

A RESPONSE (II) TO LOUIS DUPRÉ

Professor Dupré has pinpointed a single perspective from which to comprehend the theological categories of transcendence and immanence. The dominance of a particular concept of transcendence in Western thought, he argues, that of cause, may lie at the root of the cultural and religious dilemmas of our time. While I would ask whether "cause" was used univocally by all the philosophers he cites, and would argue that it certainly was used analogously by Aquinas in reference to God, Professor Dupré may be right in maintaining the inadequacy of one type of causal model in theology. Efficient cause, even used analogously of the relation between God and the human person, tends to juxtapose "two beings of which one depends on the other in the same order of reality," and inevitably leads to theological difficulty. Whether this be the old problem of predestination, grace, and freedom, or the meaning of providence and authentic moral responsibility, the question is the same: is the concept of efficient cause adequate today to both the surpassing transcendence and intimate immanence of God witnessed in the Christian message and in the spiritual traditions of Christianity?

Professor Dupré gives two indications of theological alternatives, one in those theologians who emphasized God's uncreated immanence rather than created grace, and the other in the panentheism of the Whiteheadian tradition. These hints converge in the theological synthesis of Karl Rahner, both in his stress on uncreated grace and in the thrust of his entire project toward certain emphases of process theology. Most important, however, the transcendental tradition in Catholic theology offers a foundational approach to God which develops precisely that trend in Aquinas which Professor Dupré cites as an ambiguity in relation to the clearly delineated causal notion, a Thomastic understanding of God in the realm of participation. God is known while remaining unknown, not as an object but as the ground or horizon of human performance (*Vollzug*). While I do not argue that Rahner's synthesis solves all the problems of the contemporary religious crisis as it has been sketched, it does seem that his thought offers powerful resources within the Catholic tradition for addressing elements of it.

Since Rahner's thought is familiar to this audience, it will be sufficient simply to point to those aspects relevant to the issues of

transcendence and immanence, and to indicate some suggestions for further development.

1. Most fundamental is the philosophical concept of God adopted by theology. Rahner moves away from the objectification of God as cause by providing, not a proof of God's existence, but a way of philosophical reflection on the conditions of possibility for theology (and religious experience). His transcendental method means that the existence of God is not inferred from the contingency of empirical objects; rather we know these objects of ordinary experience only through a co-affirmation of God as the *a priori* condition of their being and being known at all. Thus the radical immanence of God to human experience is posited as is God's absolute transcendence—for God cannot be known at all as an object; terms such as "horizon" and "ground" serve to indicate the ever-escaping or surpassing character of the source and goal of human knowledge and love.¹

Rahner's appropriation of the Kantian method and problematic raises the question of what Professor Dupré refers to as the devastating religious-cultural effect of the objectivist view of transcendence, the issue of freedom, value, and causal dependence. Because Rahner's fundamental notion of God is not a causal one, the mystery of human freedom is placed from the outset in terms of participation. The pre-apprehension of Being conjoins human freedom, love, and historicity with knowledge, especially knowledge of God.² Thus the human person is most radically free and transcendent, is a project of self-creation before God, while being the most radically dependent of creatures precisely in this participated freedom. The highest exemplar of this Creator-creature relationship is found in Jesus, the Christ, the supreme instance of utter dependence and autonomous freedom. "Radical dependence upon [God] increases in direct, and not in inverse, proportion with genuine self-coherence before [God]."³ is a principle repeated throughout Rahner's writings on creation, freedom, grace, christology.

2. Professor Dupré points to the inadequacy of the causal concept of God on the levels of both creation and grace. Again, one finds in Rahner an insistence that the essential scriptural and

¹Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. by William Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. 117-236.

²*Hörer des Wortes* (München: Kösel Verlag, 1963), pp. 91-136.

³"Current Problems in Christology," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, trans. by Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 162.

patristic meaning of grace is what later Catholic theology calls "uncreated grace." While for much scholastic speculation, God's indwelling presence is dependent on the created grace of justification, there is another scholastic perspective, he suggests, in which grace is the beginning of glory. Rahner shows that when Thomas speaks of God's essence as the "species" of beatific knowledge, he is indicating something more than a knowledge of God as efficient cause. Knowledge is the self-presence (*Beisichsein*) of an entity and hence the species is an ontological determination of the knower; knower and known are "the same thing." The only analogy for this immanence of God to the human person is the hypostatic union, where the concept Aquinas uses is formal causality.⁴ It is clear that the scholastic categories break down in expressing this presence of God in grace and glory. Rahner coins the phrase "quasi-formal causality"—"quasi" as an "emphatic reminder" of the analogical, metacategorical, mysterious character of this presence. The difference between the union in Jesus and that in the ordinary person in grace and glory is that the latter is union in knowledge and love. But it is union, nevertheless, with the "very being of God."⁵ Once again, Rahner indicates an approach to transcendence and immanence beyond the category of efficient cause.

3. Finally, Rahner's thought shows significant parallels with certain expressions of process theology, and perhaps may serve as a bridge to its partial appropriation by Roman Catholic thought. The first lies in his commitment to the partially determinative use of philosophy, and specifically of metaphysics in theology. While this stance is common to much of the Catholic tradition, there are some distinctive nuances in his thought which indicate its thrust toward process categories. An adequate theology needs the criticism as well as the concepts of philosophy: under the impact of the Kantian critique, Rahner moved beyond the more static received categories and adopted the dynamic transcendental thought of Maréchal to designate human relationship to God. Nevertheless, philosophy is an "inner moment" of theology; like process thought, Rahner's metaphysics requires theism. But for him, philosophy is subsumed by theology, which itself is bound to the religious experience and language of Scripture and the various dimensions of tradition, including the mystical and spiritual

⁴"Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," *ibid.*, pp. 325-33.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 332.

traditions.⁶ Under the weight of that data, the scholastic categories break down, as for example, in the radical immanence of God suggested by the phrase "quasi-formal causality."

The second parallel is the anthropological orientation which is common to transcendental Thomism and the process tradition. This orientation is based on a commitment to the legitimacy and importance of the "turn to the subject" of modern philosophy—for Rahner in carrying forward the Kantian problematic, for process thinkers in Whitehead's "reformed subjectivist principle."⁷ This means, for both, the centrality of subjectivity as the paradigm for conceptual thought, the turn from a cosmocentric to an anthropocentric universe, as Rahner puts it. The centrality of human experience is evident in his thought. From a somewhat narrow, intellectualist view in his early writings, there is a constant development to a richer notion of experience at present, similar to that of the Anglo-American tradition of James, Pierce, Dewey and Whitehead.⁸

The third parallel lies in Rahner's analysis of transcendence as it is placed in reference to the problem of historicity. Human history, with its temporal focus of past, present, and future, is the realm of transcendence and freedom. Again, the importance of historicity is similar to the focus on temporality in process thought. Within this context, aspects of Rahner's christology might be recalled in relation to the process tradition's critique of scholastic categories which deny a real relation to God to the human world. Rahner affirms that the doctrine of the incarnation means that God can become something, can become subject to change in something else; the incarnation, the external expression of God's inner life, provides the model of love rather than knowledge for creation as well as grace.⁹ Thus he writes, God "undergoes history, change

⁶Cf. Klaus P. Fischer, *Der Mensch als Geheimnis* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) for an analysis of the sources in spirituality of Rahner's theology.

⁷Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 238-54.

⁸John C. Robertson, "Rahner and Ogden: Man's Knowledge of God," *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970), pp. 377-407, indicates interesting parallels between Rahner and Schubert Ogden, for example, with regard to theological anthropology, revelation, and christology. Theological anthropology, for both thinkers, is rooted in genuine knowledge of God: Rahner's validation of the knowledge of God lies in analysis of human knowledge and love, Ogden's in that of moral experience. For both, however, such knowledge is not objectifying. The God whose radical immanence and transcendence is affirmed in ordinary experience is known rather as the horizon or light of the intellect, the ground of moral confidence.

⁹"On the Theology of the Incarnation," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, trans. by Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 115.

and so too time; the time of the world is [God's] own history."¹⁰ And there is Rahner's version of a Teilhardian christology. Many elements of process thought are recalled in this perspective which involves the relation of matter and spirit, hominisation, and an evolutionary world-view. Creation exists for the sake of the incarnation; this is the goal of evolutionary history, the fullest development of the convergence of matter and spirit in the human person, the manifestation of the "worldliness" of God. Christ subsumes matter and history, making it a reality of God's own life. And in this single evolutionary process, God is understood not merely as efficient cause but as the transcendental ground of all life and activity, of nature and history.¹¹

These indications of Rahner's non-objectivist approach to the radical immanence and transcendence of God and of certain congenialities in his thought to process categories are offered for two reasons. One is to indicate that there are resources in Catholic theology which address the conceptual problem Professor Dupré has outlined. The other is to suggest that some of the important moves in the transcendental tradition, in Rahner's thought at least, are in the direction of process thought. One might speculate that some form of Thomism was the only option available in his time and place. Today, and in this country, those moves might better be formulated in process categories. A distinctively Roman Catholic process theology might overcome the remaining ambiguities in Rahner's synthesis (the nature/grace or double gratuity problem, "privatism" vs. a needed sociality) while expressing more adequately his thrust toward a single order of creation and grace, knowledge and love. Catholic theology's commitment to its own spiritual and mystical traditions might enrich and indeed add flesh to the bones of process thought. And it might use process categories to overcome that often criticized terminology which denies a real involvement of God in human affairs.

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¹⁰"Theological Observations on the Concept of Time," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 11, trans. by David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 307-8.

¹¹"Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, trans. by Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), pp. 157-92. See William C. Shepherd, *Man's Condition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) for a synthesis of the whole of Rahner's theology from this perspective.