

A Primer On Thomism

by James Larson

“The Church has adopted his philosophy for her own.”

Pope Pius XI – *Studiorum Ducem*

Triumphalism

When I converted to the Catholic Faith in 1980 there was a word very much in vogue which was disparagingly used to describe what had been the dominant orientation of the Church previous to Vatican II. That word was “Triumphalism.” Father Hardon’s Modern Catholic Dictionary defines Triumphalism in the following manner:

"Triumphalism: A term of reproach leveled at the Catholic Church for the claim that she has the fullness of divine revelation and the right to pass judgment on the personal and social obligations of humankind."

I would consider this a very good definition. What is more, it does indeed characterize Catholic teaching and belief up to Vatican II.

The Gospel, in fact, is very fond of the idea of triumph and victory. St. Paul writes:

"Now thanks be to God, who always maketh us to **triumph** in Jesus Christ and manifesteth the odour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are the good odour of Christ unto God, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one indeed the odour of death unto death, but to the others the odour of life unto life."(2 Cor 2:14-16)

Notice that, in the just -quoted passage from St. Paul, the triumph which God **always** makes us manifest in Christ has to do with knowledge of His truth. This, of course, is in complete accord with Our Lord's commission to his disciples, as in expressed His words of departure in the Gospel of Matthew:

"All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Our Lord's teaching, in other words, is undiluted triumphalism, as are the following words from St. Paul:

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty to God unto the pulling down of fortifications, destroying counsels, and every height that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor 10:4-5)

Triumphalism is, therefore, at the very core of the Gospel.

All of this speaks of a tremendous solidity, a tremendous clarity. There is no fuzziness here. God is who He is. He has revealed to us the nature of His Supreme Being, and also the nature of our finite being. And He has established His Church to capture our minds unto the fullness of these eternal, unchanging truths.

In the pre-Vatican II Church, this tremendous solidity was reflected in all the various facets of Catholic worship and life. There was absolutely no doubt, for instance, that the traditional Latin Mass was wholly intent on worshipping the majesty of God and of accomplishing that filial submission of mind and heart of all those who assisted at Mass to the total sovereignty of God over all things human. The Latin language, the direction the altar faced, the beauty of sacred vessels, statuary, stained-glass windows, all aspects of the architecture, and the sacred music – all these things spoke of worship centered upon the Infinite, Immutable Being of God. And, of course, the prayers of the Old Mass embodied this worship to the utmost. The very fact that the priest and servers knelt at the foot of the steps and prayed Psalm 42 and the Confiteor before they dared ascend to the altar, profoundly revealed this basic orientation of our faith and worship.

The same may be said for all standard materials used to teach the Faith. Catechisms such as the Baltimore catechism in the U.S. or the Penny catechism in the UK were almost like small compendiums of the Catechism of the Council of Trent, deeply reflecting the principles of our faith found in the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas.

All of this solidity largely disappeared after Vatican Council II. It was widely declared that Triumphalism was something that only belonged to the Pharisaical past, and that the path to the future lay in something called *aggiornamento* – which roughly translated means “openness to the world.” This, despite the fact that Holy Scripture issues a dire warning precisely against any such “openness” to, or friendship with, the world. In the Epistle of St. James, we read:

“Adulterers, know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever, therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God.” (James 4:4).

The chaos that has erupted in the Church during the past 40-45 years because of this fundamental shift in Catholic attitudes towards belief and worship need not be documented extensively here. We all know that it has happened. The loss of priestly and religious vocations, the Catholic divorce rate, the priestly sexual abuse scandal, the abysmal state of catechetics, the ecumenical abominations – these things are evident, I think, to us all. The world, in other words, has entered violently into the Church and violated her. The two questions we seek to answer here are: how did this happen and what is the medicine which must be applied in order to accomplish a return to Catholic sanity?

False Philosophy

Towards the beginning of his encyclical (*Aeterni Patris*) – “On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy According to the Mind of St. Thomas Aquinas”, – the great Pope Leo XIII wrote the following:

*“Whoso turns his attention to the bitter strifes of these days and seeks a reason for the troubles that vex public and private life must come to the conclusion that a fruitful cause of the evils which now afflict, as well as those which threaten, us lies in this: that false conclusions concerning divine and human things, **which originated in the schools of philosophy**, have now crept into all the orders of the State, and have been accepted by the common consent of the masses. For, since it is in the very nature of man to follow the guide of reason in his actions, if his intellect sins at all his will soon follows; and thus it happens that false opinions, whose seat is in the understanding, influence human actions and pervert them.”*

This notion that false philosophy is at the root of all our modern evils is a truth which has been reiterated by many Popes over the past 250 years. In the year 1775, only 14 years before the French Revolution, Pope Pius VI, in his encyclical *Inscrutabile*, writes:

“Who would not be shocked when considering that We have undertaken the task of guarding and protecting the Church at a time when many plots are laid against orthodox religion, when the safe guidance of the sacred canons is rashly despised, and when confusion is spread wide by men maddened by a monstrous desire of innovation, *who attack the very bases of rational nature* and attempt to overthrow them?...yourselves, established as scouts in the house of Israel, see clearly the many victories claimed by a **philosophy** full of deceit. You see the ease with which it attracts to itself a great host of peoples, concealing its impiety with the honorable name of **philosophy**....While they pursue a remarkable knowledge,

they open their eyes to behold a false light which is worse than very darkness. Naturally our enemy, desirous of harming us and skilled in doing so, just as he made use of the serpent to deceive the first human beings, has armed the tongues of those men with the poison of his deceitfulness in order to lead astray the minds of the faithful....In this way these men by their speech '**enter in lowliness, capture mildly, softly bind and kill in secret** (St. Leo the Great)'"

This is the power of false ideas – ideas which may begin in intellectual and philosophical circles – but which eventually filter down to all the average citizenry in such a manner as to “enter in lowliness, capture mildly, softly bind and kill in secret.”

Thomism: The Only Remedy

These same Popes have always proposed the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas as the **only** remedy for this situation. Writing in his encyclical *Studiorum Ducem*, Pope Pius XI says:

"We so heartily approve the magnificent tribute of praise bestowed upon this most divine genius that We consider that Thomas should be called not only the Angelic, but also the *Common* or Universal Doctor of the Church; **for the Church has adopted his philosophy for her own.**"

“Again, if we are to avoid the errors which are the source and fountain-head of all the miseries of our time, the teaching of Aquinas refutes the theories propounded by Modernists in every sphere....” (Pius XI, *Studiorum Ducem*).

“Thomas wrote under the inspiration of the supernatural spirit which animated his life and that his writings, which contain the principles of, and the laws governing, all sacred studies, must be said to possess a universal character.” (*Studiorum Ducem*)

In his *Motu proprio Doctoris Angelici*, Pope Pius X wrote:

“We therefore desired that all teachers of philosophy and sacred theology should be warned that if they deviate so much as a step, in metaphysics especially, from Aquinas, they exposed themselves to grave risk.”

Two quotes from Leo XIII on St. Thomas;

“With his own hand he vanquished all errors of ancient times; and still he supplies an armory of weapons which brings us certain victory in the conflict with falsehoods ever springing up in the course of years.”

“The ecumenical councils, also, where blossoms the flower of all earthly wisdom, have always been careful to hold Thomas Aquinas in singular honor. In the Councils of Lyons, Vienne, Florence, and the Vatican [Vatican I] one might almost say that Thomas took part and presided over the deliberations and decrees of the Fathers, contending against the errors of the Greeks, of heretics and rationalists, with invincible force and with the happiest results. But the chief and special glory of Thomas, one which he has shared with none of the Catholic Doctors, is that the Fathers of Trent made it part of the order of conclave to lay upon the altar, together with sacred Scripture and the decrees of the supreme Pontiffs, the Summa of Thomas Aquinas, whence to seek counsel, reason, and inspiration.”

And finally, one more quote from Pope St. Pius X. I want us to pay special attention to this one because it contains the point from which we shall start our examination of the philosophy of St. Thomas:

“For just as the opinion of certain ancients is to be rejected which maintains that it makes no difference to the truth of the Faith what any man thinks about the nature of creation, provided his opinions on the nature of God be sound, because **error with regard to the nature of creation begets a false knowledge of God; so the principles of philosophy laid down by St. Thomas Aquinas are to be religiously and inviolably observed**, because they are the means of acquiring such a knowledge of creation as is most congruent with the Faith; **of refuting all the errors of all the ages**, and of enabling man to distinguish clearly what things are to be attributed to God and to God alone.”

This, I believe, is where we must begin if we are to understand the forces that are assaulting every aspect of Catholic teaching and practice. Everywhere today, the Church is in retreat before a bogus science which claims to possess a knowledge of creation not only superior to the truths of our Faith, but a knowledge which contradicts the faith. This is especially true in regard to the doctrine of Transubstantiation, which demands an understanding of the nature of created substances which is very specific. But it is also equally true of all doctrines which in any way involve human psychology – for instance, the existence of Original Sin and its consequences; or the intrinsic evil of homosexual acts or of any sexual sin. And it is also true that the doctrine concerning the complete inerrancy of all of Holy Scripture has been denied by a Modernist-inspired historical-critical method, claiming to be a science which has the mandate to contradict previous declarations of the Catholic Magisterium concerning the Bible. All of this is

sure confirmation of Pius X's teaching that a primary principle of Modernist philosophy is the subjection of the Faith to modern science.

The Heresy of Atomism

There is one specific tyranny that false science holds over virtually every mind in the modern world, and is the source of the Church's retreat before the juggernaut of Modernism. It is the heresy of Atomism, by which all created substances are dissolved of their substantial being and reduced to the quantifications of analytical chemistry and physics.

Lest we conclude that all this bears little consequences for our faith, let us consider the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation. To the modern scientific mind, deeply imbued with the notion that all physical realities are reducible to atomic particles or quanta, there simply does not exist a distinction between substance and accidents as applied to physical substances such as bread and wine. Everything is reducible to the interactions between atoms or quanta. Rather than such things as the color, texture, taste, and dimensions of the host being considered as accidents which inhere in some distinct substance called bread, the modern mind, formed by the ambience of reductive analytical science, can only consider such properties to be produced by interactions between the atoms of what we call bread and the atoms which constitute our senses. In accord with such scientific analysis, therefore, there simply can be no valid or real distinction between substance and accidents. Thus, there can be no such thing as transubstantiation.

This denial of the traditional, Thomistic understanding of transubstantiation is something that has entered deeply into the thinking of many priests. After my conversion I made it a point to ask a number of priests why we never heard transubstantiation talked about from the pulpit anymore. The answer was invariably something to the effect: "Transubstantiation was a medieval notion. It involves a distinction between substance and accidents that we can no longer believe in."

This modern retreat before the face of reductive analytical science, and its rejection of the substantial reality of physical things, is perfectly expressed by Father Joseph Ratzinger in his 1970 book *Being Christian*:

"The concept of substance, with which the idea of change [the Eucharistic change] seems to be closely linked, appears to be completely unobjective since the bread, considered from a physical and chemical point of view, is seen as a mixture of heterogeneous materials, made up of an infinite multitude of atoms which, in turn, are composed of an enormous number of elemental particles to

which we can ultimately apply no certain concepts of substance, since we do not even know if their existence is corpuscular or undulatory.”

In other words, because of the effect of reductive scientific analysis upon our thinking, we have lost, or are losing, the whole concept of substance in relation to physical reality. And since physical realities constitute the what St. Bonaventure referred to as the “footsteps of God”, and are themselves reflective of spiritual realities, then this loss of belief in substantial physical reality has also resulted in a massive loss of belief in the substantiality, solidity, and immutability of Catholic belief and doctrine. The inevitable consequence is an orientation towards the faith which views it as evolutionary. If, for instance, science has proved to us that the defined doctrine of Transubstantiation cannot be true because of what we now know about physical realities, then the basic mental orientation is firmly planted within virtually every Catholic that he must always be poised to re-adjust or essentialize his faith to be in accord with the latest findings of secular science.

It is therefore imperative that we engage in battle against this war being conducted by science against the notion of substantial being. In order to do so we have need of St. Thomas Aquinas.

St. Thomas’ Teaching on Creation

St. Thomas’ teaching on creation is rooted in his metaphysics. We need first of all to understand that metaphysics is the foundation of all the various disciplines of philosophy. This is so because metaphysics is the science which deals with the concept of being itself. All the other branches of philosophy – logic, epistemology, the philosophy of nature, psychology, ethics, and natural theology (theodicy) are dependent upon metaphysics, the science of being, for their approach to their particular subject matter. Being is the fundamental concept of philosophy, from which all other concepts derive their validity. If we begin with false notions in regard to being we are like an arrow which may leave the bow only a very small fraction askew, but which is then bound to miss the target far down the road by a considerable margin. This is why, as Pope St. Pius X said, to deviate even so much as one step from the metaphysics of St. Thomas inevitably brings in its train the ruin of truly rational thinking and a perversion of the absolutely foundational relationship which must exist between the human mind and objective reality. This initial irrationality then necessarily comes to fruition in erroneous and enormously destructive ideas concerning the nature of material substances, and in human psychology and morality – all this culminating in a profoundly distorted view of God Himself, and of man’s relationship to God.

Thomistic Cosmology

According to Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding, all created *being* is divided into ten categories: one category of substance, and nine of accidents. The categories of accidents are: Quantity, Quality, Relation, Place, Time, Posture, Habit, Action, and Passion. Every thing the human mind can conceive of as being *something* must be conceived of as either a substance or as one of these accidents. In other words, we are not here just dealing with abstract philosophical concepts, but with real being as we experience it on the most concrete and common-sense level. If we look, for instance, at the life cycle of an oak tree, we can see every one of the accidental realities of this tree changing from its first state as a seedling up to the giant oak in its full maturity. Yet the substance – an oak tree – remains the same.

We should not, however, fall into the error of thinking that somehow accidents are unreal, or that they are only “appearances”, in the sense of their being some sort of illusion not possessing real being. Accidents are real categories of being. All those *accidents* of being which are part of that oak tree along its path of life are very real. But these accidents have no independent being. In Thomistic metaphysics and cosmology they are said to *inhere* in substance as very real, but very dependent, being.

Substance, on the other hand, is being which exists in itself, and not (as is the case with accidents) in something else as its subject.

It is extremely important to realize that all the aspects of being that we can measure, or in any other way “put a handle on” through the use of the nine categories of accidental being, do not constitute substance itself. For some of the categories of accidents this is easy for us to see, but for others it is more difficult. We may well understand, for instance, that fluidity is a Quality (one of the categories of accidents) of water, but that it is not identical with the substance water. We may also see clearly that the Place (another category) that water occupies, or the Time it exists, or its particular Action (such as its necessary action in every cell of our body, or its destructive action in a tsunami) is not identical with its substance.

It is much harder for us to understand, however, that the atomic and molecular structure of water does not constitute its substance. Such, however, must be the case. In atomic analysis we are dealing with such things as measurements of quantity, extension, distances and energies which clearly fall under the accidents of Quantity and Relation. In other words, with atomic or sub-atomic analysis, quantum theory, speculations about such things as superstrings, or any other physical analysis of any substance we are still in the realm of accidental reality. All this, of course, makes perfect sense if we simply step back a bit from what has become the almost

universal tyranny of modern scientific thinking. If we use our common sense, there is no way, for instance, in which we can equate the marvelous thing which is water with the atomic fact of a few electrons in orbit around a few protons. Such an atomic structure is necessary to water's continued existence, and it is certainly true that a change in these quantitative and relational structures involves the change of water into something else; but this does not at all mean that such a structure is equivalent, or determinant of, what water **is**. We might make a loose comparison to human life. Very small changes in the chemical structure of our blood, or in hormones, or in neurology can cause death. This does not at all mean, however, that these things constitute the substance that we know as human life. Substance is not reducible to any combination of accidental being.

We can therefore see why in the transubstantiation of the substance of the Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ at the Consecration, all the accidental properties of real bread and wine can be measured and proved to still exist after the Consecration. If they did not, then this would not be transubstantiation. The accidents **have to** remain, and they must be measurable. This is also why Catholics are not involving themselves in cannibalism when they partake of the Substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. They are not receiving all the accidents (color, taste, texture, smell, etc.) of human flesh and blood, the eating of which justifiably evokes in us a strong reaction of disgust.

At the same time, however, we rightly speak of the Eucharistic change as involving a change in the physical substances called bread and wine. In other words, not everything that constitutes physical nature can be measured or gauged by one of the nine categories of accidental being. In fact, the most important part of any physical thing, its substantial being, cannot be measured at all. It is truly **metaphysical**, not in the sense of it being above what is physical, but in the sense of it being beyond physics or any sort of physical analysis. It is, in other words, beyond any form of measurement or quantification. Yet it is an absolutely integral part of its **physical nature**.

What then is substance? If the substance of any self-subsisting physical thing is not reducible to anything that can be measured, or anything that can be analyzed by the other categories of being, then what is substance? What is water, for instance? Or, for that matter, what is a proton or an electron?

The Aristotelian doctrine which explains the nature of substance is called *hylomorphism*, this word being composed of two Greek words (hyle and morphe), meaning matter and form respectively. In scholastic terminology, we would say that any physical substance is the union of primal matter with substantial form. The philosopher Paul Glenn offers an explanation of these two principles of any physical substance:

“Now all bodies – solid, liquid, gaseous, living, non-living – are at one in this point: they are *bodies*. There is something, therefore, in all bodies, some substratum, some substantial principle, which is common to them: it makes bodies. There is also in bodies something substantial which distinguishes them into different species or essential kinds of bodies. By reason of the first substantial principle each body is *a body*; by reason of the second substantial principle each body is *this essential kind of body*. The first substantial principle is called Prime Matter; the second is called Substantial Form” (*The History of Philosophy*, p. 90-91).

There is a point to be made here which is absolutely crucial to our discussion concerning the nature of all created things. The reader will remember that in the Aristotelian-Thomistic scheme of things there are only ten categories of being – one of substance and nine of accidents. We are now at the point of analyzing physical substance itself. We are therefore ontologically “below” or “previous” to any category of being. Substantial Form and Prime Matter are not to be considered as in any way independent being, or as in any way as “existents” previous to their union in some particular substance. Substantial Form and Primary Matter, while being totally real and necessary to our understanding of the nature of any physical thing, and of God’s creative action, are not in themselves to be considered any sort of being. They are, in the terminology of St. Thomas, *principles* of being.

And yet we know that these *principles* of being are absolutely necessary to our understanding any physical thing. It is our everyday experience that when we encounter any substantial thing, we are face to face with something that must have a form which makes it what it is and not something else. A cow is a cow, and not a man or molecule of water, or a banana. Yet this *form* is not identifiable with anything (including atomic structure) that we can quantify or with any of the other accidental categories of being. At the same time, we also encounter the fact that this thing is “material”, and that the form itself would not exist without being *informed* in matter. It is therefore integral to all our knowledge of created things that these two *principles* of being are real. And since these *principles* cannot be *categorized* as any sort of existent being, it is at this point that any created substance devolves upon God’s creation of all things from nothing. It is here that the human intellect hovers over what scripture refers to as the glorious, mysterious, hidden, and secret work of God. We must be clear, however, that these two principles of created being are not in any way to be identified with God’s Being. They are the first *principles* of being encountered by the human intellect within creation itself.

With these two *principles*, we also stand at the source of all integrity and truth in philosophical knowledge. We are at that point where the human mind assents to two truths which are absolutely essential to both human and divine integrity. These two truths are: 1) that every created substance **is what it is** simply because God willed its creation, as such, out of nothing and, 2) that God is absolutely distinct from all created reality. These two truths are encapsulated

in one absolutely defined dogma of the Catholic Faith: Creation *ex nihilo*. And it is here where, I think, all heresy begins.

It is this wondrous, mysterious, and hidden point that human hubris finds so difficult to leave alone. There can be no creation *ex nihilo* if this point is violated, and yet it is astounding the extent to which Christian philosophers of all sorts of stamps and denominations, who would never have admitted to denying the doctrine of God's creation from nothing, have violated this point in their metaphysics.

Reductive science is the most destructive heresy of our times. But it is more than a heresy. It is an ambience, a poisoned atmosphere, which modern man takes in with virtually every breath. This poison tells man that he is reducible to accidental properties – that his love is reducible to hormonal reactions; his aspirations for truth reducible to conditioned responses; his belief in God a neurological reaction to fear and uncertainty.

But its most destructive effect is that it eliminates that fundamental mysteriousness about life and creation which leads a person to think about and hunger after God. This is why there is now so much *indifference* towards God. And this is also why, despite all the scientific and technological advance of our time, man becomes more and more confused not only as to his own nature, but also as to the nature of the smallest substance. It is not that analytical science is intrinsically evil, but rather that it is intrinsically superficial simply because quantitative analysis can never touch or understand the nature of any substance created by God out of nothing.

There is a profound "disconnect" between what science views as ultimate substance and human experience. For the scientist who believes (and virtually all do) in the identification of "atoms" (or whatever) with substantial physical nature, there is no solution to this "disconnect." Anyone interested in this subject might want to read John Horgan's book *The End of Science*. Mr. Horgan, former senior writer at *Scientific American*, documents this "disconnect" through interviews with over 40 of the most prominent scientists in the world (many Nobel prize winners). With each interview one encounters what might be described as a new Mad-Hatter. Not one of these scientists has an explanation for this disparity between what we experience as reality, and what appears to them (and they differ among themselves greatly) to be the ultimate substantial nature of physical reality. Not one of them could explain, or draw any logical connection, between H₂O and the marvelous substance we know as water.

In other words, as the result of reductive scientific analysis and its prevailing domination of the thinking processes in the civilized world, we are all living in what might be called a dysfunctional state of epistemological schizophrenia. There is no connection between what we experience as being real with our ordinary senses, mind, heart, and what we have come to believe to be real in terms of reductive scientific analysis. We have, in other words, all become philosophical Mad-Hatters.

And, of course, it shows. The basic effect of reductive scientific analysis upon all human thinking is the ultimate conviction that we cannot be sure that we really know anything. This is not only a conclusion present in the minds of wooly-headed nuclear physicists, but it is something which has penetrated to the most intimate nooks and crannies of the average persons thoughts, emotions, aspirations, beliefs, and attitudes. It's ultimate fruits, of course, are confusion, relativism, cynicism, agnosticism, atheism, despair, and immorality. It is, in other words, the most destructive idea of all time – far more destructive than any child-devouring ancient Idol.

If we wish to know why we have with us the wholesale destruction of what was once Christian civilization; if we wish to know why we now have the murders of millions of the unborn every year, wholesale pornography, child-abuse (and yes, priestly pedophilia), rampant homosexuality, children murdering their fellow students and teachers in school shootings, the drug problem, increased suicide rates, a vast loss of civil courtesy and honesty, the virtual total loss of all public morality, and an endless list of other evils, we need only to look at the common link that connects all these evils. Human beings and societies have simply lost that basic spirituality and rationality founded upon belief in the substantial reality of man's natural perception, which in turn has profoundly undermined man's ability to believe in any notion of objective, absolute Truth. Consequently, they have also lost the moral will capable of following through upon what the mind perceives to be absolutely true. This loss of mind and will is the absolutely logical fruit of a worldwide scientific "ambience" which reduces all of creation and all human beings and their activities to blind material forces.

This is the world that science has built, and it is the world which now faces a decay and dissolution which will make any previous holocaust appear miniscule. The "scientific" experiments of Communism and Nazism are only mild precursors and foreshadowers of what is yet to come unless the hold is broken upon this "Brave New Scientific World," and we return to a truly Christian civilization, which achieved perfection of intellectual expression in the great synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas.

In Him We live, and Move, and Are

There is one other principle of Thomistic metaphysics which we need to understand before we enter, in my next lecture, into a discussion of the significant differences which exist between Catholic and Eastern Orthodox philosophy and theology. This is the principle which is called "the Analogy of Being." At the very center of the magnificent Thomistic philosophical understanding of man and his relationship to God is the beautiful passage from the book of Acts in which St. Paul, while addressing the Athenians, proclaims:

“That they should seek God, if happily they may feel after him or find him, although he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and are.” (Acts 17:27)

The only philosophical approach, the only metaphysics, which makes possible this intimacy with God, without this in any way involving a false pantheistic identification of human nature with the Divine, is that understanding of creation which sees the substantial nature of all created substances as being the action of God creating and sustaining them out of nothing every moment of their existence. St. Thomas writes:

"I answer that, God is in all things; not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident; but as an agent is present to that upon which it works...Now since God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated.... Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermostly." (Q. 8, A.1).

Again, Thomas writes: "He is in all things as giving them being, power, and operation," this is in accord with the passage from the Book of Isaiah: "Lord...Thou hast wrought all our works in us. (Isaias 26: 12).

Again, all of this makes sense. The Infinitude and Perfection of God require that absolutely nothing in the universe exist independent of Him. In the Epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul writes:

"For **in** him were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him and **in** him." (Col 1:16).

This created intimacy between man and God has tremendous implications. Man being created in God's image, this means there is a real analogy of being between the being of man and the Supreme Being of God. The consequences of this truth for the science of epistemology – the philosophical science which is concerned with how man knows, and the reliability of his knowledge – are enormous. Under normal conditions, man's knowledge is reliable. The substances that he perceives really are substances created by God from nothing. St. Thomas writes:

“And thus we must needs say that the human soul knows all things in the eternal types, since by participation of these types we know all things. For the intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal types (I, 84, 5)

In other words, the reason we possess a true knowledge of substances is because God created the intellectual light that is within us in such a way that, despite the fact that our minds possess no innate knowledge at birth, they are created and structured in such a way as to perceive the substantial nature of things whose types or substantial forms exist eternally in the mind of God. In other words, with the metaphysics and epistemology of St. Thomas, the whole world becomes real once again. At the same time the world of epistemological skepticism which began with Descartes, flowered into subjective madness with Kant, and invaded the Church in the form of Phenomenalism – all this subjectivism, and the mental confusion and relativism which are its fruit, are put to route. In other words, sanity is restored to the human race.

But much more is given to us through Thomistic philosophy than mere natural sanity. Man has once again been connected, in the deepest faculty of his soul - his intellect – to God. Man's knowledge is reliable because it is rooted in a participated likeness in the light of God's intellect. And because we can now truly believe that man sees creation as God sees it, we can now also believe in the possibility of man seeing God even as man is seen by God.

Man's Deification

God, Whose intimacy to us is such that He sustains us in our natural being every moment of our lives, has yet willed for us a union with Him which infinitely surpasses our natural being and power. He has willed our deification – the vision of, and communion with, His Divine Essence.

In order to philosophically and theologically penetrate into how this can be possible we must appreciate the extent to which the concept of "being" is absolutely central to our understanding of both God and man.

We speak of God as the Supreme "Being." God defines Himself to Moses as "I Am Who Am." The Catholic understanding of this Self-definition of God is that this means that God is, as we say, "His own man." He is totally uncaused, His Essence being undetermined by anything outside Himself. He is what **He is**, and not what anything or anyone else has in any way determined Him to be.

This also means that His Essence is identical with His Existence. There is no potentiality in Him to change, to become something different, or to cease to Be What He is. In scholastic terminology He is pure Act –where the word "Act" denotes that which is opposed to all potentiality. This connotation of the word "Act" comes down to us in our saying that something or someone is fully "actualized." This, of course, means also that God is infinitely "fulfilled" in

Himself with no need from anything outside Himself. The only necessity which we can apply to God therefore is the interior necessity, determined freely by Himself alone, of Being Who He is. All acts outside Himself involve no necessity whatsoever, but are simply acts of the Divine freedom.

The supreme concept, both theological and philosophical, of "Who God is" is therefore the concept of Being. Closely allied to the concept of Being is the concept of Nature. God's Being is also His Nature, where the word "Nature" is conceived of as Being or Essence in Operation." The only real distinction between the words "essence" and "nature" is that the word "Nature" is used from the perspective of how a thing operates. When, therefore, we say that God's essence is identical to His existence or nature, we are simply saying that He **is** His Knowledge and Truth, He **is** His Will, He **is** His Goodness, He **is** His Beauty. In other words, God has a specific Nature which, if we are not to affirm duplicity and division in God, must be affirmed as united in Divine Simplicity with His Essence. We will see in my next lecture that Eastern Orthodoxy categorically denies this Absolute Divine Simplicity.

God created man in His own image. Therefore, the fundamental principle of man's existence, as it is in God, is the principle of being. God is infinite Being, man is finite being. Who man is, is determined by God creating his substantial form or essence out of nothing. Man's essence we find expressed in his nature. And so we say that man is created in the image of God because he possesses a spiritual soul with the faculties of intellect and Will. The proper object of the intellect is truth; the highest expression of the will is love. And herein we have what Catholic theologians term "the Analogy of Being, in that man is created with the faculties and the destiny to image his God Who is Truth and Love.

This truth is immensely important for understanding man's relationship to God, and the possibility of his deification. The essence of God is not totally *incomprehensible* to man. The essence of God is transcendent, but not remote. The Analogy of Being provides us with a way of understanding that there is an intimate relationship between our highest values and Who God is in His Essence. It also provides us, as we shall see, with the ability to understand that there is a certain *proportion* (St. Thomas' word) between God and man which is the basis upon which God's Grace can enable us to see and be united with His very Essence in the Beatific Vision.

This vision of the Essence of God is made possible, first of all, because God is not unknowable, but, on the contrary, is infinitely knowable. St. Thomas writes:

“Since everything is knowable according as it is actual, God, Who is pure act without any admixture of potentiality, is in Himself supremely knowable.” (I, 12, A.1).

As we shall see, this is in direct and total contradiction to the teaching of Palamite Eastern Orthodoxy which absolutely insists that the Essence of God is totally unknowable either in this life or the next.

Second, this vision of the Essence of God is possible because there is true proportion between the intellect of man and the Essence of God. This "proportion" extends to the possibility of the Vision of the Divine Essence. St. Thomas, in *Summa Contra Gentiles, LIV*, writes:

"There is indeed proportion between the created intellect and understanding God, a proportion **not of measure**, but of **aptitude**, such as of matter for form, or cause for effect. In this way there is no reason against there being in the creature a proportion to God, consisting in the aptitude of an intelligent being for an intelligible object, as well as of effect in respect of its cause."

This **proportion** (a proportion of **aptitude** in accordance with the **analogy of being**) is also why, as St. Thomas says, the positive Names of God such as Essence, Being, Love, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty apply to God *substantially*. In other words, the highest values of which the human intellect can conceive bear an actual proportion to Who God Is. And this is also the reason why the *Light of Glory* is able to raise the created intellect to the direct Vision of God's Essence:

"Moreover, this light raises the created intellect to the vision of God, not on account of its affinity to the divine substance, but on account of the power which it receives from God to produce such an effect: although in its being it is infinitely distant from God, as the second argument stated. **For this light unites the created intellect to God, not in being but only in understanding.**" (Ibid).

The human intellect, in other words, created in the image of God and bearing a proportion of aptitude to the vision of God, also bears the aptitude to receive the Grace of Glory from God which will enable it to see God's Essence. Again, in Article 5 of Question 12, St. Thomas writes:

"On the contrary, It is written: In thy light we shall see light (Ps. xxxv. 10).

*I answer that, Everything which is raised up to what exceeds its nature, must be prepared by some disposition above its nature; as, for example, if air is to receive the form of fire, it must be prepared by some disposition for such a form. But when any created intellect sees the essence of God, the essence of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the intellect. ...And this is the light spoken of in the Apocalypse (xxi. 23). The glory of God hath enlightened it – vis. the society of the blessed who see God. By this light the blessed are made *deiform* – that is,*

like to God, according to the saying: *When He shall appear we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is* (1 John, ii. 2)."

St. Thomas gives us the following description of the blessed in Heaven:

"But the blessed possess these three things in God; because they see Him, and in seeing Him, possess Him as present, having the power to see Him always; and possessing Him, they enjoy Him as the ultimate fulfillment of desire." (Ibid).

This Vision of the Divine Essence is not to be confused with "comprehending" God in all His Fullness. Again, St. Thomas:

"God, whose being is infinite, as was shown above, is infinitely knowable. Now no created intellect can know God infinitely. For the created intellect knows the divine essence more or less perfectly in proportion as it receives a greater or lesser light of glory. Since therefore the created light of glory received into any created intellect cannot be infinite, it is clearly impossible for any created intellect to know God in an infinite degree. Hence it is impossible that it should comprehend God." (Ibid, A.7).

In other words, because we are granted the eternal vision of God's Essence does not at all mean that we will every totally comprehend Him. This, again, is a beautiful affirmation of our humanity which will not be destroyed, but only perfected, in Heaven. Even in terms of human relationships we speak of really coming to know a person, of somehow having seen to the very core of who he or she is, and of being united in love, without this in any way meaning that we possess total comprehension of all that is in that person's mind and heart. In other words, man does not comprehend God, not because His Essence is unknowable, but because He is **infinitely knowable** and therefore never subject to full comprehension from a finite being.

We thus have the perfect Catholic solution as to how the human person can come to full union with God in the Beatific Vision, and be in complete and Eternal possession of the Vision of the Divine Essence, without this union or vision in any way involving a pantheistic confusion of the human and Divine.

We are also now positioned to examine, in my next lecture, the profound differences which exist between Thomistic Catholicism and Palamite Orthodoxy.