GRACE, THEOLOGIZING AND THE HUMANIZING OF MAN

I. Introduction

A real concern for the humanizing of man is one of the characteristics of Western culture. The famous words of Protagoras still embody our whole outlook on life: "Man is the measure of all things." This deep concern generated a real sense of solidarity, already expressed in the verse of Terence in one of his comedies: "Man I am, and nothing human is alien to me."

This dominant humanism was at the same time corrected by a deep sense of the divine. No less a person than Plato himself insisted on contradicting Protagoras when he wrote in his *Laws:* "God is for us the measure of all things, much more indeed than some man somewhere, as has been said" (716; Lib. IV). Unfortunately the Greek mind was rather haunted by the inexorable necessity of Fate than fascinated by the divine Beauty and Love. The desperate struggle for liberation, manifest also in the Greek mysteries resulted in the association by philosophical thought—another way of salvation!—of the Supreme Being with necessity. The Supreme Intelligibility appeared at the dawn of Western thought inseparably associated with absolute immobility and inner necessity.[1]

This equation introduced into Western culture an almost intolerable tension. I am not going to expand on this. From the time of St. Augustine, the father of Western thought, we find the characteristic and often repeated theme in the theology of grace: *De gratia et libero arbitrio,* or even more explicitly: *De praedestinatione et libero arbitrio.* From the fifth century on the occidental mind has always been obsessed by the dilemma between the absoluteness of God's transcendent and mysterious necessity and the fascination of contingent human liberty.

This tension, inherent to Western religious thought has not

[1] Leslie Dewart, *The Foundations of Belief* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 50-57.

abated at all. On the contrary, it seems to us more virulent to-day. We must, however, add one qualification: henceforth we use the word "Western culture" in a more restrictive way, as characterizing the religious world which has been shaped by the Latin Church in Western Europe, and which spread itself all over North and South America. Though the Eastern Orthodox churches possess the same cultural ancestry as we do, the Greek culture that is, they seem from very early times to have avoided the radicalization of this spiritual dilemma. So far as we are able to evaluate their evolution, they have developed a more contemplative attitude, also expressed in their liturgy and art, which brought about an integration of the deep sense of God's majesty and glory with the experience of human life. We suspect that one of the reasons for this different evolution was their mystical sense of God's unapproachable mystery, connected with a spontaneous acceptance of the symbolic function and meaning of the created universe in expressing his mystery. As both Church and Empire were viewed as rooted in the majesty of the "Pantocrator," so too the created universe was the iconic revelation of the invisible and unknowable God. However, we have neither the competence nor the time to enlarge upon this very different tradition in humanism. It is good to remain aware of the fact that, within the large tradition of the Christian faith, there is indeed a tradition, rooted in the preaching of the Apostles, which follows a different pattern, entailing, of course, its own advantages and disadvantages, as does ours. Western Christian tradition is not the only possible vision of the realities God revealed to us in his Son through the inspiration of his Spirit.

I said before that our present Western culture, far from having softened the Western dilemma, has brought it to an almost intolerable climax. The most striking example is given by the recent evolution towards a better humanism in the Marxist world. We are not speaking, of course, of the rigid orthodoxy of party-line Marxism, which is principally concerned with main structures of power, even at the cost of extreme violence and dictatorial tyranny. We are thinking rather of those Marxists exemplified in the Prague Spring and the heroic figure of Dubček, of those Marxist humanists, as Ernest Bloch, Roger Garaudy and Vitezlav Gardavsky, who have

accepted a dialogue with the Christians, precisely because they recognize in them somehow the same concern with human dignity and freedom.

The paradox of Western thought is clearly shown by their often repeated conviction that every re-introduction of faith in God will inevitably threaten human dignity and freedom. If these thinkers remain atheists, in contradiction to their own sincere spiritualism, it is because they believe in man, and because they are convinced from the experience of the last centuries that there is no hope for human dignity in a deeply religious world.

This conviction is by no means a sudden and unexpected phenomenon of our secularized world. It was prepared by a long evolution of philosophical, social and scientific thought, outside the churches, who, as a matter of fact, generally refused to understand this evolution of Western man. God and man exist in radical competition with one another.[2] There is no more decisive dilemma for modern man than to choose either for God and the Christian tradition and to forsake at the same time any hope for man's dignity, or to choose the dignity of man, leaving far behind the "old time religion" and faith in God as a pre-humanistic illusion.

As theme for our paper we shall therefore take one of the leading concerns of the Dutch theologian, Piet Schoonenberg, in the evolution of his theology: "God or man: a false dilemma."[3]

Our paper will therefore consist of two parts. In the first section

[2] J. J. Buskes, *God en Mens als concurrenten* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1971) gives a historical survey of some of those views.

[3] Piet Schoonenberg wrote as early as 1955: "It may also be expressed thus: in both creation and covenant the dilemma "God or man" is excluded; in both God alone is the cause of man's being himself," *Covenant and Creation* (Notre Dame University Press, 1969) 125. He referred to it again in 1958, when elaborating his first Christology in *Het Geloof van ons Doopsel,* vol. 3 ('s Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1958) 134-40 esp. 138-39 and again in 251. He explicitly chose this theme for his inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Nijmegen in Holland in his first public lecture as newly appointed professor in Dogmatics: *God of mens: een vals dilemma; Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van gewoon hoogleraar in de dogmatieke theologie op vrijdag 14 mei 1965* ('s Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1965). Finally he consecrated a whole chapter to this same theme in *The Christ: A Study of the God-Man Relationship in the Whole of Creation and in Jesus Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) 13-49.

we shall analyze how the fore-mentioned dilemma happened to reach a rather tragic climax at the beginning of this century. In the second section we will show how we may eventually try to correct the century-old perspective of Western thought so as to avoid a dilemma we are convinced to be false, at least on the basis of our religious faith.

II. The Exasperation of the Dilemma: God or Man

We have reached, we have already said, a kind of climax in the tension between our faith in God and our faith in man. It is rather a curious fact. Quite often the human mind succeeds, after centuries of effort, in elaborating a temporarily satisfying integration of two opposing poles within a vision of life. I think, at least, that some valid integration was attained indeed in the patristic era and the Middle Ages, even if one may feel inclined to agree with the objection that this was achieved somehow at the cost of man. About the sixteenth century Europe re-discovered the meaning of humanism, and now we might argue that we restored human values at the cost of God. Even within the dialectical thrust and growth from one extreme to the other we still seem incapable of freeing ourselves from the obsession that one extreme must absorb and destroy the other.

No need to say that whenever we refer to historical periods such reference has none but a symptomatic value. When we refer e.g. to the sixteenth century we only mean to say that during that century the re-discovery of human values became so dominant that it expressed itself in typical forms of culture, literature, politics and other forms of thought and life. One may go back, however, to former centuries and point to some earlier signs of the coming tide. Evolution in history is never uniform or abrupt. Older currents still remain underground or are still clearly noticeable somewhere within a changing world. In this sense we could say that Luther remained basically a medieval mind, though the Reformation was undoubtedly instrumental in later developments. The same could be said of Baius and Jansenius.

We all know that it is impossible to fix a date for the beginning of any new development. In a way the Renaissance was born far off

amidst the Byzantine civilization and was driven towards the West under the pressure of the invading Turks. It is only later, sometimes centuries after the events, that historians can identify some decisive options or rejections. We add the word "rejections," because history is no more unilinear than it is uniform. Regressions frequently threaten our steps towards the future. Those regressions may affect some particular social, cultural or national groups, or spread all over a continent, absorbing the emergent future, or banishing it from the mainstream of the resisting culture.

We just said that the Christian churches as a whole, though they doubtless collaborated in many ways towards the liberation of man, remained primarily regressive or defensive. To give a few examples, the abolition of slavery, the end of the almost maniac witch-burning during the seventeenth century, the emancipation of the working classes, the autonomy of the human sciences, of political activity and philosophy were largely the result of non-religious, and just because of that, of anti-religious, or at least anticlerical initiatives and movements, even though we Christians like to point to some remarkable churchmen or saints who did not conform to the common ghetto-attitude of the Church. As we shall have to see very soon, early Jesuit theologians who courageously ventured to integrate the re-discovery of man into their theology, were very soon led astray by some other influences of the times to arrive at the most anti-human theology of grace to be found in the Church's history. A similar phenomenon, that is, the evolution from Puritan severity and sobriety into a self-confident capitalistic way of life, was described by Max Weber in relation to the development of Calvinism.

In a certain sense a good historian knows better what happened many centuries ago than those living at the time; at least, his view is more comprehensive, more panoramic, and therefore more true than either the scandalized or enthusiastic, scornful or empathetic feelings of people living in the midst of historical turmoil.[4]

The human mind reaches truth by means of a certain degree of abstraction. Especially in such a short paper as ours, we shall have to simplify the structures of past history. We believe, however, that

[4] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London, 1972) 208-34.

by outlining those basic structures and trends, for all the baffling variety of contradicting events and doctrines, we do acquire a better view of what actually happened. We have, of course, to recognize that this effort of abstraction implies an unavoidable pluralism in approach, in perspective and in concern, so that one historian's interpretation does not fully coincide with the interpretation of another. They do not have to coincide, but it suffices when they complement one another. The important thing in this matter is not to explain everything, but to discover those facts and meanings which permit a better understanding.

The sixteenth century was a time of crisis, as ours is, and largely for the same reasons. Father J. H. Walgrave, O.P., professor at the University of Louvain, a specialist in Newman and Ortega y Gasset, both philosophers of the development of human doctrine and culture, has worked out a remarkable synthesis of what happened to our world in the sixteenth century and after, especially in the doctrine of grace.[5] Unhappily his book has still not been published in English translation because of the crisis which affects religious publishers and booksellers to-day all over our Western world, one more example incidentally of the crisis we are in.

With Newman, Ortega y Gasset and some German philosophers of hermeneutics such as Gadamer, Father Walgrave asserts that men of a given culture think and act within the perspectives of a common, mostly unconscious and deeply rooted orientation of mind—a commonly accepted frame of reference—which works as a "pre-understanding," as a basic pre-conception of our existence inside the universe in which we live. The patristic and medieval mind saw human existence as primarily rooted in, or directed towards God. Grace within this "pre-understanding" of man could never be thought of as a "supernatural" reality, as was the case later. Grace was seen as the aspect of realization, actualization of the deep-rooted God-orientation of man. It supported the *epistrophé,* the return back to God which had been initiated by God himself in the *proödos* gesture of creation. This idea of a cosmic rhythm, of an *exitus-reditus* tide,

[5] J. H. Walgrave, *Geloof en theologie in de crisis* (Kasterlee: De Vroente, 1966).

as it was translated into Latin, and compared by Ruusbroec, the great Flemish mystic, to the flooding and ebbing tides of a divine ocean, had been introduced so many centuries before by the works of Denys the Areopagite.

This view of Walgrave has been confirmed by some statements of Henry de Lubac and Heiko A. Oberman, who both affirm that the notion of a "pure nature" appeared only as late as the fourteenth century, and even then rather as a mere hypothetical notion related to the speculations around the *potentia absoluta Dei* of the Nominalists.[6] Frequently the classicist theology contends that the introduction of the supernatural was enforced upon Thomas by his acceptation of Aristotelean philosophy, especially of human nature.[7] However, G. de Lagarde, the historian of fifteenth century culture and philosophy contends that the influence of Aristotle was, as so often in human history, rather ambivalent. If Aristotle prepared for the discovery of human autonomy, he also stressed and confirmed the commonly accepted God-orientated conception of man and life because of his own God-centered conception of the universe.[8] The real Aristotle was not discovered until after the sixteenth century, or probably even later. The Middle Ages were still too Christian to read him in a context different from their own.

A more efficacious way to establish this generally God-orientated pre-understanding of the medieval mind is to be found, as my experience shows, outside strict theology. The identity of the same Latin language and the largely similar theological terminology make it almost impossible for anybody but a historically sensitive mind to realize that the same words and sentences might have had rather different meanings over the span of three or more centuries. On the contrary, when the same problem, which is necessarily also a cultural problem, is approached in terms of the relations between

[6] H. de Lubac, *Surnaturel,* Études historiques (*Théologie,* 8) (Paris: Aubier, 1946) 103-13. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Press, 1963) 47-50.

[7] For instance Juan Alfaro, "Nature, The Theological Concept," *Sacramentum Mundi,* vol. 4 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 172-75.

[8] G. de Lagarde, *La naissance de l'esprit laïque au déclin du Moyen Age,* vol. III, *Defensor Pacis* (Paris, 1970) 305-6.

Church and State where no theological terminology is involved, there might be a greater hope to convert the historically blind.[9]

Whatever the success of this different approach may be, I know how difficult it is to convert people who still accept what Bernard Lonergan calls the classicist view of culture, as opposed to the empirical notion of culture we possess to-day.[10] I have no time in this paper to try to convert the still unconverted. I can only say that this is my conviction, and that my view on the history of grace is deeply affected by it.

The sixteenth century brought a sharp acceleration in the cultural evolution of the Western world, which now, after three centuries, may look analogous to the well-known biological leap. Man discovered himself as the center of the universe. His life on earth had a meaning, had values, showed a broad range of possibilities. Since the Aristotelean categories were still in use, this discovery was very soon expressed in philosophical and theological terms borrowed from this form of thought. Man was constituted by a "nature," moving towards its final end through the mediation of appropriated activities, identified as "natural" acts. We may dispute whether Cajetan took the initiative in re-thinking the synthesis of St. Thomas in the light of this new orientation and perspective, or Bellarmine, influenced by a few professors of Louvain, Ruard Tapper and Joannes Driedo whom he met during his stay in that university between 1570 and 1576.[11] As a matter of fact, the doctrine of Baius was primarily directed against those two professors of Louvain we just mentioned, who preceded him by half a generation. The fact is that this new approach to the mystery of grace was very soon and easily accepted in many countries against the bitter opposition of Baius, Jansenius and the Jansenists in the Low Countries and France.

However, once theology had delimited the area of a human "nature," characterized by its own finality, it had to find some way

[9] P. Faynel, *L'Église* (*Le Mystère chrétien*) (Paris: Desclée, 1970) vol. II, 101-228.

[10] B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology, op. cit.*, p. xi, 124 and 301.

[11] For Cajetan, cf. H. de Lubac, *Surnaturel, op. cit.*, 105, 131-39, and J. H. Walgrave, *Geloof en theologie in de crisis, op. cit.*, 137-47. Piet Smulders speaks for Bellarmine in: "De oorsprong van de theorie der zuivere natuur. Vergeten meesters der Leuvense school," *Bijdragen* 10 (1949) 105-27.

to re-introduce the reality of grace. The word "supernatural" existed already, even in the Greek language, with a whole range of various meanings, as de Lubac has shown.[12] It now became invested with a new technical meaning, signifying henceforth the given reality of divine life as opposed formally to created "nature." In opposition to the new term "supernatural," the term "pure nature" emerged, and the idea was accepted that God might have created this "pure nature" for its own sake and beatitude. On the other hand, the supernatural life was described faithfully according to a theological tradition which slowly developed during the Middle Ages and was never repudiated by the Nominalists (though it never got the final approbation of the teaching *magisterium*): the doctrine of the infused habitus of grace and the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity.

There is no doubt, when we look at this history, that most of the theologians who accepted this new interpretation were initially moved by a deep pastoral concern, such as we meet in our own times too, to up-date theology in the sense of a real *aggiornamento* within the basic perspectives and orientation of one's own cultural perspectives. They wanted to integrate the powerful humanistic trend into their own Christian beliefs.

The seriousness of this pastoral concern shows clearly in the many ways they followed to focus their theological reflection upon the actual problems of their epoch. The discovery of the rest of the world, which happened at the same time, presented them with a totally new problem: the salvation of the non-Christians. They stressed human freedom in such a way as to be frequently accused of Pelagianism, and not always falsely. They promoted the autonomy of the human sciences, since so many of their fellow-priests were astronomers, mathematicians and physicists. Their most remarkable achievement was their attempt to adapt the Christian rites and forms of religious life and worship to Indian and Chinese patterns of life, a pastoral task which since Charlemagne had been totally neglected in the West. It is one of the saddest stories of that century that this endeavour was abruptly killed in its first blossom by the rites controversy in Europe and the final interdiction

12 H. de Lubac, *Surnaturel, op. cit.*, 325-430.

of Rome.[13] This abortive attempt proves at least that a new understanding of human culture had emerged within the Church, soon to be superseded by a return to the classicist view of culture. We could refer finally to the almost exuberant bloom of the Baroque culture in arts, music, drama and poetry.

This theological renewal was inspired by a deep love for, and a real confidence in man's goodness and greatness. And as long as they remained faithful to the mystical tradition of that epoch, their overconfident acceptance of humanism was healthily counterbalanced by the strength of their intense spirituality.

Unhappily, just about that time, after the condemnation of Molinos and Fénelon, and the fight of the Spanish Inquisition against the *Alumbrados,* the mystical tradition of the Church fell in disrepute. In Spain, many of the most famous spiritual writers were put on the Index, at least for the vernacular editions of their works. Any acculturation in liturgy and Christian life had been strictly forbidden. The first attacks of the modern sciences against the so-called evidences of the Bible started within the Church a countercurrent of estrangement from the mainstream of European thought, exemplified in the condemnation of Galileo. The long and bitter religious wars all over Europe destroyed whatever ecumenical openness might have existed before. As always in wars, the sense of fidelity to the old Church was metamorphosed into a triumphant sectarian patriotism, for which authority, obedience and solidarity outweighed truth and love.

However, an even worse consequence for these theological schools, especially the Suarezians, was the growth and the spreading of rationalism, especially after Descartes. Enlightment and rationalism were disastrous for both the Catholic Church and the Reformation. In our view the decisive element, determining an almost complete reversal of the theological element, and converting the humanistic perspective of the first generations into a truly inhuman philosophy and theology, was the fact that, on the ground of their rationalistic *a priori,* they definitely rejected the possibility of any

[13] Malcolm Hay, *Failure in the Far East! Why and How the Breach between the Western World and China First Began.* Since the book could not get any *Imprimatur* in England it had to be published in Wetteren, Belgium, 1956.

religious experience of grace except for extraordinary mystical states. Thus the dark night of mysticism fell over Europe for almost three centuries. And theology, severed from its true sources in religious experience, developed into abstract and conceptual systematizations. This regression showed itself quite clearly in the useless and senseless controversies between Molinists and Bañezians about predestination and freedom, the old Augustinian theme, but now approached through logical arguments. Because of a false interpretation of Trent, the living presence of God in grace, which is the very core of the mystery of grace, was reduced to a kind of consequence, a corollary of the infusion of created grace. The meaning of habitual grace, already deeply weakened by the interpretations of the Nominalists, became so thin that they started to over-emphasize the function and role of the actual grace. Behind the whole dispute between Molinists and Bañezians lurked the recrudescence of the old Western sore, the false dilemma: God or man!

When we now look at the Suarezian doctrine of grace after it had been infected by the current rationalism, we are indeed confronted with one of the saddest forms of theology we know. We have already referred to some minor details. But at the very center of their systematization we discover a strange contradiction. On the one side, only the natural aspects of human existence are open to direct and personal experience. However, those activities, remaining natural as such, have no value before God as long as they are not "elevated" by a formal intention of supernatural charity. That the nature of this "intention" was frequently discussed shows that we touch here a rather sensitive point in the system. On the other side, the supernatural dimension of our life, being closed to any form of personal experience, is known only by supernatural faith, which, of course, was conceived as purely notional, namely, the acceptance of notions we receive formally through revelation. This aspect of our life has no real impact upon our common human existence, being purely revealed and therefore vertical. Of course, because of the durable influence of older traditions, they accepted, as we may remember from handbook-theology, the argument of "congruency," which entails a silent recognition of our modern anthropological approach in theology. No large movement of theology is ever extreme.

But in this paper we have to simplify so as to highlight the defects of this theology, while remaining aware, that in so doing, we might sometimes for some people come very near to caricature.

On the human side this contradiction generated an over-emphasis on ascetism, discipline, doctrine and authority. On the supernatural side it caused a parallel over-emphasis on the notional aspect of faith, entailing an almost exclusive insistence upon doctrinal orthodoxy, the exclusive role of the teaching authority of the hierarchy in defending this orthodoxy, and, inevitably, a hardening of ecclesiastical juridicism, already rampant in the Western Church since the thirteenth century.

Supernatural life was the important thing. But disconnected from the normal conditions of human life, it strengthened a hidden tendency to describe it as the unusual, the extraordinary, the miraculous. In this context, religious life became more Christian than married life; works of "supererogation" more meritorious than the simple accomplishment of one's duty; the clergy stood higher than the laity; revealed truths, in a sense, were more true than common human truths. Salvation, grace, church, hierarchy and priesthood were all more or less accepted as descending from high heaven, pure gifts, unreachable by any social, psychological, historical or cultural achievement. In the line of the Greek tradition this supernatural world was universal and unchangeable. In the face of this absolute world the changing and insecure world of man in this valley of tears was perceived as an inevitable place for trial and sufferings rather than the reality God created as the temple of his loving presence and the proper milieu of our human existence.

Spirituality was divorced from sound theology, and thus surrendered to the darker powers of emotionalism and sentimentality. Morals manifested the same schizophrenia. They were either reduced to a kind of semi-pagan Stoicism, based on natural law, or exalted heteronomously as the direct expression of God's will, which was all too easily identified with the laws of the Church.

We could continue in this way. The older generations amongst us are sufficiently aware of this past since they suffered from it. The younger generations know it too since this vision of Christian life is still to be found in many church traditions and doctrines, which are

precisely the object of their critiques. We thought that it could be fruitful to explain our past, so as to discover more easily how to prepare our future.

III. Can We Transcend the Dilemma: God or Man?

We shall now try to see whether we can transcend the dilemma which is still haunting the Western mind.

First we notice a growing dissatisfaction with the binomial: natural or supernatural. Some German theologians call it scornfully *die Zwei-Stock-Lehre,* the doctrine of the two stories. This discontent erupted suddenly after the last war in the "New Theology" of the brilliant historical school of Lyons in France. Pius XII included many of their positions among the "dangerous tendencies" he condemned rather squarely in his encyclical *Humani generis* of August 12, 1950.[14] The condemnation of theologians and scholars such as Henry de Lubac, Henry Bouillard and Hans Urs von Balthasar stimulated many theologians to try to re-think this "traditional" doctrine which most of them were unable to imagine as having no existence during more than fourteen centuries of Christianity.

The most famous attempt was that of Karl Rahner, originally written before the condemnation and at the invitation of the French in a spirit of free discussion. I refer to his doctrine of the "supernatural existential."[15] His solution has been often misunderstood, because many are unacquainted with the transcendental method he is using. Worse, not a few read the logical priorities he was referring to as a temporal succession of moments in establishing the relation between God and man. Most of the Thomistic theologians had com-

14 "Alii gratuitatem ordinis supernaturalis corrumpunt, cum autumnent Deum entia intellectu praedita condere non posse, quin eadem ad beatificam visionem ordinet et vocet," D-S 3891.

15 One theologian from Lyons had planned an open discussion on the topic with Karl Rahner to be published by the *Recherches de Science religieuse* of Paris. Because of the increasing rumors about a coming condemnation by the pope, the French Jesuit review had to cancel the publication in French. The whole discussion was then published by the Swiss review *Orientierung* June 30, 1950. See the slightly expanded text of K. Rahner in *Schriften zur Theologie,* vol. I (Freiburg, Herder, I, 1961[4]) 323-46, and a new more historical analysis of the same topic in *Schriften zur Theologie,* vol. IV (Freiburg, 1961[2]) 209-36.

pletely forgotten about the very subtle but effective notion of *dispositio ultima* St. Thomas invented to explain the mutual priorities of the saving God and grace-accepting man.[16] However, this may be, it would be completely wrong to relegate this view of Rahner to a mere marginal opinion of his.[17] It belongs to the very core of his own transcendental theology.

But this is not the occasion to re-open the discussion about Rahner's views. After a short efflorescence during the fifties of articles and doctoral theses on the notion of the "supernatural" and other connected notions, the whole controversy petered out in an almost unanimous silence, the most effective manifestation of indifference, I would say.

When occasionally some theologians feel the necessity to return to the problem, they dispatch the whole thing in a few words. Among the various arguments against the distinction between pure nature and the supernatural I met in the past years I retain two, which seem to me really to the point.

The first consists in stressing the difference between the models and patterns of thought used in this matter. Within the structure of a conceptual and essential theology of the scholastic type, which may be called "pre-transcendental,"[18] the use of the notion "nature" implies necessarily its corelative notion of "the supernatural." "Nature," in the Aristotelean tradition, expressed whatever belongs necessarily and universally to a given being. Since grace is by definition a gratuitous gift of God, it cannot belong to the human "nature" in this technical sense. However, as soon as we look at human existence from a different frame of reference, as for instance in the philosophy of "person," this reasoning loses its inner cogency. Relations between persons are necessarily gratuitous and free. This

[16] H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez St. Thomas d'Aquin, (Théologie,* 1) (Paris: Aubier, 1954) 5-6, 12, 40-47 and 53-58. See also K. Rahner, "Zur scholastischen Begrifflichkeit der ungeschaffenen Gnade", *Schriften zur Theologie,* I, *op. cit.,* 347-76, especially, 361.

[17] So, for instance, Charles R. Meyer, *A Contemporary Theology of Grace* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1970).

[18] So, for instance, William A. Luijpen, *What Can You Say about God? (Except "God")* (New York: Paulist Press, 1971).

model evokes the categories of encounter and presence, and not of universal and necessary *a priori* conditions of possibility of any ontological reality, as, for instance, supernatural grace.

Edward Schillebeeckx complemented this argument by a new analysis of the notion "gratuity" in relation to functionality. It is wrong to think that, by affirming the functionality of some human reality, we exclude inevitably its gratuity. Education possesses a deep functional role in view of the mature growth of a human person, and nevertheless it is the gratuitous gift, and even the creation of spontaneous parental love. In the same way there is no valid reason to contend that by recognizing the functional and perfective role of grace (*gratia sanans et elevans!*) we empty the notions of gratuitous divine presence and love of their meaning.[19]

There is a second introductory consideration we want to make. During this present century Christian thought has gone through a real "Copernican revolution." The renewed interest in Blondel in Anglo-Saxon countries shows that in the whole Church the merits of this philosopher are being more and more recognized.[20] What he calls "the method of immanence" in the analysis of human activity, has now given rise to a new term introduced by German theologians: "anthropological theology and philosophy."[21] Though the meaning of the word anthropology is somewhat different in English and in other languages for that matter, the new meaning spread very rapidly on both sides of the Atlantic.

Anthropological theology means that kind of approach to the revealed realities by which we look at them from and through the impact they have upon human existence. This approach is still very easily and almost inevitably misunderstood by those who can only think within an essentialistic frame of reference. They feel that

19 E. Schillebeeckx, *"Christelijk antwoord op een menselijke vraag?: De oecumenische betekenis van de "correlatiemethode," Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 10 (1970) 1-22, esp. 19.

20 Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) chapter I, "The Blondelian Shift," 1-36.

21 Karl Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology," *The World in History,* The St. Xavier Symposium, ed. by T. Patrick Burke (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) 1-23.

this perspective in modern theology means returning to the pagan principle of Protagoras, making "man the measure of all things," and even worse, the measure of all divine things.

They are confirmed in this belief, because many eager theologians, infatuated with the sudden fashion of "secularity," are in fact all too prone to apply a reductionist kind of theology. They simply cancel any element of the Christian tradition that does not meet with their favor, or that seems to contradict the all-comprehensive principle of secularity.

This is not serious. The most elementary rules of hermeneutics tell us that our own contemporary perspective is as much subject to a critical reflection as any other "objective" *a priori* position. A serious astronomer never forgets to include in his final calculations the nature and the defects of his telescope and other instruments. It would be a real sin of pride to fancy that suddenly in 1972 the aprioristic principles of our modern culture and thought are above any criticism, when at the same time we subject the *a priori* of the past to the most radical critique.

That is why, as soon as I read it, I was prepared to agree with the central exigency in Lonergan's *Method in Theology*:[22] there is no real understanding or thinking and communicating in theology without a deep intellectual, moral and religious "conversion" of the theologian. Lonergan grounds this conversion upon the transcendental analysis of man's existence and, even more so, upon the experience of grace. This means, in other words, that the fundamental attitude and option of the theologian are as much subject to self-criticism as the other realities he is trying to understand and to communicate. Repeating the famous principle of Kierkegaard, Lonergan remarks in connection with the necessary "purification" of the categories we use: "Nor may one expect the discovery of some 'objective' criterion or test or control. For that meaning of the 'objective' is mere delusion. Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity. It is to be attained only by attaining authentic subjectivity. To seek and employ some alternative prop or crutch invariably leads to some measure of reductionism. As Hans-Georg

[22] B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology, op. cit.*, 235-94.

Gadamer has contended at length in his *Wahrheit und Methode,* there are no satisfactory methodical criteria that prescind from the criteria of truth."[23]

This quotation, taken from Lonergan's latest book, shows the reversal in perspective to-day that we called the "Copernican revolution." One may express this in a different way. First, it manifests that theology is returning to the important principle that there is no knowledge in theology which is not somehow grounded in experience. Secondly, there are basically only two archetypical models for human thought taken from our experience of being in the world. Either man sees himself as a thing among other things, eventually a subject confronted with exterior "objects": he assimilates the outer world through knowledge, more or less as a camera, and manipulates it in making or re-making and changing things. Or, he sees himself as meeting another person within the dimensions of the cosmos, which involves mutual relations between both as forms of presence, encounter, mutual confirmation and fulfillment.[24] Thirdly, we can only speak of revelation when what is being revealed is actually assumed within the intentional thrust of our human consciousness, expressed in language and life.[25] Fourthly, and this aspect is not so often referred to, looking at the activity of the divine revelation through grace from the point of view of God, even when we on our side have to divide this activity into different structural moments, for God creation, salvation and divine presence in grace are only one coherent and all-permeating gesture of love.

[23] *Ibid.,* 292.

[24] Gordon D. Kaufman, "Two Models of Transcendence. An Inquiry into the Problem of Theological Meaning," *The Heritage of Christian Thought,* Essays in Honor of Robert Lowry Calhoun, ed. by Robert E. Cushmann and Egil Grislis (New York, 1965) 182-96, and F. Michael McLain, "On Theological Models," *Harvard Theological Review* 62 (1969) 155-87. See also P. Schoonenberg, *Covenant and Creation, op. cit.,* 79-93. William A. Luijpen, quoted in note 18 presents a more popularized, though not less convincing description of the two patterns of thought.

[25] E. Schillebeeckx, "Faith Functioning in Human Self-Understanding," *The Word in History, op. cit.,* 41-59, and Piet F. Fransen, "Divine Revelation: Source of Man's Faith," *Faith: Its Nature and Meaning,* Papers of the Maynooth Union Summer School 1970, ed. by Paul Surlis (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan) 1972, 18-52.

From those considerations it appears that an anthropological approach is by no means imposing human criteria upon God's activity, but showing precisely the cohesion and the meaningfulness of this activity. In the background remains, totally untouched and unimpaired, the deep faith in God's absolute and radical primacy. What we want to avoid, as Schoonenberg showed in his first chapter of *The Christ,* is the idea that God must continuously interfere in the process of history, like a clumsy and amateurish artisan, who feels he has to improve upon his first sketchy plans.

The important point for us is that this kind of theology rediscovers "the humanity of God," to quote one of the most famous little books of Karl Barth.[26] Or, looking at a totally different tradition in the East, the tradition of Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Palamas and the later Byzantine theology,[27] there is in God a fullness, his "essence" or *"ousia,"* which escapes totally human knowledge and experience, but in his very movement towards us, in his "works" or *"energeiai,"* he is showing his "human" face. This is not an abstraction, since this movement of "oikonomia" revealed itself in Christ, the Emmanuel, the God-for-us, the very core of Christianity.

Now we are ready indeed to tackle the problem of the acceptability of the dilemma: God or man. Is it true that we have no other choice?

We have indeed no other choice, whenever we explicitly, and especially implicitly lower down God's activity to the level of other created activities. Under the influence of our uncritical imagination we do this constantly. In technical terms, does the activity of God belong to the other categorical activities we know from experience? Or better, is it true that every divine activity competes with ours so that we have to divide among God and us the various competences, that ever resurging Pelagian illusion?[28]

The answer is, of course, negative. The reason for this is simple.

[26] Karl Bath, *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes* (*Theologische Studien,* 48) (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956).

[27] Basil Krivosheine, Monk of Mount Athos, *The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas,* Reprint of *The Eastern Churches Quarterly,* 1938, No. 4, London, 1938.

[28] P. Fransen, *The New Life of Grace* (New York: Desclée, 1969) 108-13.

Expressing it metaphysically, we have to say that, because God is so radically transcendent, he is at the same time so thoroughly immanent. The most moving expression of this mystery was given by Augustine, when he said in the *Confessions* about God: God is *intimior intimo meo, superior summo meo.*[29] But if this is true, Augustine already gave us the first inkling of the source of our anthropological theology, when he wrote in the *Soliloquies*: ". . . under your guidance I will return within me, and so in you."[30] We don't deny that Augustine was influenced in his view by this whole Platonic perspective of his thoughts. This, however, does not impair, it seems to us, the validity of the principle. Paul Tillich is one of the modern authors who returned to this approach, even if his frame of reference was different from that of Augustine. In modern terms we could say approximately the same: God is the living ground of our being, precisely because he is radically outside our being.

In expressing this aspect of God's presence in the world, Schoonenberg comes to a striking conclusion: "Our divinization is our humanization." And he continues: "What we receive from God, we never *have* it, but we *are* it."[31] I tried to express the same thought in my book on grace when I wrote under the influence of Ruusbroec, the Flemish mystic, that God does not reach us "from without inwards," but "from within outwards," that is, from the very core of density of our existence, at the very point where we flow from God's creative hands.[32]

As you may have noticed, in the course of the last paragraph our language became more and more symbolical. The reason for this is that the technical philosophical language, though correct, does not convince the general reader who still feels confused by the patterns of his imagination. Since the devastating power of the dilemma we are talking about is so strong, we are obliged to something more than

29 *Confessiones* III, 6, 18.

30 "Praetende mihi lumen tuum, revoca me ab erroribus; te duce in me redeam, et in te"; *Soliloquies* II, 6, 9. Comp. with: "noverim me, noverim te," *Soliloquies* II, 1, 1. Cf. Gerard Verbeke, "Connaissance de soi and connaissance de Dieu chez saint Augustin," *Augustiniana* 4 (1954) 513-15.

31 P. Schoonenberg, *Het geloof van ons Doopsel*, vol. 3, *op. cit.*, 133 note 1, 139 and 251.

32 P. Fransen, *The New Life of Grace, op. cit.*, 130-32.

correct thinking. We have to convince. And we shall never convince if we do not have the courage and the humility to strike back at the very point where the evil lies, the quasi-notional patterns of our imagination. This can only be achieved when we use a more powerful dynamic symbolism, which points and aims at the very depths of the mystery and does not emprison it within the static images we erroneously take for metaphysical concepts.

We have always believed in a justified use of symbolism in theology. Nevertheless we also agree that a more philosophical language may be equally useful, if only because of the idiosyncracies of Western scholarship which dodges too flowery a language, and prefers a scientific obscurity to poetic inspiration. It was not always so, nor is it so everywhere, but so we are!

The best way to follow would be, I think, to start with a basic experience, which may provide us with the necessary frame of reference and models for thought, introducing us into a new vision of reality. In my opinion we discover at this point the fundamental orientation of our future culture. The sixteenth century discovered the unicity of the individual, his greatness, his freedom and creativity. We are now discovering, in this planetarian world, the unique value and meaningfulness of our being together, of belonging to one another, of being responsible together in a way we have never experienced before.

I am not going to elaborate on the influence of the communication media, the growing smallness of the world we live in, the many dangers of self-destruction that bring us together in our common fight against pollution, injustice and war. These are things we know, we read about them daily in the papers. This short hint may suffice.

On the more technical level of the human or experimental sciences we discover how deeply dependent we are on one another. I would only have to cite the recent achievements of biology, sociology, psychology, economics and linguistics. The impact of the modern sciences is so strong and overwhelming that, were it not for our long and inured tradition of individualism, many of us would lose any confidence in our individuality and personal freedom. It might be difficult to deny that this has actually happened already in some quarters.

Finally, there is a new trend in philosophy which stresses the fact that we cannot become ourselves—the great ideal of the latter centuries—except in and through the encounter with others.[33] We cannot even discover God but through the mirror or the ministry of others. In the beginning of this century Freud had already stated that the father-image was instrumental in bringing about an image of God. Lévinas in Paris reached the same conclusion, but on the basis of a philosophical reflection that our encounter with others is our life. We know that theologians as Metz and Pannenberg are now repudiating "existentialism," and even "personalism," because of the latent individualism. The philosophies can only free themselves from this old Western lore in so far as they direct themselves more radically towards the fulness of historical reality and process, either in the world or in the Church. More and more the theologians of the Church are looking for a renewed approach to its mystery through the basic reality of the "koinonia," the communion of faith.

In short, to-day we are not discovering humanism so much as the fact that there is no true humanism at all, no hope for a more human life, if we refuse to grow more human together. To be human is our gift to each other, an exchange in which we receive as much as we give. At least we could, for it might not be altogether out of place here to warn ourselves and others. We talk a lot of growing, developing and maturing. This makes sense only if we look at the positive powers in us. Since we are, however, growing in freedom, there is everywhere and always the real risk of refusal, of retarding, of deflecting this movement. We don't want to give the impression Teilhard de Chardin has sometimes given, that, though he believed in the reality of evil and sin, his belief in the powers of evolution made the risk of regression and dehumanization seem rather marginal and epidermal. We know that only God knows what is in man. As for us we would not like to invalidate our views by a naive optimism.

Would it not be possible now to channel this world-wide experience into a truer kind of theology of grace? Indeed, but then we

33 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity,* An Essay in Exteriority, (*Duquesne Studies,* 24) (Duquesne University Press, 1969). Cf. Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming, op. cit.,* chapter II, "Redemptive Immanence," 37-60.

should free our theology of grace from the many individualistic accretions it has developed in the course of time. St. Thomas thought that grace was primarily given, "infused" he said, in our soul. Late Scholasticism saw it more and more as a kind of private gift to each of us. During the last decades, we corrected somewhat this narrow view. We returned to the biblical vision that grace is primarily God's mercy and love for us, his living and loving presence reaching out to the very core of our existence, affecting therefore our whole being, body and soul. However, that we belong together in communion and love seemed to be more the result of our common private sanctification. Is there not need for a more radical "Copernican revolution" in the doctrine of grace? Our belonging together in the communion of the Church and, through the Church, our being called to the service of all men, must form the radical structure of grace itself. Saying this, we would not think of denying the importance of one's personal commitment in faith and love but, as we saw above, there is no personal commitment which is completely separated from the commitment to the others. Our human existence is corporate and personal at the same time.

The proof is not so complicated if we admit the truth of our common experience of human existence to-day. God's grace is primarily God's living and loving presence to us. If grace also presents a created gift-aspect, a view developed exclusively within the Western tradition, this is but a secondary aspect of grace, meaningless, if not totally implicated within the former.[34] Now God is not present to everyone of us for himself. He is present to the whole world, as he created it, that is in its deeper and dynamic cohesion, in its historical growing process. Therefore, grace is primarily God's loving and living presence to the whole world, especially to the world of man. Schoonenberg coined for this a quite expressive sentence: "In grace we are given to one another."[35]

This view has an important implication. Of course, the source of grace is God alone. Therefore we would not like to give the impression that we are the source of grace for one another. According to the

[34] P. Fransen, *The New Life of Grace, op. cit.*, 99-104.
[35] P. Schoonenberg, *God of mens: een vals dilemma, op. cit.*, 15-19.

old doctrine of the Councils,[36] if there is within the movement of grace something for which we bear the sole responsibility, it is evil and sin. Remaining true to our vision, we suddenly discover again the corporate dimension of sin. By impairing and disturbing our inter-personal relations, we do obscure the light of God's presence in history, and therefore in everyone of us. As does grace, so does sin in this view have a corporate dimension.

A last word to confirm the theological value of this approach. At the same time we will unmask the radical falsity of our Western dilemma. If what we have said about the nature of the divine activity is true, then the more divine influx we receive the more human we become. The opposite is also true. The more human we find ourselves to be the more signs we should detect of a divine presence. That is the way Schoonenberg puts it.[37]

Metz, in trying to establish a theology of secularization, expresses it in another way. In Christ, God has accepted and is still accepting the world as it is. He is accepting it in the radical sense of the word, which we know from accepting one another in love. He has confirmed the world in its own value and meaning.[38] This is according to us the only true theology of secularization which makes sense, at least for a Christian. But returning to Schoonenberg, true secularization can only stress and strengthen our faith, obedience and love in and for God. True secularization is true mysticism. It is the paradox of Christianity, the paradox of Christ himself. We are still far from it. Only in Christ we can contemplate it realized in a radical way. He was fully human, more than we will ever be, and therefore he was so radically rooted in God. As Son of Man he was the Son of God.

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36 D-S 240, 242 and 622-23.

37 P. Schoonenberg, *Het geloof van ons Doopsel, op. cit.*, 133, note 1.

38 Johannes B. Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) 25-32.