are overcome at one stroke. Being is a divine or human thought like any other, even thought´s first formality. God himself, the actually infinite, is his own thought of himself, thus indeed causa sui, also for Aristotle. There is nothing "proper" about being apart from this formal quality which predicative identification exemplifies. We ourselves are also divine thoughts (or maybe as well thoughts of one another) and thus one with the divine essence, i.e. with the Absolute (having the unity with all within us). This gives us a certain necessity and hence security, to know this. The element of formality, as the Absolute's necessary differentiation (it is otherwise abstract merely), recalls Aquinas's comparison of the angelic hierarchy with the number series, although the differentiation envisaged here is not hierarchic. One might recall Bentham's "Each to count for one and none for more than one", though it is more true to say, we have found, each to count for all and none for less than all, the burden of also Kant's ethics after all. As necessary our being acquires a formal, ideational aspect, superior to time and space.

What we have been putting forward, prior to any more specific claims, is that all is the divine thinking. This though has led us to at least speculate that this that is called divine, as personal, unitary and separate or transcendent, is itself the thinking which is thought, a thinking of just this thinking at once identical with each of its thoughts. The unity binding them is not applied compositely from outside but is in each one of them (as any divine idea, on the older version, was identical with the divine essence). We might perhaps say then that it is at once personal or impersonal, reminiscent of that mythical being with a myriad eyes, ourselves, or simply of the human mind, *quodammodo omnia*, the ultimate in quantum-computers, one might be tempted to say.

Yet nothing is worth saying or making unless it expresses and is the whole. A symphony, a painting, these (at their best) are pure types of this .

As God alone is, so each idea, as identical with God and only so, is. Yet although we abstract or form a general idea of existence it is not self-evident that God or the Absolute has or still less is this idea, though he or it must have the idea of us forming the idea, which thus, it too, becomes the whole, himself. For thus too the Absolute, as actively knowing and being all things, must cause us to do it, inasmuch as we find ourselves so.

The Absolute or God thinks his own act of existence (which is not the abstracted idea of existence but unique), since he is. Nothing else thus exists, yet everything else exists in just this way, in the Absolute in unity. God thinks himself. This, these, are the divine processions, without limit, ever new as at a first moment, thus ever the same, a series active at all points as returning upon itself, from which it went out in order, precisely, to be.

As for us, we exist as thus thought. No special idea of existence is needed. That I exist means that God thinks me or I think God indifferently. I know as I am known. The "sheen" of being, even sensuous qualities, the sparkle of wit, is the infinity of the thinking, itself just therefore as wordless or "absolute" music.

The caesura between existence and essence is thus unnecessary, indeed false. Aquinas was thus far right to make of existence an essence (in God, though one can also say he made there of essence an existence) and the existentialists, though criticized on this point by Gilson in his *On Being and Some Philosophers*, were thus in continuity with him. Essence only occurs as thought and as divine thought, which thinks only itself (i.e. is not intentional), it already is one absolute notion. This thought is the divine being or life, its act is *actus purus* solely, not substantial, not therefore substance in a rational nature (the old definition of personality). So this thought is not other than "he". There is not some other principle. But God is not thus reduced to "creation". The latter is rather taken up into the Absolute where alone it is true (Hegel calls this "acosmism", the opposite of pantheism[18]). The Absolute exceeds or transcends the parts only or precisely in being that whole with which each of them is identical, it in them and they in it, as "contractions" (Nicholas of Cusa).

We can then go on to ask whether all divine thoughts are us persons or spirits, though we have noted that in being a spirit I might exceed my present conception of my individuality, e.g. I might be one with what I have supposed another person, in the past or future or simultaneously with me indifferently, since time does not signify. Anything other than such spirits would be our own thoughts as misperceptions and known only thus

[18] *Encycl*.50.

within the Absolute, i.e. in one act with his knowledge of the spirits or, we could rather say, in the absoluteness which is the unitary transparency of the totality of the spirits, who are spirit, to themselves.

Nothing we have said here contradicts the Thomist-Aristotelian analysis of created reality as apprehended by us, such as, in particular, the dictum that there is no class of the things which are, making of being an analogous concept, even, according to Gilson, a conceptio of something unconceptualizable (though Geach ridicules this as "self-mate"). Thus we find the Hegelian McTaggart presenting, in Chapter Two of *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, an exact replica of Aquinas´s doctrine of cognition in S.T. I 85 2, whereby what is known, what is "in" the mind, is the thing (*res*) itself and not its representation. Hence we claim that absolute idealism fulfils Thomism. The same seeming paradox of knowledge, as "having the other as other", is determinative for both systems, even after the intentional and the real have been identified.

We have in fact no warrant for attributing thought to God, but only for not denying to him the perfection belonging, in our experience, to thought. The divine act is very likely far beyond anything we call thought. The same applies to the Absolute as traced by dialectic. The category called cognition cannot be shown to be the same as our idea of consciousness, though this is the one reality we know which fulfils the specifications of this unity, of the parts with the whole for example, as found in this category.

The dividing of spirit into knowledge and will falls short of the Absolute. What we call the divine idea of red, for example, would really be a moment in the one act which is himself. Yet this act, we are suggesting, is differentiated. Its differentiation has no meaning but the unity and the unity has no meaning but the differentiations. The harmony is only produced in cognition, in a self-consciousness embracing in its inmost the others as others.

> The absolute must be differentiated into persons because no other differentiations have vitality to stand against a perfect unity, and because a unity which was not differentiated would not exist.[19]

As Thomas concludes, quoting Augustine, *ipsae personae sunt relationes* in the perfect unity and harmony which is God. McTaggart, when taking an example for his system, actually considers just three persons A, B and C.[20]

---

[19] McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Cosmology* 18.
[20] Ibid., 15.

Contraries, again, remain incompatible also for the dialectic, though each divine idea is identical with the divine essence (as Aquinas has it), each person one with, "in" the others, the All, as *atman*. For my thought to approach the Absolute it is defined in its inmost as seeking, as cognition and willing are one, the latter the inclination of the former, the former that which inclines and only that. It must perpetually surmount itself, surmount the subject-object schema, in the unity in equality we call love. To that extent, i.e. absolutely, it leaves the mode we call thought, now seen as itself an abstraction, the penultimate category, for music and ultra-music. This, the Idea indeed, falls upon no ear. The laugh of the Buddha might be the closest approach, or the eucharist.

This eucharist is bypassed by many Christian groups, above all in its aspect, perhaps adventitious, of a rite. What indeed has philosophy to do with rites? Yet as idea it remains central in, for example, the four Gospels. "He that eats me shall live because of me", a saying that might be atributed to any element of nourishment, could it but speak. The eucharist is at once a celebration (an idea hardly divorcible from thanksgiving), of and by what is seen as the whole community present locally or, we saw, ultimately, in each person (as the "private mass" witnessed, though much more our reflections in these pages up to now). The infinite is in the finite, while by one and the same leap of conception, it is, in the Catholic or Orthodox traditions, a or the "sacrifice", "one, whole, full, perfect and sufficient". Each celebration, namely, is that, whether by representation, actual participation or identification with the death, in history and mystically viewed as one, of the other of the Absolute itself. This is identified, again, with the perpetual reditus to unity within each one of us as indeed constituting us.

The eucharist, this action or event become rite, is also, even in Lutheranism, called a sacrament (*sacramentum*). Indeed the claim there is that just as a sacrament it cannot be bearer of what is taken by others as the miracle and not merely the mystery of trans-substantiation (Council of Trent, following Aquinas), this being explicit at least since the ninth century and as against the doubts of Berengar and others. One can note here, all the same, a difference between the Frankish magical materialism as subsoil and the thought and words of Augustine on this question. Thus the Anglican Articles claim that this doctrine "overthroweth the nature of a sacrament", i.e. it is no longer a sign, the bread and wine in particular, if they go over to being what they should signify. Against this Vonier and others counter that God can cause a sign to be what it signifies, somewhat against the nature of a sign as this might otherwise seem. Indded in the dialectic as we outline it here, where each is all, there seems no particular

difficulty with this, since it would thus far be no longer miraculous but rather a "moral" or natural state of affairs.[21] Within naive realism, however, such a perspective can only be taken as a miracle, i.e. as a total exception, rather than as the culmination and perfection of life finding embodiment "in the fullness of time" in the absolute religion, as Hegel saw Christianity as being.

In this way Jesus, as sign and sacrament of God, Father, is himself God. "He that has seen me has seen the Father." From this, though, one might conclude that the Father both is and is not. This is but one of a whole series of identifications in difference in Christian doctrine as based upon the Gospels and what they attempt to recount. Identity in difference though is the watchword of the dialectic, thus evidencing those deeply Christian roots suspiciously noted by Popper.

This "causing something to be" something, then, seems in a kind of tension with faith or philosophy as "seeing something as", though a thing is what it is seen as, i.e. if it is seen. We go deep here. We might consider other notions seeming to hover somewhere between sign and thing signified, such as that of a vocation, particularly in the religious sphere, to this or that. Does God then cause this sign, which the sense of vocation is often taken as, to be what it signifies, viz. an actual vocation or summoning? Or does this notion just give carte blanche to the superego, opening the young person to manipulation through the institutions he respects?

Again, were the ancient Israelites chosen and summoned, or did they just decide so to regard themselves, freeing themselves from idolatry to take those intelligent if "tricksy" initiatives that won them so many battles? How far, more to the point, are we considering alternatives here? Divine vocation, but even just the sense of it, confers a freedom and creativity in action (for good or ill), such as we call prophetic. That one acts well under such a conviction is thus far no proof that one did not purely of oneself assume the prophetic role. Praemotio physica anyhow already undercuts the either-or, bestowing freedom in proportion to its immediacy. "It is not you but God who worketh in you", the whole in the part. Scruples about speaking of parts will not affect the main point here, God will be wholly present and operative even in what might be only his dreams or the veils in which he as it were hides himself. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me", says the man when himself first ready to act. Grace is freedom, hence autonomy. It could be that Augustine saw less deeply than Pelagius, though maybe choosing his words more carefully. So Aquinas

[21] Abbot Anscar Vonier O.S.B., *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, 1925.

says simply that God, and a fortiori grace, makes a man's acts his own, *i.e.* free.

Consider, not the Incarnation precisely, but the appearance of a man claiming to be the Messiah, he that should come, the anointed one. What does it mean that, in the account, he did not answer the Baptist's query on this score in the direct affirmative? “Blessed is he that does not lose confidence in me.” It might well mean, and be intended to mean, that he himself felt an identity with his free action, sufficient to place him above any tradition as to how he ought to behave or see himself. He, the man, was not another's puppet, but supremely autonomous and creative. “Believe me for the very works' sake.” Now though that he has succeeded in his mission we others explain him as God incarnate in the sense of not being a human person in the old terminology. His human nature is “assumed”, surely an utterly crass metaphor. I am myself and not another, as is any “I”, even though, in the Hegelian philosophy, identity in difference is allowed for.

Yet what we have here, if we would accept the claim, is a man who is God. There is and could be no “assumption” of human nature, as by a being previously not human.[22] Not only so, but there could be other men and women who are God, Aquinas allows. He insists that they would be the same divine “person”, but they would clearly be different human beings, identity in difference again.[23] They might, that is to say, meet on the street, or one might be born as the other dies, precisely as we have envisaged in the case of “ordinary” incarnations answering to a world of eternal spirits. The eucharistic bread both is and is not Christ, who both is and is not the uniquely transcendent or, rather, this we call Christ is maybe present, “in”, one with, many or all human or rational (cognitively conscious in their general capacity) beings. We must remember here though, just here, that the dialectic demonstrates what the infinite or Absolute must be. It does not precisely demonstrate the reality, or rather the real existence (it is certainly a reality, and somehow, as absolute, super-existent) of this infinite, except in so far as it might include confirmation of an “ontological argument”. Nothing else would serve. On the other hand it might be claimed to raise our minds above the unreflected pre-eminence, for us, of existence, as some Buddhist thinkers say we were never born. We may leave the question open for, in Paul's words, “Death, where is thy sting? Where, grave, thy victory?” For certainly we do die, on

[22] Cf. Herbert McCabe O.P. on this topic in his *God Matters*.
[23] *Summa theol*. IIIa, 7 ad 2.

the day we were born, says Hegel, who certainly indicates his belief in immortality nonetheless.

The clumsiness of the talk of assumption points to the superiority of Hegel's interpretation, according to which the man who is God appears "in the fullness of time", and hence any such man. The thing happens, not perhaps of itself, but as of a piece with anything else, like the priest's words of consecration. Indeed it is striking, in view of the history, that the latest Roman catechism patently avoids identifying a moment in the service of celebration at which Christ becomes really or, as they say, "sacramentally" present, though they affirm this presence in the traditional way.

The difference is that this appearance, of the God-man, is thus seen as necessary, part of things generally, not contingent, though not less free for that moral necessity again, also recognized by Aquinas.[24] All of creation, its differentiation, is thought as one, in an instant, by infinity.

Yet it does seem, to recur, that any of us might take this role upon himself or herself. In scripture one is supposed to be debarred by being "sinful", which is merged confusedly with an ontological difference between creature-person and Trinitarian person. Only he could atone for sin and he would not need to, runs the argument, sin being made the cause of death. Yet in the end, dialectically, the atoner is "made sin for us", a curse even. Still, if we hold to our first statement here, we would be opting, in Indian terms, for the true or absolute self, *atman*, as against the false or empirical self. This in fact is what Christians try to do, at full strength each one an Atlas, aspiring to "fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ". "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me", that most suggestive of prepositions again. All these things would follow from our first supposition, of Jesus adopting his own stance, as he surely did, the agony of Gethsemane notwithstanding.

Vocation, the Jews, Jesus… yet as indicated above we take as our focal example the eucharist and the sacramental conception in general. We find that anything whatever may be viewed sacramentally, as sign of that in which it participates, as each divine idea participates in infinite Mind to the point of identity with it.

We are saying, in effect, that we can create our reality by choosing to see or by expecting things to be in a certain way, though of course not all prophecies are self-fulfilling, as the Marxists have learned. Hence they cancelled their expectations. One has, that is, to back not as such the "right" horse, but an animal in which one can have prudent confidence. Of

[24] IIa-IIae 58, 3.

course we will still then say an animal of the right kind, as there is of course a right way of doing philosophy if the whole project is not to collapse. Not much hangs on this since it remains within the province of absolute freedom to "establish" rightness, as can only appear afterwards. This in fact is the mystique, the distinguishing character, just of revolution, as it is of the leaps of the dialectic. The prophet needs a certain connaturality with his subsequent success, a non-analysable extra sense correctly specified in theology as a gift.

So a man, feeling his divinity, can choose to make of a communal mean a representation of a sacrifice, his own. His followers, similarly, can choose to make of the elements of that meal what he, taken literally, declared them to be, himself. He, after all, made of his own death, by choice, as we are told, something in the nature of a sacrifice, bringing out thereby the ethical character to which sacrificial ritual and theology had ever been impotently striving. Just therefore, though, his death was supremely itself and, as such, something other than the supreme member merely in the class of sacrifices. In a sense it overthrew all sacrifice if sacrifice means setting something apart for the deity. He aimed rather to draw all men to himself, so as to make of them a unity, without separation.

Given that he was the one to come, in the fullness of time, then he would indeed be able to determine bread and wine thus offered, blessed or set forth, to be himself. No one else would anyhow think of doing that, or hardly. The ambiguity of "offered, blessed or set forth" is deliberate, this *sacramentum*, supreme among signs maybe, not requiring to be combined within the parameters of ancient ritual sacrifice while at the same time fulfilling as overflowing whatever legitimate aspirations such sacrifice expressed.

*

The texts of St. Thomas Aquinas on the sacraments and the eucharist in particular (in the Third Part of the *Summa theologica*), so central for the decrees of the Council of Trent on the issue, do not today of themselves inspire full confidence in what is still the official Catholic position on these matters. However that may be, they offer a convenient locus for raising certain philosophical questions.

Thus the whole sacramental stance, as here and usually presented, depends upon an opposition as between things sensible and things spiritual. In Hegelian terms these would find place within the category of life, of which the "notion and reality do not thoroughly correspond to each

other"[25], not within that of cognition, volition or, finally, the Absolute Idea which is ultimate reality and "a systematic totality" which, however, "lets" life, "the immediate idea, as its reflected image, go forth freely as Nature."

So sacraments, one says, suit man's nature in so far as man comes to spiritual things through sensible or material things as symbolising them. The whole world, inclusive of words, consists of signs. Sacraments, that is, are presented as a harmonisation of an aboriginal dualism, where "as soul, the notion is realised in a body", i.e. in "externality… its parts lying out of one another," needing to be conveyed "back into subjectivity". Life is finite, the living thing mortal.

When considering the divine ideas we inclined to thinking that abstract ideas were ideas formed exclusively by human beings, abstraction being the device evolved for making our environment intelligible. As eternal spirits, that is, we would not abstract. By environment in this context a material extended environment is generally meant, materiality corresponding to unintelligibility while immateriality is "the root of cognition". In Thomism it is not fully explicit that such an unintelligibility cannot be finally real. It is supposed to be "created" though the finer minds will stress that most of even created reality is spiritual or angelic, wishing merely to reduce the difficulty of this contradiction. But once see through the veil of matter and we ourselves stand there in place of the angels (this will then be called "angelism" by those missing the logic of it).

Yet in many places Thomas stresses, with us, that there is perfect divine and therefore spiritual knowledge of individuals, even if we as individuals only grasp universal ideas, sense-cognition apart. The remedy here would be to present sense-cognition as a mode of the spiritual, quaedam ratio says St. Thomas. Yet such knowledge of a sensible thing cannot, by being reckoned spiritual qua knowledge, be offset against sensible things as itself a thing, *ens rationis*, to be somehow known, e.g. through a sacrament. Thus we arrived at the position that the things which we see and experience are the divine thoughts, or the closest anything comes in divinity to being a thought. Thus insofar as we each unite with the atman, the All or Absolute, then they are our thoughts too, seen in a harmony beyond "types and shadows". If, however, such a non-intentional thought be judged more contradictory than analogous then we simply need to improve the terminology. Things are within, "at home" with, our subjectivity, we are "in" the whole, the absolute, in a perfect eternal union realised objectively, yet to be ever more realised subjectively.

[25] G.W.F. Hegel, *Encycl.*, Logic 216.

Meanwhile we have the position that all sensible things, "creatures", are signs of something sacred[26] and therefore properly (*proprie*) sacraments, although not in the sense in which we are now speaking[27], though this appears to contradict or take back the more general position (as so often in Aquinas). Thomas's orthodoxy places him in a tight spot here. Sacraments, as a name for signs of invisible divinity generally are such for knowing things in themselves, but not for "sanctifying" us, the narrower sense he wants now to use the term for. This though divorces progress in knowledge of God from progres in becoming holy, morally better, deiform and so on. Yet the holy man was always one who knows God.

So he is hard put to it to explain why we need the sacraments of the Church, apart at least from the sin-story and the Church as bringing remedy for this. They signify divine qualities not as in themselves holy but as bringing salvation to us. Thus when considering the determinate legislated character of Christian sacraments he shows[28] full appreciation of how this appears to constrain (*arctare*) our freedom as spiritual sons and daughters, we might say, but only to come down tight against any further questioning of the matter, comparing the "institution" of sacraments to the particular divine choices of imagery in scripture, "determined by the judgment of the Holy Spirit".

As viewed today though this is to reason in a circle. The authors of the Biblical books were themselves free in their choice of imagery, even given that their texts were later canonized as "inspired". Should not then we be free too? Besides, it is only the eucharist which can be recognized as in some sense "instituted" by Jesus, by Christ. Even baptism was something found in existence in his lifetime and the "water and the spirit" text appealed to by Aquinas could clearly not have been said by him while living. It would be more characteristic of Thales, maybe. What authority the early Christian community had to impose these things with such dreadful sanctions (fate of unbaptized infants), no doubt responding, one might almost say idolatrously (Augustine), to such a text or to the Pauline baptism theology, is under constant discussion today. Our point is that the position arises out of an initial dualism not too well compatible with absolute idealism, for example, and never thematized in a critical examination of the ontology of "things visible and invisible". The interpretation of the eucharist was not likely to remain unaffected by this.

Thus the classing of the eucharist as one in a row of such sacraments is by no means a self-evident move. It leads to an explication of this

[26] *Sacrum*, S.T. IIIa 60, 2, *objectio* 1.
[27] *Ibid., ad* 1
[28] IIIa 60, 5.