

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Philosophy and Philosophizing in Theology*

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Father Gerald McCool, S.J., personifies both in his life and in his work the value and importance of philosophy and philosophizing in theology. His investigation into the question of method in nineteenth-century Catholic theology,<sup>1</sup> his study of the evolution of Thomism from a unitary to a differentiated school of thought,<sup>2</sup> and the extensive work he has done on the theology of Karl Rahner,<sup>3</sup> one of the most philosophical of contemporary theologians, all attest to his appreciation of and his own contribution to the philosophical moment in theology. At a time when so many were declaring the death of metaphysics and celebrating its demise, Gerald McCool was one of those whose thought helped to keep the discipline alive and well. Both Catholic philosophy and Catholic theology in the twentieth century, as well as their harmonious interaction and collaboration in philosophical theology, stand greatly in his debt.

It is the intention of this essay written in his honor to indicate some of the important points, chosen somewhat at random, at which Catholic theology in this century would be the poorer without the benefit of philosophical reflection. The first of those points lies in the domain of epistemology and would show how a sound philosophy of knowledge can serve to safeguard theology against an inherent tendency to try to encompass God within the confines of human concepts and human language. The second point is also an epistemological issue and tries to show the value

for theology of the philosophical notion of knowledge by connaturality, as used by Thomas Aquinas. The third and final point lies within the domain of ontology and suggests that a dialectical and symbolic notion of being can be effective in overcoming the many dualisms which can distort theology's talk of God and the world.

### Knowledge of God

Since the Christian revelation upon which theology reflects concerns not the eternal and necessary nature of God in God's own divine self, but the gratuitous relationship with the world and with history into which God has freely entered — that is to say, since Christian revelation concerns not God's essence but God's freedom — Christian theology requires a way of knowing God in which God can be known not in isolation, but precisely in this freely chosen relationship to the world and to history. In other words, since Christian theology is not about *what* God is in God's own self, but about *who* God is in relationship to us, revealed knowledge of God must be understood as a knowledge of this relationship. Revelation and faith precede reason and philosophy in the sense that it is the former that reveals who God is in a Christian context and thereby determines how God must be known in this context: God must be known not in isolation nor as separate from the world, but as freely involved in and bound up with it.

This means that from the viewpoint of Christian theology, knowledge of God and knowledge of the world, though distinct to be sure, as the realities known are themselves distinct, are not two separate knowledges but are necessarily and intrinsically interrelated as the realities themselves are intrinsically interrelated. Because of the sovereign freedom of God's disposition of creation, there is no such thing as "pure" human nature unrelated in grace to God, nor "pure" divine nature unrelated in grace to humankind. From this Christian viewpoint, all knowledge of God or all theology is also knowledge of the world and of humankind; that is, all theology is also cosmology and anthropology, and all cosmology and anthropology is also theology.

But the integration of the two distinct poles in this divine/human relationship must be such that, in the first place, the two are never identified as they are in any of the many forms of pantheism, but secondly and just as importantly, neither are they ever separated as they are in deism and some forms of Christian theism.<sup>4</sup> To accomplish this, we must begin with the incarnational Christology (and the incarnational epistemology implied therein) elaborated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, when it spoke of the unity in difference or the differentiated unity of divinity and humanity in Jesus, and we must elaborate both the anthropological and the cosmological implications of this Christological affirmation.<sup>5</sup> Christology thereby becomes the paradigm and prime analogate (it is only an analogy, of course) for understanding from a Christian perspective the divine/human relationship as such: God and the world are never identical, but neither are they ever separate.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, to do justice to both realities, the distinction between the divine and the human must be understood as qualitative, not quantitative. In a quantitative understanding, we predicate of God in an unlimited way what we predicate of ourselves in a limited way: for example, our power is limited, but God is omnipotent; likewise, our knowledge is limited, but God is omniscient; we are finite beings, but God is an infinite being. We arrive at the attributes of God by “stretching” our finite concepts to an infinite degree. It is just this quantitative understanding that opens the way to seeing divine agency and human agency, for example, as alternatives or competitors, so that the more that is ascribed to the one, the less can be ascribed to the other. But this “more and less” is impossible when the divine and the human are understood as incommensurate and incommensurable because the distinction between them is qualitative, not quantitative. When the distinction is understood as qualitative, God can never be understood just as one being existing among other beings, however supreme, nor just as one agent acting among other agents, however omnipotent, nor known simply as one object among other objects, however infinite, and a qualitative distinction precludes any possibility of God’s ever being conceived as an alternative to or in competition with finite realities.

*Unthematic Knowledge of God*

One epistemology that satisfies both the norms established by the incarnational vision of Christian revelation for the knowledge of God — first, that God be known not as a separate “object,” but in God’s freely chosen relationship to the world, and second, that God be known in this relationship precisely as qualitatively, not quantitatively different from the world — is the epistemology associated with the contemporary school of philosophy and theology known as “transcendental Thomism” as this interpretation of Aquinas has been employed in theology by Karl Rahner.<sup>7</sup> It is called “Thomism” because it remains faithful to the central insights of Thomas Aquinas and his objective realism.<sup>8</sup> But it is called “transcendental Thomism” to distinguish it from the more scholastic forms of Thomism because it tries to incorporate into its interpretation of Aquinas and his objective realism the later insights of transcendental philosophy “from Kant to Heidegger,” as Rahner says, insights into the active role played by the subjectivity of the knower in all of our objective knowledge.<sup>9</sup> It does this not in eclectic fashion, taking this from the one and that from the other, but rather by reading each tradition through the eyes of the other and thereby allowing the two to cross-fertilize each other and to be a source of mutual enrichment.

As practiced by Rahner, transcendental Thomism satisfies the two norms mentioned above because, first, it insists that in our original and primary knowledge of God, God is not known as an object separate from the world, for this original and primary knowledge of God takes place as a dimension within our knowledge of the world; and second, in this multidimensional knowledge, the qualitative difference between God and the world is captured from the very outset because this further dimension is experienced precisely as qualitatively different from our knowledge of the world. For in all of our encounters in and with the world, no matter who or what the object of our knowledge might be, the knowing subject simultaneously, although in an unthematic way, knows itself as reaching beyond the immediate object of its knowledge to what lies ever beyond it.<sup>10</sup> Our reach always exceeds our grasp no matter how often or how much we grasp, and in this

further reaching we always and necessarily experience, however silently and unthematically, what is and will always remain by its very nature forever beyond our grasp.

Moreover, and this is the crucial point, our experience of this "beyond" is not like knowing another, second object, but is qualitatively different from our experience of an object that we can grasp and comprehend. Indeed, we experience it rather as grasping us, as drawing and attracting us in the experience of awe and wonder that is the source of all longing and searching and the source of all knowledge. It is not by stretching concepts as described earlier that we attain to a knowledge of God, but by "stretching" ourselves in this reaching out and being drawn beyond the confines of the finite.

On the other hand and of equal importance, it is always and only in our encounter with the finite that this movement of transcendence takes place, so that our knowledge of God is always and in every instance mediated by our knowledge of the world. Transcendence is not a leap out of the world into a separate realm that is the domain of God: it is a step-by-step movement in and through the world. In the epistemology of transcendental Thomism, then, every act of knowledge includes all of these qualitatively different dimensions within the single act of knowledge. The same multidimensionality is also true of our interaction with the world in acts of freedom and love.

This epistemological analysis of the pluriform structure of knowledge gives rise to four features that would characterize theology in the light of this philosophical reflection. First, it enables our knowledge of this "beyond," this horizon which we cannot grasp or comprehend but which grasps us, and which faith and theology are going to call the mystery which we name God, to be integrated into our knowledge of the world. For it sees the knowledge of God as a necessary component in all of our encounters with finite realities. Second, it sees this unthematic knowledge of God as qualitatively different from our knowledge of the world, so that God is known from the outset as qualitatively different from the world, and not as one univocal object among others in our knowledge of the world. Third, this qualitative difference is constituted by the fact that our primary

experience of God is precisely of what cannot be grasped or comprehended, so that God is experienced from the very outset as incomprehensible and as mystery. Finally, this experience of God as mystery takes place always and only as a moment within our knowledge of the world and is always mediated by our knowledge of the world.

What is of special importance for theology in this philosophical reflection on the pluriform structure of knowledge is that it enables us to follow the lead of the Council of Chalcedon in understanding God and the world in a non-pantheistic way as always distinct and always qualitatively different, but also as never separate and never in isolation from each other after the fashion of deistic forms of theism. This must be so because our original and primary knowledge of God is always integrated within and always mediated by our knowledge of the world. Moreover, that fact that we do not know God in "test-tube purity," but always as mediated by the world or, as Paul puts it, "through a glass darkly" (1 Cor 13:12), throws light on the traditional teaching on the highly analogous nature of all our knowledge of God.<sup>11</sup>

### *Thematic Knowledge of God*

The phrase "original and primary knowledge of God" was just used to distinguish this from subsequent knowledge which is the result of reflecting on, conceptualizing, and articulating the original experiential knowledge. In this process, our knowledge of God is objectified as it must be if it is to be brought to expression and communication, and if the reality of God is to be distinguished explicitly from the reality of the world. But with this distinction comes the possibility and the danger of separation: our objectifications of God can be mistakenly identified with God, and then God becomes one object among other objects, one being among other beings, and different from other beings quantitatively rather than qualitatively as God is in truth and as is grasped in the original experience.<sup>12</sup> From this objectification and separation can come the dualistic understanding of God and the world that lies at the heart of a great variety of dualisms that can influence theological thinking: the dualism between the natural and super-

natural orders, between the history of salvation and the history of the world and humankind, and between the sacred and the secular.<sup>13</sup> Each of these dualistic variations on the same theme suffers from the same lack of integration called for by the incarnational vision of Chalcedon, a theological vision which never identifies, but also never separates God and the world. Good theology, then, is always dependent on the quality of the philosophical reflection that accompanies it, and an incarnational vision of God and the world requires an epistemology that can really integrate the two without distorting the reality of either.

### *Why Jesus?*

At this point, a legitimate question can and, indeed, should arise which can help clarify the proper role of philosophy and philosophizing within theology. If all human knowledge reaches beyond its immediate grasp to touch and be touched by the horizon of mystery within which we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), that horizon which at least unthematically is always present to us and which we call God, then why is it necessary and why was it necessary, as Christian faith maintains, for Jesus to appear as the presence and the revelation of God for humankind? It can seem that philosophy is not only able to provide valuable insights for the benefit of theological reflection but can even render faith and theology altogether superfluous and unnecessary, and philosophizing in theology becomes a not very subtle form of rationalism.

Jesus is necessary for us from a Christian point of view because it is precisely our Christian faith, rooted in and derived from Jesus, that prompts us to call this mystery God and that allows us to call this God “Abba.” Our philosophical analysis of the structure of human knowledge can reveal to us the possibility of knowing God should God so choose, but only God can reveal who God actually is and has freely chosen to be in relationship to us. From the viewpoint of Christian faith, it is precisely in Jesus of Nazareth that this relationship in all its fullness has actually, freely, and contingently happened historically, and in this historical event has been revealed to us. No amount of philosophy can

render the facticity of that event, and therein its revelation, superfluous and unnecessary.

Indeed, so far from rendering the historical revelation in Jesus superfluous, what philosophical reflection on the structure of human knowledge is able to show is that what scripture and Christian faith maintain actually happened in Jesus really does lie within the realm of human possibilities as God has created them precisely for the incarnation of God's own life and being, and therefore it cannot simply be dismissed as an incredible piece of ancient and obsolete mythology. But we cannot deduce from the fact that God has created human beings with the capacity to hear and respond to God's word either whether God has spoken or what God has said. Those answers lie in the domain not of reason, but of actual history, and for Christians they lie in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. The logic of faith always moves from actuality to possibility, not in the reverse direction, and it is the actual event that reveals its possibility. Karl Rahner often used the analogy of music to clarify this logic. Once Beethoven has actually created his music, one knows that what he has created lies within the possibilities of music, but the music of Beethoven could never be deduced from these possibilities.

### Knowledge by Connaturality

The second point at which we want to see how theology can benefit from sound philosophical reflection is the elaboration of the notion of connatural knowledge as this term was used by Thomas Aquinas. It is of particular value in theology's attempt to solve some of the problems that have arisen for our traditional understanding of the faith by new initiatives taken by the Second Vatican Council. One of these new initiatives and one of these consequent problems is most apparent in the much more positive and optimistic view taken by the Council on the question of salvation outside the Christian church. We will consider just one of the several texts in which this new view comes to expression. After speaking of the share which all Christians have in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* continues: "For,

since Christ died for all people, and since the ultimate vocation of all people is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery."<sup>14</sup> This positive and optimistic assessment stands in stark contrast to an earlier and now disavowed dictum: "There is no salvation outside the church."

But it also brings with it a new set of problems for theology, problems at which the Council itself hints. In affirming not only the universal possibility of salvation but also the Christic nature of this salvation, the Council acknowledged in the phrase "in a manner known only to God" that this universalism really did not fit into the church's theology that was current at the time. The theories that were then current about revelation and faith were simply inadequate to explain the "manner" in which this association with Jesus takes place, and so they cannot really explain "why Jesus?" is necessary for non-Christians. But then they cannot really explain "why Jesus?" is necessary for Christians either, for what the Council wants to affirm is that both groups have the very same salvific relationship to Jesus. Without intending to, of course, the Council's laudable desire to see the world of grace extending beyond its own borders raises many questions about the nature of faith and the nature of this "association" with the paschal mystery of Jesus that call for serious philosophical reflection.

The new situation created for theology by the Council requires a new hypothesis which, if it is to throw light on how non-Christians can be related to Jesus and his paschal mystery, would also have to apply to Christians, for the Council's affirmation of faith and hope is that both groups somehow ("in a manner known only to God") enjoy the same salvific relationship to Jesus. Two factors combine to provide us with a way forward towards a possible and perhaps plausible hypothesis. The first is familiar from our earlier discussion of the multidimensional structure of knowledge and is suggested by the fact that the problem we face has to do with knowledge: how can people who do not know Jesus and perhaps have never heard of him be thought to be associated with him and to be saved through this

association? Knowledge is understood here in the first instance as knowing Jesus in the sense of knowing an object; that is, being familiar with him from having read the scriptures or having heard about him from someone's preaching or teaching. Our earlier reflections about knowledge are of value here insofar as they have shown that not all of our human knowing is knowing something as an object. We do not know God as an object, for example, nor do we know ourselves in the first instance as objects. This qualitatively different kind of knowledge opens the possibility that there can be a real relationship to Jesus and a real knowledge of him that can and must be understood as something quite different from knowing an object.

What this might be like is hinted at in the word that the Council has happily chosen to characterize the relationship of the non-Christian to Jesus, and this brings us to our second factor. The Council spoke of the possibility of the non-Christian's being "associated" with the paschal mystery of Jesus. A kind of association with Jesus is quite conceivable if a person is living out in his or her own life the very same mystery of dying and rising that constitutes what is meant by the paschal mystery of Jesus. Association in this sense is possible even if the person has never heard of Jesus and therefore has no knowledge of Jesus in the usual sense of knowing an object. But this association brings a profounder kind of knowledge: namely, a knowledge by "connaturality," which comes through sharing in the experience of Jesus. This term is found in Aquinas in a variety of contexts which we will consider briefly. In all of these contexts, "connaturality" points to a certain relationship of union, affinity or likeness.

For example, in his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas contrasts the process of arriving at a correct judgment by the use of reason with arriving at the very same correct judgment because of a "certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge." The chaste person, for example, knows "by a kind of connaturality" what is the chaste and moral thing to do.<sup>15</sup> Their chaste character gives them a familiarity with and a knowledge of chastity "from the inside," as it were, which enables them to recognize the chaste thing when they see it. In another context, also in the *Summa*, Aquinas says that "love is a certain union or connaturality of the

lover with the beloved."<sup>16</sup> Here the emphasis is on oneness that binds the two together and makes them in a certain sense one. Finally, when speaking of the attractive power of the good, Aquinas says that good causes "a certain aptitude or inclination or connaturality in respect of the good."<sup>17</sup> In all three instances, the term "connaturality" points to a commonality or union or likeness in being between two things that can be the source of familiarity with and a knowledge of one by the other.

However unfamiliar the term "connaturality" itself might be, it points to something quite familiar to us in ordinary life. There is a kind of knowledge of Jesus' agony in the garden, for example, which cannot be acquired by reading the scriptural accounts of the event nor by hearing sermons about it, and much less by learned exegetical analysis of the texts. It can be had only by one who actually and freely endures one's own agony in the garden just as Jesus endured his, for one is thereby related to reality just as Jesus himself was. This "association" with Jesus through association with his life and experience forges an existential likeness to Jesus, and it is from this likeness that there comes a knowledge of him that can be antecedent to and is not dependent on Jesus being an object of knowledge in the usual sense. It is precisely this association with Jesus and the resulting knowledge of him by connaturality that enables the knower to "recognize" Jesus whenever his name is mentioned or his story told, for one can recognize only what one in some way and in some sense already knows. On this profound level of existential knowledge by connaturality, some non-Christians can even know Jesus much better than some Christians know him.

### *The Faith of Jesus*

These two factors, then, first, an awareness of the qualitatively different ways we are related to reality in knowledge and, second, that particular way we have called, following our Catholic tradition, knowledge by connaturality combine to provide us with our hypothesis: what is of salvific significance for the non-Christian is not faith in Jesus in the sense of knowing and assenting to an objective content of knowledge about him,

whether this content be comprised of scriptural titles or later dogmatic assertions. Rather, what is of salvific importance is the faith *of* Jesus; that is, the process whereby one lives in one's own life the faith that Jesus himself lived and through this actual association with him in real life comes to know him by connaturality. But if this is true of people who are not Christians, then it must also be true of Christians. Christians must acquire their real and salvific knowledge of Jesus not primarily through the content of their doctrines *about* him, but through the content of the lives they live in association *with* him.

It is true, of course, that until quite recently, theology did not speak of the faith of Jesus. Following the medieval tradition, including Aquinas, who taught that Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision from the first moment of his conception, it was presumed that the knowledge Jesus possessed precluded the need and even the possibility of faith.<sup>18</sup> This has begun to change, however, thanks to the contemporary effort in theology to remove any taint of the monophysite heresy from the Church's teaching and preaching and to recover, in accordance with the orthodox faith of the Council of Chalcedon, the fullness of the humanity of Jesus along with his divinity. This fullness would have to include human faith and hope as well as human love.<sup>19</sup> If that is the case, association with him in his faith can ground knowledge of him by connaturality.

### *Connatural Knowledge of God*

The philosophical notion of knowledge by connaturality can also throw light on a much quoted but somewhat obscure text in the Johannine literature in the New Testament. The passage appears in the First Letter of John and reads in its entirety: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 Jn 4:7-8). The context in which John speaks here of the knowledge of God is his exhortation to the community that they love one another. His argument is brief and his logic simple. The reason one should love one's brothers and sisters is not just because it is an extrinsic

commandment of God, but because in doing so, one is born into the very life of God, and living this life brings knowledge of God. It does this because God is love.

One might wonder just why and how this would bring knowledge of God. For John's exhortation to the community is not to love God, but to love one's neighbor, and so it is one's neighbor who is the explicit object of one's knowledge, attention, and love. Here as elsewhere, John collapses the dual commandment in the synoptic gospels to love God and one's neighbor into the single commandment as it appears here.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is knowledge of God that one gains through this love. But if one's attention is and has to be focused on the neighbor one is loving, then the knowledge of God this brings cannot be knowing God as an explicit object. But John's logic makes perfect sense if the knowledge of God he is talking about is interpreted as knowledge through connaturality. By living a life of love for one's neighbor, one is touching and being touched by the very reality that constitutes God's own life and reality, and through this very contact, one is coming to know God not in a conceptual, but in an existential and experiential sense. One acquires real knowledge of God as distinguished from notional knowledge, to use Cardinal Newman's terminology, primarily through how one lives, not through how one thinks. How one thinks, of course, and how one conceptualizes the reality of God are crucially important for both philosophy and theology, but both philosophy and theology can remain formal and empty abstractions unless both are grounded in experience — that is to say, unless theoretical knowledge is rooted in knowledge by connaturality.

### Being as Symbolic

The final area we want to consider where once again philosophical reflection can make a very significant contribution to theological understanding moves us from the domain of epistemology to that of ontology and the notion of the symbolic nature of being.<sup>21</sup> Because of the differentiated unity or the unity in difference that defines the relationship between a "real symbol" and what it symbolizes, understanding being as symbolic can be

of value in theological reflection wherever we are dealing with a situation of differentiated unity (for example, the unity in difference that characterizes the relations within the Trinity and the distinction between the humanity and divinity of Jesus in the differentiated unity of a single person). The symbolic nature of being can also throw light on the relationship between the invisible reality of grace and the church's visible ritual and sacramental activities. In all of these areas and others as well, a sound philosophy of symbol can enrich theological reflection.

A real symbol is a symbol which does not simply point to something other than itself as a sign does, but rather, although there is a real distinction between the symbol and the symbolized, the symbol is the medium in which the symbolized becomes really present and manifest. A symbol can be real in this sense because, and only because, being itself is not composed of separate, disparate, and self-enclosed monads but is characterized by dynamic interrelationship. Being is by its very nature relational, and every being is intrinsically related outward to what is other than itself, that other in which it can come to expression and without which it cannot be itself. It is this dynamic and relational character of being that grounds and constitutes the symbolic nature of being and makes it possible for something (the symbolized) to be really present in another (the symbol) and makes it possible for this other to be its real symbol.

For example, in human beings, matter is really other than spirit, but it is only in and through the materiality of the body (the symbol) that spirit of soul (the symbolized) can be itself and can manifest itself. In their differentiated unity, matter and spirit are really different, and yet they are really one because each is incomplete without the other, and neither can be itself without the other. This symbolic character of being reaches all the way into the inner life of God: the oneness of God is not a static and monolithic unity but is the living, dynamic, interrelational, and differentiated unity of the Father giving expression to God's own self in the real symbol of the Word. It is, of course, this symbolic nature of God's own Trinitarian life that grounds the symbolic nature of all being. The examples of both the differentiated unity of the Trinity and of matter and spirit in a human being make it

clear that the relationship between a real symbol and that which it symbolizes is always a dialectical relationship of identity and difference: the symbol both is and is not the symbolized. In the real symbol, the symbolized is really present and manifest, and this constitutes the identity of the two; but it is present and manifest in what is other than itself, and this constitutes the difference between them.

This dialectical and paradoxical relationship of both identity and difference comes clearly to expression in the area of sacramental theology in the ancient Aramaic liturgical exclamation, "*maranatha!*," which is usually translated, "Come, Lord!"<sup>22</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer considers the phrase to be a "primitive liturgical formula" which very early on was "probably used at liturgical Eucharistic gatherings."<sup>23</sup> Taken in this sense as used at the end of a Eucharistic memorial of the Lord's death and celebration of his risen presence, the phrase vividly captures the experience of the simultaneous presence and absence of Jesus in the early Christian communities. His sacramental presence in the symbols of the Eucharistic celebration also included a sense of his absence and a longing for the fullness of his presence in the *parousia* or his second coming.

### *The "Two Natures Model"*

But it is perhaps in the area of Christology that a symbolic understanding of being makes its most significant and valuable contribution to theological reflection today. Its contribution lies in the context of the effort on the part of contemporary theology that we have already mentioned: namely, to recapture the full humanity of Jesus and to remove from the church's teaching and preaching any trace of the monophysite heresy. That such traces are in fact actually present is the opinion of many. For example, in presenting his "case for Spirit Christology," Roger Haight maintains that "a Spirit Christology is more relatively adequate to Christological data in our time than is a Logos Christology" because the latter has tended to undermine the humanity of Jesus, and this is precisely "what Spirit Christology seeks to undo."<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the problem lies, however, not really in Johannine Word

Christology as such, but rather in the much later “two natures model” that was used to speak of the differentiated unity of humanity and divinity in Jesus. For the two natures formula can be misleading in the sense that it can give the false impression that a divine nature and a human nature are two species within the common genus “nature.” But God and the nature of God cannot fit into any higher genus and be measured by it. God and humanity or divine and human nature can never be juxtaposed as two parallel realities that can then become alternatives or competitors. In this competition, the human nature must invariably and inevitably give way to the divine, at least for religious minds, and this is what creates the possibility of a monophysite interpretation that is perhaps the all-too-common and unfortunate result of the two natures formula.

#### *An Alternate Model*

But one can be faithful to the truth to which the two natures formula points and to the spirit of the Council of Chalcedon without having to repeat its letter. This truth is identical to the truth to which the four gospels point: in Jesus of Nazareth, in his life and ministry and in his death and resurrection, his disciples found the presence, power, and revelation of God, or as John puts it, they found the very Word of God who in him had become flesh. The relationship which from all eternity existed between the divine Word or the Son and the Father has become flesh in the life of sonship which Jesus lived and died, and this is, of course, the very same Jesus whom they had come to know and knew quite well to be a thoroughly human being. This differentiated unity of humanity and divinity in Jesus can perhaps be expressed as the differentiated unity of a real symbol and what it symbolizes in a way that precludes any possibility of a monophysite misunderstanding.

In the Incarnation, the Eternal Word and Son of God (the symbolized) freely became really present and manifest in what is other than himself — namely, in the created humanity of Jesus (the real symbol) — and could do so because this humanity was created and “tailored” for this very purpose: “*ipsa assumptione crearetur*,” as Augustine puts it: “by its very assumption it was

created.”<sup>25</sup> The humanity of Jesus is the real symbol of the Eternal Word and Son because it is the embodiment and the medium of his real presence in the world and in history. Between the symbol and the symbolized, there exists the dialectical relationship of identity and difference that we described above, and it is important to note that the very same characteristics quoted earlier by which the Council of Chalcedon characterized the relationship between the divine and the human nature of Jesus remain true of the dialectical relationship of symbol and symbolized.<sup>26</sup> Just like the two natures, the symbol (humanity) and what is symbolized (the divine Word) are not confused or intermingled or changed through their union, but each retains its own identity and integrity. Just like the two natures, the symbol and the symbolized are distinct, but they are not divided or separate in the tension of their dialectical relationship.

But unlike the two natures model (and it is this that recommends the language of symbol and symbolized), where the divine nature always threatens to overshadow and overwhelm the human nature, or to “undermine” it as Haight said above, and thus Christology tends to become tinged with the monophysite heresy, the real symbol must always remain thoroughly itself; that is, it must remain completely and utterly human in order to be the real symbol of the Eternal Word and Son in time and in flesh. Humanity and divinity must vary not in inverse but in direct proportion; that is, the more the symbol is and remains its human self, the more it can be the real symbol in which the divine Word and Son becomes present and manifest in flesh.

It is also important to note that this real presence is not a static reality, but is a process of becoming because the flesh which the Word becomes and which is the real symbol of the Word exists in time. All human life is by its very nature a becoming, and Jesus had to live and die a human life of sonship in order that the Incarnation of the eternal Son could take place. God’s free call to sonship, which in terminology that has become commonplace today is called “descending Christology,” required the free response of Jesus’ human life of sonship, and this is what is called “ascending Christology,” and in the free response of his living and dying (the human symbol), the Eternal Word of God (the symbolized) became

flesh, and flesh became the Eternal Word. The Incarnation was not an instantaneous event at the moment of Jesus' conception, but is a process that includes his whole life, death, and resurrection.

The differentiated unity of symbol and symbolized, moreover, and the real relationship of identity and difference between them always prevent the humanity and divinity of Jesus from ever being alternatives or competitors. There are never two realities or "two natures" to balance, for when the humanity of Jesus is the real symbol of the eternal relationship between the divine Word and the Father, the more human Jesus was, the more he could be in his very humanity the presence of the divine Word as its real symbol. The divinity of Jesus must be found precisely in his humanity as the real symbol of this divinity rather than in a second nature alongside or above it.

Expressing the Church's faith in the divinity and humanity of Jesus in the language of symbol and symbolized rather than of natures also gives us a thoroughly incarnational Christology. When the Word of God became flesh in Jesus, he thereby entered into human finitude, and in doing so he accepted all the limitations of our human condition. There can be no disembodied and free-floating divine intellect alongside Jesus' human intellect to endow him with superhuman knowledge, for it has become incarnate in the limitations of flesh. There can be no disembodied divine will to aid and abet the human will of Jesus, for this too has become incarnate in his humanity. Jesus had to *freely* believe, hope, and love like every other human being and thereby incur the risk of failure. The measure and the miracle of his human love is not that he *could not* sin, but that he *did not* sin. In the free self-transcendence of his faith, hope, and love, Jesus moved step by step through his human life of sonship to the fullness of new life in the resurrection, and in so doing, he has become for all eternity the Word of God made flesh, and thereby the Word of God to us and for us.

### Conclusion

Bearing in mind, as we have already emphasized, that Christian revelation is about God's actual presence and activity in

the world and in history and not in the first instance about ideas, and that, therefore, Christian faith is a response to this presence and not in the first instance an answer to theoretical problems, revelation, nevertheless, does give rise to thought, and faith can and should be deepened through reason and reflection. This reflection constitutes the province of theology, as Anselm defined it almost a millennium ago: *fides quaerens intellectum* — theology is faith in search of understanding. We have become more aware in recent times of the great number and variety of disciplines that can be of service to theology in this search and in its efforts to become inculturated in a particular time and place. These disciplines include the natural and the social sciences and a whole array of literary and humanistic disciplines. Among these latter stands philosophical reflection, as we hope to have illustrated in the three areas we have considered: first, a philosophy of knowledge that can relate and integrate the knowledge of God with knowledge of the finite so that God is not a stranger to creation; second, the value for theology of the notion of knowledge by connaturality in a variety of contexts that show the importance of experiential knowledge; and third, the usefulness of a symbolic and relational understanding of being for articulating an incarnational vision of reality that sees God and the world as never identical, to be sure, but also as never separate.

#### Notes

1. Gerald McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury, 1977), republished in 1989 by Fordham University Press under the title *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method*.

2. Gerald McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), and *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994).

3. Gerald McCool, ed., *A Rahner Reader* (New York: Seabury, 1975), and *The Theology of Karl Rahner* (Albany: Magi Books, 1961).

4. Nicholas Lash points out that at the time the terms were coined in the French Enlightenment, "theism" and "deism" were used interchangeably to denote a rationalistic "belief in the existence of a Supreme

Being” along with a rejection of any kind of supernatural revelation. It took a long time before their meanings were distinguished and “theism” came to be used in a non-rationalistic sense, but it perhaps never lost the unfortunate connotation of belief in a distant “Supreme Being.” See Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1986), 103. See also his discussion of Friedrich von Hügel and the grain of truth and the plausibility that von Hügel finds in pantheism, 171-72.

5. The Council’s Christological statement about the human nature of Jesus must have anthropological implications for human nature as such because the whole intent of the Council was to affirm that in his humanity Jesus was *homoousios* with us or of the same substance as ours. This would not be the case if his human nature was not like ours “in all respects but sin,” as the Council says, quoting Hebrews (4:15). See Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), no. 301, hereafter cited as *DS*.

6. Chalcedon used four terms to maintain and clarify this differentiated unity in Christology: in their union, says the Council, the divine and the human natures of Jesus “undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation.” English translation from *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman Tanner (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:86.

7. Rahner’s analysis of Thomas Aquinas’ understanding of knowledge in general and knowledge of God in particular was published as *Geist in Welt* (Innsbruck: Felizian Rauch, 1939), and appeared in its English version under the title *Spirit in the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), hereafter cited as *SW*. He mentions both Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Maréchal as the two interpreters of Aquinas to whom he is most indebted (see *xlvii*).

8. For example, the anti-idealist and anti-subjectivist axiom of Aquinas: “*Nil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu*” (*De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, obj. 19 and ad 19). The axiom understands all knowledge as rooted in the senses. The context here is God’s knowledge of others, and in his response to this objection, Aquinas affirms of the human intellect, as distinguished from the divine intellect, that there is no intellectual knowledge that is not mediated by the senses.

9. Rahner, *SW*, *lii*.

10. “Unthematic” is meant to indicate that this grasp of the knowing self does not constitute a second object of knowledge, as though the knower were focusing on, attending to, or thinking about itself. The

knower is focusing on and thinking about only one object, and its simultaneous, unthematic self-knowledge is the sheer self-presence of the knower to itself whenever it is knowing something. This self-presence is given simply by the fact that knowledge is a conscious process. If the objective pole in knowledge or the object we are focusing on can be likened to a beam of light shining on something, the subjective pole, on the other hand, or the self-presence of knower, is like a burning coal. The two similes bring out the qualitative difference between knowing an object and the self-presence of the knower in all objective knowledge. This also shows that all objective knowledge, however objective it might be, takes place within the "light" of the subjectivity of the knower, which includes the perspective that the whole past history of the knower brings to this knowledge.

11. In 1215, for example, the Fourth Lateran Council insisted in its condemnation of the teaching of Joachim of Fiore that between creator and creature there can be "no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them." See *DS*, no. 806.

12. It is worth noting that from the viewpoint of transcendental Thomism, the same process of objectification can be observed in relation to our original, unthematic experience of subjectivity. The knowing subject can focus on itself and make itself the explicit object of its knowledge in an act of introspection, but this "objective" knowledge of the self is not identical with the original experience of subjectivity. As with our knowledge of God, objectification always separates what was originally experienced together.

13. By dualism is meant not just the duality that is entailed in every legitimate distinction, but turning the distinction into a false separation in which the distinguished realities are no longer seen in their actual interrelation, but in isolation from each other.

14. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22. See *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), 221-22.

15. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 2, corpus.

16. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 32, a. 3, ad 3.

17. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 23, a. 4, corpus.

18. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 7, a. 3.

19. Jon Sobrino, for example, includes a chapter entitled "The Faith of Jesus" in his *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987), 79-145. For an overview of past and present opinions on the question of Jesus' faith, see Gerald O'Collins and Daniel Kendall, "The Faith of Jesus," *Theological Studies* 53, no. 4 (1992): 403-23.

20. For example, in the Farewell Discourses, John speaks of the single

commandment Jesus gives his disciples, that they love one another as he has loved them (Jn 15:12), and says that this love for one another is what is to distinguish them as his disciples (Jn 13:35). The synoptic gospels, on the other hand, speak of two loves for God and for neighbor, e.g., Mark 12:29-30, Matthew 22:37-40, Luke 10:27-28.

21. See Karl Rahner's groundbreaking article on "The Theology of Symbol" in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 221-52, and in the same volume his application of the notion to Christology, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," 105-29.

22. The phrase appears in Paul (I Cor 16:22) and in the book of Revelation (22:20), as well as in the post-apostolic book of "instructions" called the *Didache* (10:6).

23. See Fitzmyer's article, "Pauline Theology," in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), 2:812.

24. See Roger Haight, "The Case for Spirit Christology," *Theological Studies* 53, no. 2 (1992): 276, 286. He defines Spirit Christology as "one that explains how God is present and active in Jesus, and thus Jesus' divinity, by using the biblical symbol of God as Spirit, and not the symbol Logos." For a view that finds Spirit Christology inadequate, see John Wright, "Roger Haight's Spirit Christology," *Theological Studies* 53, no. 4 (1992): 729-35.

25. The clause appears in Augustine's *Contra sermonem Arianorum*, 8, 6, as quoted by Felix Malmberg in his *Über den Gottmenschen. Quaestiones Disputatae* 9, ed. Karl Rahner and Heinrich Schlier (Freiburg: Herder, 1950), 38.

26. See note 6.