

The Person as the Metaphysics of the Future

John C. Médaille

St. Thomas...justified Job for complaining to God for having lost his goods, his health and his family. Job could "speak up" to God because there is a certain mysterious equality between persons.

Frederick Wilhelmsen

Defining the Human Person

The problem of the human person arises in Western Philosophy solely in a Christian context. For the pagans, an individual was of value solely insofar as he reflected the fullness of human nature, of the "type."¹ Even the term "person" referred to the masks that actors wore and that symbolized universal types. Value therefore resided in the nature and not in the person; the nature alone has the permanence, and the individual is ephemeral.² Christology presents philosophy with a new problem, however, since by asserting that Christ is one person subsisting within two natures, it is necessarily making a distinction between person and nature, a distinction that was not present previously. Therefore, we can look at the person not as a "mask," but as a mystery; not as merely the individuation of a type, but as something in itself, something that traces its individuality to a principle that transcends nature.

¹ Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, (Irving, Texas, The University of Dallas Press: 1970), 115.

² It would seem to follow that insofar as an individual is an instantiation of a type or a nature, he is distinguished solely by his failures to conform to type. Presumably, all who perfectly conform to the type would be identical, and any individuality must represent a failure to conform.

When we contemplate this mystery that is the human person, we must ask "What is the proper principle that is at the center of the movement of life?"³ Now it is clear that the human person is a strange being, neither all spirit nor all matter, but with a foot in both camps. That being the case, no view of man can be complete if it derives from solely one source or the other, if it treats him as either a disembodied spirit, or as an epiphenomenon of pure matter. Nevertheless, the principle we seek must be *primarily* a spiritual one, while not ignoring the world of matter, the realm of material potency reduced to physical act by purely external forces. Hence we must seek the unique marks of the spirit within us, and locate the human dynamic within them. Two activities that seem to mark us as spiritual beings are knowledge and love, and thus it appears that we may seek our dynamic principle within the activities of enquiry and friendship.⁴ Both of these activities place us in *relationship* to the world, and it is possible that by examining these relations we may come to an understanding of what it is that makes us human persons. I will attempt to explore the idea that man is not merely a

³ Kenneth L. Schmitz, "The First Principle of Personal Becoming," *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (June 1994), 757.

⁴ Schmitz, 769-70.

collection of passive potentials reduced to act by external forces, but a set of subsisting relations by which the person moves himself in freedom, rather than by necessity, to become what he or she will become.

This examination is an act of speculative theology and any act of speculative theology must be firmly anchored in facts. The facts which appear most relevant to this question are that the human person is constructed in the image and likeness of God and that God himself is a Trinity of subsisting relations. Further, we must also be able to relate this dynamic principle to the concrete situation of humans, both as spiritual and biological beings. These two poles, the Trinitarian and the human, must form both the impetus and the checkrein on our speculations. The principle we are asserting must be firmly anchored in the ontological and terminate in the anthropological. I propose, then, to examine briefly the idea of personhood as subsisting relations in its divine and human dimensions, in its activities of knowing and loving, in its existence as biological and ecclesial, and in its orientation towards the future.

Before we can begin this exploration, however, we must deal with a serious objection. If the human person is really more than the sum of potentials reduced to act by external forces, then this “proper principle” must itself be something both active and open to the world. Kenneth Schmitz has labeled this principle “non-passive receptivity”⁵ or “non-privative receptivity.”⁶ But Steven

Long has objected that “To assert that the human person transcends the division of being into act and potency is to assert the fundamental inadequacy of Thomistic metaphysics.”⁷ Of course Long does not deny that there is a kind of receptivity in the divine persons, but he says that this receptivity is “wholly other” and that we lack proper knowledge of it, certainly the kind of knowledge upon which we could found any analogy to the human person.⁸ Thus Professor Long would break off the *analogia entis* at its very root, as does St. Thomas himself (*ST I*, q. 29, a. 4). For St. Thomas, the term “person” refers to what is distinct in any nature, that is, its “individuating principle,” but in God, distinction is only by way of relations of origin, while men may be distinguished by other means. Hence, personhood as subsisting relations applies only to God, not to man. For Thomas, the analogy between God and man lies elsewhere, namely in intelligence and charity, the ability of persons, human or divine, to know and to love. But note that both of these are *relational* activities, in fact they are the same activities that form the starting point for Schmitz’s reflections.⁹ Thus it should be possible, from purely Thomistic sources, to construct an anthropology similar to Schmitz’s, an anthropology grounded in relations. This paper will not attempt that exercise; rather it will concentrate on the metaphysical objection that potency and

⁷ Steven A. Long, “Personal Receptivity and Act: A Thomistic Critique,” *The Thomist*, 61 (July, 1997), (From www.thomist.org/journal/1997/971along.thm), 12.

⁸ Steven A. Long, “Divine and Creaturely ‘Receptivity’: The Search for a Middle Term,” *Communio* 21 (Spring, 1994), p. 159.

⁹ Schmitz, “Personal Becoming,” p. 769.

⁵ Schmitz, p. 771.

⁶ Kenneth L. Schmitz, “Created Receptivity and the Philosophy of the Concrete,” *The Thomist*, 61 (July 1997), p. 343.

act are sufficient to describe all of creation and that nothing in creation can transcend these categories.

Receptivity at the Limit

Two of the commentators who have responded to Professor Long are Norris Clarke and David Schindler. Clarke disposes of the metaphysical problem by ascribing receptivity not to being, but to the acts of beings.¹⁰ Schindler finds this method insufficient to answer Long and insists on handling the problem at the level of *esse* rather than *agere*.¹¹ He states that Long has bypassed what is distinctly personal and focuses “on being precisely in its *limit* (potency): that is, on receptivity precisely as already defined by creaturely existence...”¹² The limit condition, however, is still a condition, and if something *analogous* to receptivity does not exist at the limit, then Long’s objection must stand. As Schindler notes,

...by a proper notion of analogy, we can (and must) extend receptivity (or something *truly like receptivity*) below this floor—in accord with the principles adduced above. This means, not that sub-human beings are receptive in the sense of possessing intelligence and freedom, but merely that there must

be something in sub-human beings which is genuinely analogous to the receptivity, intelligence, and freedom we find in human beings. That “something” I take to consist in some minimum level of immanent activity, order, and transitive activity (*italics in original*).¹³

Unfortunately, Schindler does not attempt to show what this “minimum level” might actually be in the concrete world of existentials. Rather, he skips directly to *esse*, wherein he finds a triadic structure that already includes receptivity (more of which anon.) But if this analogous receptivity cannot be demonstrated at the limit of creaturely existence, then the analogy is broken. Long would break the analogy at the top, but it is just as effective to break it at the bottom, for once it is broken anywhere, it is broken everywhere. Is there a way to supply a concrete example of that missing “minimum level” of receptivity at the minimum level of being? This minimum must include, analogously, features which correspond to the features of non-passive receptivity, namely, freedom, immateriality, and an orientation towards becoming. Fortunately, modern physics has been able to penetrate physical being right to the boundary line between physics and metaphysics; if our “concrete” example exists at all, it must exist here as well.¹⁴

¹⁰ Norris Clarke, “Response to Long’s Comments,” *Communio* 21 (Spring, 1994), p. 165.

¹¹ David L. Schindler, “‘Thomism’ and the Human Person: The Question of Receptivity and the Philosophy-Theology Distinction,” *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communion Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation*, (Grand Rapids: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 280-81.

¹² David L. Schindler, “The Person: Philosophy, Theology, and Receptivity,” *Communio* 21 (Spring, 1994), p. 173.

¹³ Schindler, “The Person,” p. 175.

¹⁴ At this point, the reader may object to introducing authorities from physics into a theological treatise. Indeed, anybody who steps outside his area of expertise risks becoming a fool in short order. Further, the stream of books with a semi-mystical view of physics is enough to give one pause (for example, *The Tao of Physics* or *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters*). Nevertheless, certain theories are sufficiently

The most well-documented conundrum of physics is the complementarity of waves and particles; waves and particles form two “views” of the same reality, but the views are mutually exclusive; we can see the world as waves or as particles but not, at the same time, as both.¹⁵ The particle we may take as a “packet” of energy at a given point in space having certain measurable qualities such as mass, momentum, spin, charge, etc. The wave, on the other hand, is not something “material” at all; rather, it is purely “formal,” a mathematical formula, to be precise, which yields the probability of finding the particle at any particular point described by the wave.¹⁶ Although the wave lacks “materiality,” it is nevertheless “physical”; it is both immaterial and physical, in fact it “contains” all the possible states in which one can find the “material” particle. And here is the main point: Not only must the particle be “found,” but it cannot be said to exist until it is found. The particle is not some pre-existent “given” standing alone. Rather, its “being” is entirely contingent on its being in *relation* to some other particle and its “properties,” its direction, mass, spin, etc., cannot be said to exist prior to this relationship.¹⁷ To speak of a “single” particle makes no sense, since

“alone” it has no definite thermodynamic properties whatsoever.¹⁸ Its being is a being of relationship, of a world of possibilities described by the wave reduced to some particular configuration by its relationship with another particle.¹⁹ Or to express it another way, the particularity of a particle is relational.

At this point, I think, we may clearly see the “metaphysical” concepts of potency and act taking definite shape in the world of physics. In the relationship of waves and particles, the wave defines all that can be, while the particle defines all that is.²⁰ There could be no clearer demonstration of potency and act than wave and particle. Indeed, as we peer into the very foundations of “physical” being, we see the visage of Aristotle peering back at us; after a space of two and a half millennia, the physicists have caught up with the metaphysicians. That being the case, have we then settled the case at hand? Can we say that, given that potency and act appear to be inscribed into being at its most foundational level, the “analogy” which Schindler seeks is missing, while potency and act exhaust (at this level at least) the description of all that is? Does this description exclude, for example, analogies to a “non-passive” potency, freedom, immateriality, and a “being”

well established and certain authorities sufficiently widely accepted that we may use their findings without too much hesitation. Further, if theology is to maintain her position as “Queen of the Sciences,” she must be in fruitful dialog with all the other sciences, from literary criticism to nuclear physics.

¹⁵ Heinz R. Pagels, *The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) 94.

¹⁶ Pagels, p. 80.

¹⁷ Pagels, p. 80.

¹⁸ Alastair Rae, *Quantum Physics: Illusion or Reality?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 116.

¹⁹ Wolfgang Smith, *The Quantum Enigma: Finding the Hidden Key*, (Peru, Illinois: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1995) 56.

²⁰ It should be noted that this is an approximation, since the objects of the world are more than just the ensemble of particles that compose them; but it is proximate enough for our purpose here.

that is really a “becoming”? This bears a more than superficial examination.

In the first place, what is inherent even in the very language of act and potency is that being itself is *relational*. No particle has any thermodynamic properties, save by virtue of being in relation with another particle or particles. All of the particles that make up the being of *this* table have the qualities they do only by being in relationship with all the other particles of the same table. Attendant on this relational principle is *mutuality*: Each particle is not only determined by the other, but itself determines the other. Thus in respect of itself, it is a passive potential, but in respect of the other, it may be considered to be “active.” Nor can we simply say that the “active” is only in respect of the other, for both the particles make up a single “system,” a single “object” (table, chair, etc.). May we not then say that in receiving its being, a thing is both determined and determines, and hence has something *analogous* to a “non-passive” receptivity?

The relationship of waves and particles also has the quality of indeterminacy. The wave formally contains all the possibilities of the particle, but it is impossible to determine in advance the outcome of any particular encounter.²¹ Is it not possible to take this uncertainty in the measurement of any given particle as a crude analogy to freedom? Of course, the freedom we

²¹ It should be noted in passing that this indeterminacy operates within a strict determinism; the particles are indeterminate with respect to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, and deterministic with respect to the Schrödinger wave equations. But this relationship need not concern us here. (Cf. Smith, pp. 43-65)

speak of is a quality of persons, yet it does have an ontological base, and that base has its reflection, however primitive, at the very limit of being, a being that refuses to be “determined,” at least insofar as determinism is conceived of as absolute and inflexible.

Furthermore, since the “waves” are themselves no more than a mathematical formalism, we cannot reduce the physical to the material, but must admit of an immateriality. In this regard, we must admit, along with Werner Heisenberg, that Plato arrived at the correct solution somewhat in advance of the physicists:

I think on this point modern physics has definitely decided for Plato. For the smallest units of matter are in fact not physical objects in the ordinary sense of the word; they are forms, structures or—in Plato’s sense—Ideas, which can be unambiguously spoken of only in the language of mathematics.²²

However, these forms must not be thought of—as Plato did—as something static, but as dynamic relationships. Here we reverse an order that tends to be implicit or explicit in metaphysics, and that is the order of being and becoming. We cannot make being prior to becoming, at least in the physical world, since insofar as anything in nature is at all, it is solely by virtue of its participation in a system which is already dynamic, and apart from that dynamism it does not exist. Thus we may say that being is *becoming*, and apart from becoming there is no (physical) being. As Alastair Rae notes,

²² Werner Heisenberg, *Across the Frontier*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975): 116.

...although we could imagine a world with a greater (or lesser) number of spatial dimensions than three, it is impossible to imagine a world with no time dimension. Without the possibility of change the idea of existence is meaningless, so for me at least there is no being without becoming.²³

In all of this we may discern features that we may be permitted to take as analogues of the very principles at issue: being as relational, non-passive receptivity, freedom, immateriality, and becoming. It is not that the relation between act and potency is not a correct description of reality—which no one disputes, especially at the “limit” condition—but that this does not preclude the notion of an “active” receptivity which freely participates in and chooses its own response to the gift of being. Indeed, the limit condition is the presupposition of non-passive receptivity. Thus we can say that we have secured the analogies necessary for a notion of personal becoming at the very lowest level, the “limit” condition referred to by Schindler. Having secured the analogies at the base, we can now look at them at the summit.

Receptivity and *Esse*

The names we are given for God are names of relations: Father, Son, and Spirit. This is obvious in the case of the first two, since one cannot be a father save in relation to an offspring or a son save in relation to a parent. The Spirit as well is precisely the spirit of that relationship between the Father and Son which bridges the gap between them in love. Relationship is the very structure of the Trinity and it includes receptivity

²³ Rae, p. 117.

since what proceeds from the Father receives from Him. But we certainly cannot identify this receptivity with a purely “passive” potential which would imply some imperfection. Rather, there is a complementarity between the active and the passive aspects of receptivity which cannot clearly be separated.²⁴ The Son in receiving his being actively consents to being begotten; even the Father in the very acts of begetting and spiration is receptive because he allows himself to be determined by the Persons who proceed from him.²⁵ It is this personal mode of existence, and not some divine “substance,” that constitutes the Godhead. It is important to understand that the “substance” of God is not prior, logically or any other way, to the Persons. Rather this substance never exists in a “naked” state without a mode of existence; the divine substance of God is his being only because there are three modes of existence which relate not to substance, but to person.²⁶ The relationship between person and substance is explained by John Zizioulas as follows:

No substance or nature exists without person or hypostasis... No person exists without substance or nature, *but* the ontological “principle” or “cause” of being—i.e. that which makes a thing to exist—is not the substance or nature but the person or hypostasis. Therefore

²⁴ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama V: The Last Act*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998): 90.

²⁵ Von Balthasar, 91.

²⁶ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993): 41.

being is traced back not to substance but to person.²⁷

Now if being is therefore traced back to person, and the Persons (in the Godhead certainly) are subsisting relations, as St. Thomas holds (*ST* I, q. 29, a. 4), this implies that being itself is relational. If this is indeed the case, we should be able to discern this relational structure in the very act of being—*esse*—notwithstanding the Thomistic objection that this mode of being is limited to the Trinity alone. Schmitz finds that this receptivity is implicit in the very nature of being as creation *ex nihilo*:

For the Aristotelian understanding of potency posits a pre-existent recipient (ultimately, underived matter) whereas potency to being simultaneously demands that there can be no recipient before the reception itself has been achieved. And so creation *ex nihilo* is to be understood as the endowment of the capacity to receive being in the very communication in which that actuality is being received. ...A creature, then, is nothing but the relation of dependence upon the proper cause of its being: *tantum esse ad Deum*. But that “nothing but” is everything for the creature!²⁸

In other words, *esse* is not merely an assemblage of the principles of potency and act that are antecedent to the creating act. *Esse* is not potency to being, but being itself. Therefore we must “include created act within the notion of ontological reception. Created act is a received act.”²⁹ *Esse* is therefore,

²⁷ Zizioulas, 42.

²⁸ Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 359.

²⁹ Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 362.

a “being-from” its source. But Christian metaphysics teaches us that the only “thing” that is in itself is God and that all other things “are” only in relation to that which exists in itself, that is, God. Therefore, “being in the sense of existence is nothing other than a ‘towards God.’”³⁰ Indeed, “God is the Identity of human personhood in the very rigorous sense that God is the Identity of Existence.”³¹ These same considerations lead David Schindler to find a triadic structure within *esse*, which he describes as being “from,” being “toward,” as well as being “within” itself.³² In this way, *esse* is already “inclusive of a relation that is anteriorly receptive (*ab*) even as it is simultaneously communicative (*ad*).”³³ That is to say that creaturely existence already contains an orientation both from and towards its source, towards God (*Esse*), and that this constitutive relation “establishes in the creature—in some significant sense, in principle—an intrinsic relation towards all that participates in *Esse*.”³⁴ Understood in this way, we can grasp why

The flow from God (*influxus entis, esse-ab*) is such that it is completed only in a flow back towards the source (*reditus entis, esse-ad*). This means that the created “self” of each being is preserved only through reference to the Creative Other. This

³⁰ Wilhelmsen, 104.

³¹ Wilhelmsen, 120.

³² David L. Schindler, “The Person: Philosophy, Theology, and Receptivity,” *Communio* 21 (Spring, 1994): 176.

³³ David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation*, (Grand Rapids: T&T Clark, 1996), 288.

³⁴ Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 290.

communication and response is the initial generosity, the initial deposit of being that is inseparable from the creative endowment and that weights created being towards the actual good (i.e., the good of its own being and the Good that is its Source).³⁵

Having grounded receptivity in the Trinity and in a triadic *esse*, we can firmly grasp the being we receive from the Trinity through Jesus Christ as a relationship that is primarily receptive. We first receive through Christ, and only through him do we then image the communicativity of the Father.³⁶ In this way, we can see the being of the human person as subsisting relation analogous to the being of God as subsisting relation. “The advantage of this term is that it removes all suggestion of *absolute* autonomy from the creature at the originating level of its being.”³⁷ Having modified this autonomy, at least to the point of removing its *absolute* character, we can see the person in his mode of relationships, as being able to both receive and actively respond in his personal activities of knowing and loving.

The Person as Knowing and Loving

The importance of removing this sense of autonomy cannot be underestimated, especially when we survey the course of modern philosophy in which a metaphysical understanding of the person has been all but lost. The exaggerated notions of self reference present a rather closed and confined

sense of subjectivity. Indeed, “this primacy of self-reference obscured the role of the other in knowing and willing, turning the other into a pale shadow of the self in the form of ideas (Descartes), sensations (Hume), or phenomena (Kant).”³⁸ It would not do merely to abolish autonomy, for that would be to abolish freedom, but to see that it includes, in both its source and goal, an orientation towards others. For the person, even in his autonomy, includes real relations with others, and without them, we could not really imagine a person, human or divine. As we have seen, we are endowed with receptivity at the very level of being, of *esse*; human freedom is precisely our acceptance of these relations as gift, and the recapitulation of them in freedom. In this way, we can preserve both autonomy and freedom, without absolutizing either.

This principle becomes most clear when we contemplate these activities that are identified as most typically human: knowing and loving. They are neither passive nor static, neither completely governed by the laws of physical motion nor yet apart from them.³⁹ Knowing does not put the world inside of us, as if it knowledge were a snapshot in our material brains; rather it puts *us* in the world in a nonphysical, immaterial way.⁴⁰ That is to say, we cannot view knowledge as merely the activation of a passive potential, the writing of an external reality on *tabula rasa* of the intellect. In receiving knowledge we cannot be static or passive; we must be properly disposed to the world.⁴¹ We can certainly identify a

³⁵ Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 364.

³⁶ Schindler, *Heart of the World*, 284.

³⁷ Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 360.

³⁸ Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 347.

³⁹ Schmitz, “Personal Becoming,” 769.

⁴⁰ Schmitz, “Personal Becoming,” 770.

⁴¹ Schmitz, “Personal Becoming,” 770-71.

chain of material causes which allow the possibility of knowledge, but the attempt to reduce knowledge to a mere activation of a purely passive potential would result in an intelligence that is artificial indeed. This relationship of the person to the world is even more evident in love, which requires a mutuality of letting be and receiving for the concept of giving to be properly understood. A purely passive understanding of receptivity would fail to comprehend either of these human acts.

We can more fully examine knowing and loving under the aspect of “gift” in much the same way as we examined the reception of being itself, whether at the divine or creaturely level. In receiving a gift, the recipient is not simply passive. “He or she is called to conform to the disposition of a certain gracious activity that transcends any merely physical mode of passivity or activity, though the entire performance has elements of both.”⁴²

The Person as Ecclesial

The notion of subsisting relations allows us to view with greater precision the demand that man be “born from above.” This cannot be viewed as a mere ritual requirement, but as a call to enter actively into a new community and a new relationship with both God and our fellow man. It is a new relationship with God precisely because it is a birth “from above,” and a new relationship with our fellows, who now become “brothers.” Indeed, we must be as astonished as Nicodemus was on hearing this requirement. His astonishment, and ours, springs from the conflict of “re-birth” with natural birth, which is the conflict between man as a biological and an

ecclesial hypostasis. Man is first called into being by the ready made community of family in a purely biological way, but this community turns out to be both a boon and a burden. At what we may call the natural level, he exists as a biological hypostasis. This hypostasis is tied inevitably to natural instinct, that is, necessity and is hence not subject to freedom. Yet, man desires freedom but this freedom must always be relativized. It must be limited by positive law and social custom if chaos is not to be the result.⁴³ Nevertheless, the person tries to affirm himself in acts of separation which become mere expressions of ego. In place of relationship, the person dissolves in mere individualism. Indeed, the breaking of relationships, beginning with one’s parents, becomes a precondition of self-affirmation. The biological hypostasis attempts to become a person by way of self-affirmation, but fails, and this failure is sin.⁴⁴ In this mode, man is little more than a tendency towards death.

What is needed is a new birth and a new hypostasis, a hypostasis that is not subject to necessity, but that is affirmed only in freedom and in love and which escapes the laws of biology and ego. Thus it must be rooted in an ontological reality that does not suffer from created-ness.⁴⁵ That is to say, man must be born from above. Here man can affirm his being not on the basis of immutable law and necessity, but on the basis of a subsisting relationship with God. This is the reality at the root of baptism.⁴⁶ Indeed Christology is the

⁴² Schmitz, “Personal Becoming,” 771.

⁴³ Zizioulas, 46-7.

⁴⁴ Zizioulas, 52.

⁴⁵ Zizioulas, 53.

⁴⁶ Zizioulas, 57.

proclamation that man's nature *can* be assumed in a hypostatic union with the divine; this adoption of man by God, this identification of his hypostasis with the hypostasis of the Son, is the essence of baptism. But this assumption is one that we must appropriate for ourselves; that is, we must be receptive to it and respond to it from our own being.

In this new relationship, man may address God with the intimate *abba*, for he acquires a new father, one not subject to necessity, and new brothers, the members of the Church. Here we see illuminated in love the apparent harshness of the commands "Call no man Father," and that to follow Christ you must "hate your own father and mother." These sayings are not a simple denial, but rather they contain an affirmation that the Christian stands over and against the world; he exists as a relationship with the world, as a person, in a manner free from the relationship created by his biological identity. Our "natural" hypostasis is governed by natural laws, laws which hint at, but preclude, freedom. Only in an active receptivity to our baptism can we discover the freedom of the ecclesial hypostases, and so escape from biological necessity. The biological hypostasis deals with man as he is, an "is" limited to his "nature." But the ecclesial hypostases deals with the man he is becoming, and becoming in freedom.

Man as the Metaphysics of the Future

This ecclesial being reveals man as a paradoxical creature with its roots in the future and its branches in the present. And here we may grasp the meaning of faith, as it is expounded in Hebrews, as the "hypostasis of things hoped for."

Now hope always relates to the future, but the future does not exist; it is precisely that which is not. "Hypostasis," on the other hand, is that which makes something present in the here and now. How then can faith make that which is non-being being? Where can we find a "future" that can be "hypostasized" in the present moment?

Here we come to the distinction between personal and non-personal being. Impersonal being is indeed relational, even at its limit condition, but this relation is exhausted in the species that it serves.⁴⁷ That is to say, its future is entirely deterministic, exhausted by the analysis of its nature. Its being "progresses" according to the laws of the nature which it serves, and its future can be "hypostasized" only in the realm of the abstract, only, that is, by working out the laws of its nature and by projecting them through time; in other words, its future is contained entirely in its past. Personal being, on the other hand, is not reducible to this analytic of nature; it is not deterministic, precisely because liberty is not reducible to any nature in the direction of its choices.⁴⁸ This liberty comes as a free gift from God, the source and identity of being. Since, therefore, a person comes from a ground more ultimate than himself, his personal identity must then be related to that origin. His identity must in fact be a relation of origin.⁴⁹ Personality—the individual personhood so desired by the biological man—can only be achieved within the source of being, which is God. Hence, personal being is a participation, in some mysterious way,

⁴⁷ Wilhelmsen, p. 119.

⁴⁸ Wilhelmsen, p. 120.

⁴⁹ Wilhelmsen, p. 119.

in the Persons of the Godhead through the person of Jesus Christ and through him to all the other persons that participate in Him, which is, in some way, everybody, since “Christ is the light which enlightens every man who comes into being.”

This consideration shows us how the future can achieve a full hypostasis in the present. As Wilhelmsen expresses it,

But there is a future in the full existential sense of the verb “to be”: Christ, “the fullness of time.” My future, therefore, in the sense of my radical freedom as a person, **is** Christ. In Him I will be known even as I am known. My personhood will be revealed to be because than I will be in the very fulfillment of time, in Christ, **my** fullness. This identity in Him will be the full return of by being to its source. Until then, my person is shrouded in mystery, unknown even to myself. That personhood is not determined by a world which is only my servant and whose cultural structures, in the most profound sense of the term, I can reject and smash at any moment, thus setting them behind me as something foreign to my being. Is this not what Catholics do when they confess their sins? (boldface in original).⁵⁰

Faith, then, is receptivity to the Person of Jesus Christ, who contains the future, a future than can achieve a hypostasis in the present because it already exists in the full sense of that term. That is to say, man is not really a “being” so much as a becoming; becoming is his being precisely in and

through his relationships with himself, his neighbor, and with God. All those things which he longs for, righteousness through participation in the Personhood of Christ, but which hope must defer to the future, may be grasped by faith as in the here and now, albeit in an imperfect and non-material way.

⁵⁰ Wilhelmsen, p. 125.

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