

St. Thomas on Grace and Free Will
in the *Initium Fidei*:
The Surpassing Augustinian Synthesis

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Introduction

FOR MANY contemporary theologians, those who dare to treat the topic of grace and free will with a measure of conviction, however minimal, resemble fools rushing in where angels fear to tread. And I am indeed painfully aware that I might at least indulge in the vice of presumption with what I attempt to cover in the following pages. But I would submit that nothing less than the ensuing *tour d'horizon* will suffice to get to the core of the topic, as well as its contemporary relevance.¹ I

Dedicated to Fr. Matthew Lamb on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. Earlier versions of this essay were delivered as a conference paper at the international conference on “Aquinas the Augustinian” at Ave Maria University, Naples, FL, February 3–5, 2005, and as public lectures at the Institute of Medieval Philosophy and Theology of Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, October 17, 2005, and at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., March 12, 2007. My special thanks go to an anonymous reviewer whose critical observations and remarks saved me from some egregious mistakes and allowed me to clarify a number of aspects, as salient as they are subtle, pertaining to St. Thomas’s theology of grace.

¹ In the following, I am writing as neither a doctrinal nor a Church historian. Rather, I am writing as a theologian. Hence, my brief remarks about St. Augustine and St. Thomas, as well as those about Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther, will all be painted with far too broad a brush. But this is the privilege of the theologian. Moreover, I am not interested in being original by offering some new insight. Rather, I am interested in remembering and holding on to a most profound insight put forth by St. Augustine and, more explicitly, St. Thomas, in the hope that this insight might again become fruitful in the present theological conversation.

will begin with the usual three apposite remarks of introduction, the last of which will be the thesis I wish to submit.

First, in the following when I speak of “grace and free will,” I refer specifically to the question of how God and human interrelate in the first and fundamental act of salvation, the *initium fidei*—the beginning of faith, also referred to as the act of conversion. Conversion, most fundamentally, is the turning from sin to God, a turning that is nothing else than God gratuitously as well as efficaciously turning us to himself as our ultimate, supernatural end to be consummated only in the beatific vision. The question of how divine grace and human free will interrelate in the act of conversion—of how God is able to move the human’s will infallibly yet freely—is not simply a complex problem, eventually to be resolved; it is an unfathomable *mystery*, to be discerned ever more deeply. Mystery, understood aright, will always invite new theological efforts at interpretation.² Thus when I argue in the concluding section that St. Thomas has offered the most satisfying Augustinian interpretation to date of this mystery, I emphatically do not claim that his interpretation has thereby resolved once and for all a conceptual problem. Rather, I propose that in all his precision and profundity, St. Thomas has deepened our understanding of—and thereby preserved the very character of—the mystery itself.

Second, with the interrelationship of grace and free will, we step into the very heart of Augustinianism and its debates, debates that gave rise to ecclesiastical and political developments that culminated in the cataclysmic religious and political upheavals of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Hence, the relationship between divine grace and human free will is a question of the greatest ecumenical importance. The mystery of grace and free will is most acutely present in the act of conversion. Here Western Christianity is irreversibly shaped by Augustine and Augustinianism—and rightly so. “Freedom,” however, is a notoriously multi-valent notion. Therefore, it will be imperative to keep in mind the fundamental distinction between what I will call in the following “natu-

² I am drawing here upon a most helpful distinction employed by Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain, and Thomas G. Weinandy: “Maritain states that where there is mystery ‘the intellect has to penetrate more and more deeply the *same* object.’ The mystery, by the necessity of its subject matter, remains. . . . Many theologians today, having embraced the Enlightenment presupposition and the scientific method that it fostered, approach theological issues as if they were scientific problems to be solved rather than mysteries to be discerned and clarified. However, the true goal of theological inquiry is not the resolution of theological *problems*, but the discernment of what the mystery of faith is.” Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 31–32 [original emphasis].

ral,” or “created,” freedom on the one hand and “acquired” freedom on the other.³ Natural, or created, freedom is the *liberum arbitrium*, the “free will” to choose between alternatives and to decide for or against a course of action. Acquired freedom, on the contrary, is the freedom to live as one ought. It is the freedom for which Christ has set us free (Gal 5:1), or, as St. Thomas would put it by drawing upon the Gospel of John, the freedom to live as God’s friends by sharing inchoately through charity the very life of the triune God.⁴

Finally, let me submit, in the form of a thesis, the rough contours of my modest proposal, which eventually requires a more nuanced elaboration than I can offer in these pages. St. Augustine developed a profound account of the mystery of grace and free will. However, his account, with its ontology of participation remaining largely implicit, remained notoriously open to a variety of conflicting interpretations. The best example of such conflict, ostensibly based solely on the meaning of Scripture⁵—but with a philosophical background profoundly incompatible with Augustinian and Thomist forms of thought—is seen in the famous (or infamous) early sixteenth-century debate on free versus enslaved will (*liberum arbitrium* versus *servum arbitrium*) between Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther. In light of this epochal debate,⁶ I would submit that

³ See, comprehensively, Mortimer Adler, *The Idea of Freedom: A Dialectical Examination of the Conceptions of Freedom*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1958–61).

⁴ On this topic, see Michael Sherwin, O.P., “Christ the Teacher in St. Thomas’s Commentary on the Gospel of John,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 173–93, esp. 190–91.

⁵ Erasmus: “De sensu scripturae pugna est” (Our battle is about the meaning of Scripture). Erasmus von Rotterdam, *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 4 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 26.

⁶ I call the exchange between Erasmus and Luther epochal because, for a significant segment of Protestant as well as Roman Catholic theologians, it is still regarded as paradigmatic, to the effect that not a few Protestant theologians continue to hold Catholicism under suspicion of (Semi-)Pelagianism, while not a few Catholic theologians continue to charge Luther with theological determinism and even Manichaeism. It took several generations of intense ecumenical effort up to and including the recent Lutheran World Federation and Catholic Church’s *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) to begin officially to bury the mutual misconceptions on this crucial point. Now, I should add, there is an important way to construe Luther’s theology differently, that is, by quite intentionally not making *De servo arbitrio* the sole hinge on which the rest of Luther’s theology hangs. The new Finnish school of Luther research (see Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998];

(1) St. Thomas's account remains the most satisfying Augustinian way of interpreting and deepening St. Augustine's own account—an approach, for complex historical and intellectual reasons, that was either not available or not desirable to Erasmus and Luther. Moreover, (2) St. Thomas's particular way of antecedently avoiding erroneous Augustinianisms shows us that an anti-speculative (and hence anti-Scholastic) debate, purportedly solely on the grounds of Scripture, allows unarticulated philosophical presuppositions to rule. Furthermore, (3) I should like to propose that by way of the pivotal Thomist axiom that grace presupposes as well as perfects nature—as substantiated by St. Thomas's metaphysics of being, which climaxes in the surpassing beauty of divine transcendental causality—we can successfully avert the reductive alternatives of Erasmus's theologically as well as Luther's philosophically erroneous Augustinianism.

Hence, I will turn first to the epochal debate between Erasmus and Luther on free will; next, to the complex position of St. Augustine; and finally, to the profound account of St. Thomas.

Erasmus and Luther: Two Reductive Augustinianisms post-Occam

Martin Luther was brought up philosophically and theologically in the *via moderna*, that is, the school of William of Occam, also called nominalism. As Étienne Gilson in his magisterial *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* argues:⁷

The essential characteristic of Occam's thought, and of nominalism in general, [is] a radical empiricism, reducing all being to what is perceived, which empties out, with the idea of substance, all possibility of real relations between beings, as well as the stable subsistence of any of them, and ends by denying to the real any intelligibility, conceiving God Himself only as a Protean figure impossible to apprehend.⁸

and esp. Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005]), as well as the interpretations of Luther by George Lindbeck and his students David Yeago and Bruce Marshall, would be its most recent preeminent representatives. These reconstructions, to a large degree, bracket *De servo arbitrio* (as an unfortunate product of Luther's getting sidetracked by Erasmus's deficient attack) and focus on Luther's Christocentric work, his commentaries on Romans and Galatians, his sermons on the Gospel of John, and his two catechisms.

⁷ *La philosophie au moyen âge* (Paris: Payot, 1944), 638 ff. I cite Gilson because I think that his characterization of nominalism in its basic contours still obtains, pace recent attempts at philosophical as well as theological rehabilitation of nominalism in general and Occam in particular.

⁸ I am quoting here Louis Bouyer's apt summary of Gilson's account in Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1956), 153.

Louis Bouyer aptly observes that in this kind of conceptual system “a grace which produces a real change in us, while remaining purely the grace of God, becomes inconceivable. If some change is effected in us, then it comes from us, and to suppose it could come also and primarily from God amounts to confusing God with the creature.”⁹ Thus, the first move of turning to God has to come either from God or from the human. And if, as the nominalist theologians were inclined to think, the human is to merit grace prior to any reception of grace, the human under the condition of sin must have the power to turn to God freely.¹⁰ Consequently, the human’s natural, or created, freedom must be understood as just this power, a power essentially unaffected by original sin.

This, in a nutshell, is the position of the dominant theological school in Germany in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries¹¹—a position with which also many humanists, not least Erasmus, sympathized.¹² Martin Luther received his philosophical and theological training in this school. However, under the influence of his intense study of the Apostle Paul and of the late Augustine,¹³ he began to reject, branch and root, his school’s *theological* account of grace and free will, rightly understanding its position to be incompatible with the teaching of St. Paul. But never

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The nominalist theologians held that one has to merit the first grace *de congruo*; after this initial merit on the basis of *facere quod in se est*, God on the basis of his own liberality infuses first grace, thereby making condign merit possible. The strictness comes in that the initial move must lie completely with the human (*sub conditione peccati*); it can be a quite imperfect move, but it has to be the first move on the way to condign merit. See, in detail, Leif Grane, *Contra Gabrielem: Luthers Auseinandersetzung mit Gabriel Biel in der Disputatio Contra Scholasticam Theologiam* (Gyldendal, 1962), 214–22.

¹¹ The leading German theologian of late medieval nominalism was Gabriel Biel. Still indispensable for a study of Biel’s theology is Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1963, 2000). Most decisive for our present concerns, according to Biel, “the impact of original sin and its consequences leaves the freedom of the will intact.” Ibid., 131.

¹² For Erasmus’s relationship to Scholasticism in general and nominalism in particular, see Christian Dolfen, *Die Stellung des Erasmus von Rotterdam zur scholastischen Methode* (Osnabrück, 1936); and John B. Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970), esp. 228–29, where Payne points out how Erasmus draws support for his position from Gerson, Durandus, and Biel.

¹³ Shortly before Luther delivered his *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* (1515–16), he had discovered Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings in volume eight of the Amorbach edition of Augustine’s works from 1506.

rejecting the *philosophical* tenets of nominalism,¹⁴ Luther's corrective move veered to the opposite extreme: God is not merely the first but the sole agent of the act of conversion, with the human in a state of utter passivity. For, according to Luther, the human free will is not simply held captive by sin, as St. Augustine would maintain (*liberum arbitrium captivatum*). Rather, after the fall, "free will"—understood as the power to turn to God—becomes an "empty word." According to Luther, we continue to use this empty word only because the human being once had it, before the fall, and through grace can have it again.¹⁵

In the heat of polemic, in his response to the bull *Exsurge Domine*,¹⁶ Luther pushed this position one step further by claiming that free will—that is, now any form of natural, or created, freedom—is simply a fiction, because all things happen by absolute necessity.¹⁷ Lest we do grave injustice to Luther, however, it is important to remember the context in and against which he formulated these extreme claims, as Harry McSorley rightly emphasizes:

¹⁴ On the complex discussion of this matter in Luther research, see Grane, *Contra Gabrielem*, 9–42; and more recently, Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of Their Medieval Background* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1994).

¹⁵ See Martin Luther, *Contra malignum Iohannis Ecclii iudicium super aliquot articulis quibusdam ei suppositis Martini Lutheri defensio*, in idem, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J. F. K. Knaake et al., vol. 2 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883 ff), 647, lines 10–13. As we will see later, even already in the Second Council of Orange (529) we can find the admittedly singular description of the *liberum arbitrium* after the fall as *amissum*, "lost." And in his *De servo arbitrio*, Luther avers: "Lost liberty, according to my grammar, is no liberty at all, and to give the name of liberty to something that has no liberty, is to employ an empty phrase." *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 181; cf. Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 18, 670.

¹⁶ *Bulla "Exsurge Domine,"* June 15, 1520, in Heinrich Denzinger and Adolf Schönmetzer, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, 36th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), nos. 1451–92. Canon 36: "Liberum arbitrium post peccatum est res de solo titulo; et dum facit, quod in se est, peccat mortaliter." Denzinger and Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no. 1486.

¹⁷ *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X novissimam damnatorum* (December 1520), Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 7, 146, lines 3–12: "Unde et hunc articulum necesse est revocare. Male enim dixi, quod liberum arbitrium ante gratiam sit res de solo titulo, sed simpliciter debui dicere 'liberum arbitrium est figmentum in rebus seu titulus sine re.' Quia nulli est in manu sua quippiam cogitare mali aut boni, sed omnia (ut Viglephi articulus Constantiae damnatus recte docet) de necessitate absoluta eveniunt. Quod et Poeta voluit, quando dixit 'certa stant omnia lege; Et Christus Matth. x 'Folium arboris non cadit in terram sine voluntate patris vestri qui in celis est et capilli capitis vestri omnes numerati sunt.' Et Esa. xli. eis insultat dicens 'Bene quoque aut male si potestis facite.'"

Luther's concern here was surely not to propagate a doctrine of absolute necessitarianism. His unquestionable concern was to refute and to destroy the exaggerated Neo-Semi-Pelagian view of free will that found its expression in the Ockham-Biel interpretation of the Scholastic axiom: *facienti quod in se est*, etc. From the beginning to the end of the *Assertio*, Luther attacks the Bielian doctrine "that free will is able to prepare itself to enter into grace."¹⁸

But with the extreme formulation of the *Assertio*—echoing and indeed at that point supporting a position held by Wyclif and condemned at the Council of Constance¹⁹—Luther made himself vulnerable to the charge of theological determinism. It is precisely this determinism, or necessitarianism, that Erasmus intended to attack in his 1524 treatise *On the Freedom of the Will* (*De libero arbitrio*)—emulating in title as well as intention an early treatise of St. Augustine.²⁰ While rhetorically elegant, Erasmus's treatise

¹⁸ Harry J. McSorley, C.S.P., *Luther: Right or Wrong? An Ecumenical–Theological Study of Luther's Major Work The Bondage of the Will* (New York: Newman; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 262. Oberman characterizes this central tenet of Biel's teaching thus: "Biel's explanation of the possibility of this *facere quod in se est* makes it clear that, though the *facere quod in se est* means different things for different people, everyone is by nature in a position to discharge this first duty. For God, however, the *facere quod in se est* means only one thing: He is obliged, because he has placed the obligation on himself, to infuse his grace in everyone who has done his very best" (Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 132). Because Biel appealed to the authority of St. Thomas in order to substantiate his own Semi-Pelagian theology of grace, Luther came to think that not only the *doctores moderni* but also the *doctores antiqui* were Pelagians. For a highly instructive study of this matter, see John L. Farthing, *Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel: Interpretations of St. Thomas Aquinas in German Nominalism on the Eve of the Reformation* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1988).

¹⁹ Sessio VIII on February 22, 1418; among the errors of Wyclif listed is canon 27: "Omnia de necessitate absoluta eveniunt." Denzinger and Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no. 1177.

²⁰ See Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 41, 43, and esp. 63–64, where he refers explicitly to Luther's *Assertio*: "What is the point of praising obedience if in doing good or evil works we are the kind of instrument for God that an ax is to a carpenter? But such a tool are we all if Wyclif is right. All things before and after grace, good equally with ill, yes even things indifferent, are done by sheer necessity. Which opinion Luther approves." Cf. Erasmus, *Ausgewählte Werke*, 88. We will see later that St. Thomas could use the example of the carpenter and the ax, however, with a dramatically different result, since he was able to conceive of divine causality as truly transcendent causality, a causality that includes the genuine contingency of the human *liberum arbitrium*! On Erasmus's life and thought, see the informative as well as sympathetic accounts by Cornelius Augustijn, "Erasmus, Desiderius (1466/69–1536)," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 10:1–18; and Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 194 ff.

lacked the precise conceptual organization of the Scholastic discourse that his humanist tastes loathed. Even more fateful was the definition he offered of “free will,” or “natural freedom”: “By free choice . . . we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them.”²¹ In light of the theological issue at stake and of St. Augustine’s own mature position, this definition was shockingly deficient, for it seemed simply to underwrite the nominalist Semi-Pelagianism Luther so vigorously opposed. We might not go completely wrong in assuming that Luther stopped reading Erasmus’s treatise at this very point, seeing his worst fears come true. It did not matter that later in the treatise Erasmus allowed grace to make an appearance in aiding the human will and offered a tentative nod in the direction of the late Augustine and the Thomists as positions possible to hold.²²

In his 1525 response *On the Bondage of the Will* (*De servo arbitrio*), Luther painted a picture of Erasmus as a humanist skeptic²³ who disingenuously offered a “probable” opinion about what for Luther was most central to the Christian faith and—worse—submitted a blatantly Semi-Pelagian definition of the free will, and this based on the alleged evidence of Scripture. Luther reacted most forcefully, and his theological intentions

²¹ Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 47. “Porro liberum arbitrium hoc loco sentimus vim humanae voluntatis, qua se possit homo applicare ad ea, quae perducunt ad aeternam salutem, aut ab iisdem avertere.” Erasmus, *Ausgewählte Werke*, 36. Cf. Luther’s analysis of this definition, Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 169 ff; Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8, 662 ff.

²² Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 51 ff; cf. Erasmus, *Ausgewählte Werke*, 50 ff. Erasmus’s eventual rejoinder to Luther’s *De servo arbitrio*, a two-volume work with the title *Hyperaspistes* (liber I, 1526; liber II, 1527) in which he greatly clarified and nuanced his position—albeit without ever fully grasping Augustine’s insistence on the primacy of God’s agency in the act of faith—was largely ignored.

²³ Erasmus had his critics also on the Catholic side. (For the long history of portrayals of Erasmus, see Augustijn, “Erasmus, Desiderius,” 12 ff.) For a rather devastating account of him, see the *spiritus rector* of modern Catholic Reformation history, Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, vol. 1, trans. Ronald Walls (New York: Herder, 1939, 1968), 144–56. “That is Erasmus’s basic attitude—his vagueness. In theology, however, vagueness means to be a-dogmatic or undogmatic. In theology, Erasmus was a born relativist” (ibid., 150). More recent research on Erasmus, however, has brought the picture of the comprehensive skeptic into serious question. At least in light of his late work against Luther *Hyperaspistes* I and II, it seems indisputable that Erasmus preferred a reticence of theological assertion in questions where the Church had not promulgated a binding teaching and opposed the declaration of premature definitions (*definire*), but he allowed the making of theological assertions (*asserere*). Cf. Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* I, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, 248–54.

were undoubtedly Augustinian:²⁴ “Rapt” (*rapi*) into communion by God, the human receives genuine freedom.²⁵ But in an effort to set the record straight once and for all, Luther went too far: God is not merely the first and final agent of human salvation but its sole agent, with the human remaining purely passive (*mere passive*).

We can observe this radical passivity in relationship to God in a central—albeit rhetorically overcharged—passage from Luther’s text, which has given rise to the (false) charge of Manichean tendencies in Luther’s thought:

In short, if we are under the god of this world, away from the work and Spirit of the true God, we are held captive to his will, as Paul says to Timothy (2 Tm 2:26), so that we cannot will anything but what he wills. . . . And this we do readily and willingly, according to the nature of the will, which would not be a will if it were compelled; for compulsion is rather (so to say) “unwill” [*involuntas*]. But if a Stronger One comes who overcomes him and takes us as his spoil, then through his Spirit we are again slaves and captives—though this is royal freedom—so that we readily will and do what He wills. Thus the human will is placed between the two like a beast of burden. If God rides it, it wills and goes where God wills. . . . If Satan rides it, it wills and goes where Satan wills; nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.²⁶

One might want to question the Satanology implied in this passage and also ask how any sensible account of personal responsibility for sin can be maintained under these proposed conditions.²⁷ However, much more

²⁴ See Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 174; Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8, 665. Here Luther drew upon the second book of Augustine’s late *Contra Iulianum*, where Augustine used, for the only time, the notion “servum arbitrium”: “Utinam Dei dono, et non libero, vel potius servo proprie voluntatis arbitrio” (*Contra Iulianum* 2.8.23; PL 44:689). For the important differences between Augustine and Luther regarding the meaning of this concept, see Harry McSorley’s pertinent excursus “The Meaning of ‘Servum Arbitrium’ in Augustine,” in his *Luther: Right or Wrong?* 90–93.

²⁵ For the best recent interpretation of this undervalued but crucial aspect of Luther’s *De servo arbitrio*, see Robert W. Jenson, “An Ontology of Freedom in the *De servo arbitrio* of Luther,” *Modern Theology* 10 (1994): 247–52; and idem, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105–8.

²⁶ Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 140; Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8, 635.

²⁷ Cf. the nuanced and detailed discussion of the question “Does the devil cause sin?” in Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 3, c., in which St. Thomas rightly concludes that “the will’s movement directly comes from the will and God, who causes the will, who alone acts within the will and can incline the will to whatever He should will. But God cannot cause sin, as I have shown before. Therefore, we

central to our present concern is the fact that the ontological link between natural, or created, freedom and the acquired Christian freedom in the act of conversion is severed. Luther's legitimate Augustinian concern of rebutting even the subtlest form of (Semi-)Pelagianism is hampered by the burden of what looks all too similar to the formulation in the *Assertio* and hence all too much like theological determinism.²⁸

The Erasmus–Luther exchange shows in a paradigmatic way that the twin problems of Semi-Pelagianism and theological determinism arise whenever theologians fail to uphold or straightforwardly deny the notion that divine providence operates infallibly by way of both necessity and contingency. The classical Thomist form of maintaining this notion was to insist on the real distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae*. In his *De servo arbitrio*, Luther explicitly dismissed this distinction as a sophistic wordplay; and this I regard as the most consequential *philosophical* error in Luther's treatise.

The classical illustration for this distinction is that of Socrates sitting or standing. When Socrates sits, he sits necessarily, as long as he is sitting (this by *necessitas consequentiae*, or *suppositionis*), the reason being that it is impossible for him to sit and not sit at the same time. However, Socrates sits contingently, or freely (that is, not by *necessitas consequentis*), because it is always possible for him to stand. On the other hand, consider a puppet sitting on a chair. Unlike Socrates, the puppet must remain sitting on the chair until it is removed by another force (*necessitas consequentis*). Hence the crucial difference between the two types of necessity: Contingency is excluded only by absolute necessity, not by conditional necessity.

conclude that only the will directly causes human sin. Therefore, it is clear that the devil does not, properly speaking, directly cause sin but causes sin only as a persuader." Aquinas, *De Malo*, in *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 247. All subsequent quotations of *De Malo* will be taken from this edition.

²⁸ I agree with McSorley's judgment that "Luther's necessitarian argument *can* be interpreted in the sense of Thomas Aquinas, namely, that all things happen necessarily (*ex suppositione*) in view of God's immutable will, but not by an absolute necessity which would exclude free or contingent actions. We hold, further, that Luther's argument *must* be so interpreted if we are to avoid accusing Luther of that type of glaring contradiction which one rarely finds in thinkers of Luther's stature" (*Luther: Right or Wrong?* 329, original emphasis). The most important reason McSorley advances to support this judgment is that Luther indeed "explicitly and repeatedly affirms that man has *liberum arbitrium* 'in the realm of things below him' or 'in respect of what is below him' or 'in his own kingdom' where man 'is led by his own will and not by the precepts of another' and where God 'has granted him a free use of things at his own will'" (*ibid.*, 327).

St. Thomas offered a version of this example in *De Malo* and concluded: "And so as we most certainly see that Socrates is sitting when he is sitting, although it be not absolutely necessary on that account that he be sitting, so also the contingency of things is not taken away because God sees everything in itself that happens." Most instructively, St. Thomas's next point anticipates the thrust of the third and final part of our essay:

And regarding God's will, we should note that God's will universally causes being and every consequence of being, and so both necessity and contingency. And his will is above the ordination of the necessary and the contingent, as it is above the whole of created existing. And so we distinguish the necessity and contingency in things in relation to created causes, which the divine will has ordained in relation to their effects, namely, that there be immutable causes of necessary effects and mutable causes of contingent effects, not by the relationship of things to God's will, which is their universal cause.²⁹

I will argue later that it is precisely St. Thomas's metaphysics of being that allows for the real distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae*.

Because Luther rejected this crucial distinction as a "playing with words," he could not regard genuine contingency as the result of God's will.³⁰ Rather, he saw it as

fundamentally necessary and salutary for a Christian, to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees and purposes and does all things by his immutable, eternal, and infallible will. . . . From this it follows irrefutably that everything we do, everything that happens, even if it seems to us to happen mutably and contingently, happens in fact nonetheless necessarily and immutably, if you have regard to the will of God.³¹

Clearly, Luther had to exclude genuine contingency from consideration, because in his conceptual framework genuine contingency turns into a potential competitor with God's creative power. Only by embracing the distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae* and hence the kind of metaphysics of being that was put aside by nominalism would he have been able to conceive of God's creative power as genuinely

²⁹ *De Malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 15; Davies, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 911.

³⁰ Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 120; Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8, 617: "Quid autem istis ludibriis verborum efficiunt?"

³¹ Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 118–19; Luther, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8, 615.

transcendent, as a power that can operate through necessity as well as contingency and thus can very well effect even the free choices of humans. In his eagerness to undercut the Semi-Pelagian error once and for all, by likening the human to a beast of burden with either God or Satan as its rider, Luther seems to have accepted the price that in the act of conversion the human being has to be less than a human person, less than the creature to whom God has granted the gift of created freedom. McSorley rightly states that “a personal, free decision of faith is explicitly excluded by Luther’s over-extended concept of *servum arbitrium*.”³²

Both Erasmus and Luther seem to have operated under the *de facto* influence of a new and increasingly dominant notion of human freedom promoted by intellectual forces as substantively different and internally diverse as nominalism and humanism.³³ At the root of this new notion lay a libertarian account of spontaneity based on a concept of contingency operative on the same ontological plane as divine causality and hence in a competitive relationship with it. Erasmus seems to have entertained this notion of freedom in the human’s relationship to God, while Luther—in a vigorous (hyper-) Augustinian reaction—regarded it strictly as a divine attribute. The question of grace and freedom in the act of conversion thus became a strict “either-or.” Either the human turns to God freely, that is, by way of an act of spontaneous, self-determining freedom, and God

³² McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* 332. At the same time, McSorley rightly discerns in the normative doctrinal teachings of Lutheranism, most expressly in the *Solid Declaration* of the *Formula of Concord*, a subtle yet significant modification of Luther’s position in *De servo arbitrio*: “The clear implication of article II, 18 is that the free will, illuminated and ruled by the Holy Spirit (“*spiritu Dei illuminatum et rectum*”) *can* cooperate in man’s conversion, justice, and salvation and *can* ‘believe and give assent when the Holy Spirit offers the grace of God.’ Such a doctrine is in full harmony with the teaching of the Council of Trent that man’s free will, *activated by God*, cooperates by assenting to God in order to obtain the grace of justification. The Lutheran confessional statements thus overcome one of the chief objections against DSA [*De servo arbitrio*], namely, that it leaves no place for man’s free decision in faith. The doctrine of man’s ‘unfreedom’ which is contained in the Lutheran confessional writings, especially in the *Formula of Concord*, corresponds closely to the biblical-Catholic doctrine that the free will of fallen man is totally incapable of doing anything that is truly good *coram Deo* or of freeing itself from its sinful situation. It must *be* freed by the grace of Christ. Then it becomes, in a formula reminiscent of Augustine, a liberated will (*arbitrium liberatum*). The Holy Spirit *begins* the work of conversion in us; we are able to cooperate with him because of the new powers and the gifts he gives us” McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* 361–62 [original emphasis].

³³ See Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 120–44.

subsequently comes to the human's aid; or God irresistibly turns the human in an act in which the human remains completely passive. Thus the following picture emerges: For both Erasmus and Luther, to say that God and man act together in justification must mean that their joint action is analogous to that of two men drawing the same load. Consequently, the more one does, the less the other; whence, for Luther, realizing anew that grace does everything in salvation, it follows of necessity that man does nothing. But Erasmus desired to uphold the other aspect of tradition; that salvation is truly ours implies that we are ourselves active.³⁴

Should one wonder what the impact of Occam's razor—entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity—might have been in the centuries in which the *via moderna* unfolded?³⁵ A rigorous nominalist conception of *liberum arbitrium* just does not fit well with the notion of divine operative grace. If both agents are to act, the first cause of any form of cooperation must lie with one or the other. Luther took the one side and, in good Augustinian but equally good nominalist fashion, deleted the unnecessary factor, the “empty word,” *liberum arbitrium*. Erasmus took the other side and, in good humanist but equally good nominalist fashion, defined *liberum arbitrium* competitively, as the sufficient first cause of its proper agency, God then joining as an auxiliary cause strengthening and eventually securing the human effort. Hence, what became unavailable to both Erasmus and Luther was the radical, non-competitive transcendent causality of God as upheld explicitly by St. Thomas and implicitly in the late works of St. Augustine—a causality that allowed genuine contingency to fall utterly under the infallible divine providence and hence illuminate the real

³⁴ Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, 156–57.

³⁵ Rega Wood insists that Occam refrained from using the principle of parsimony, that is, the razor, in the economy of salvation. See Rega Wood, “Ockham's Repudiation of Pelagianism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 350–74, 358. Even so, that would not have prevented his students in the *via moderna* from applying the rule. Indeed, they might eventually have asked whether one would not want to be a bit more consistent across the board, especially if there are no overarching metaphysical reasons not also to economize the economy of salvation. An indication that this in fact was precisely the case in dismissing the distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae* can be found in the instructive study by Martin Seils, *Der Gedanke vom Zusammenwirken Gottes und des Menschen in Luthers Theologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962), 98, where Seils points to Johannes Altenstaig's nominalist *Lexicon theologicum* (Leiden, 1580). Oberman, in the nominalist glossary at the end of his *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, refers to an earlier version, Altenstaig's *Vocabularius theologie* (Hagenau, 1517).

distinction between the *necessitas consequentis* and the *necessitas consequentiae*, or *suppositionis*.

When we characterize Erasmus's and Luther's positions as two reductive Augustinianisms *post-Occam*, it would be false to assume that their respective accounts simply mirrored each other. The Erasmus of the *De libero arbitrio*, while capturing the early Augustine and displaying remarkable familiarity with Origen's account of human freedom, missed the central tenets of the late Augustine and remained disturbingly hospitable to the kind of Semi-Pelagianism that found a home among Occamist theologians as well as leading humanists. In other words, Erasmus's Augustinianism was erroneous primarily in matters *theological*. Conversely, Luther's account, while remaining fundamentally in accord with the central theological tenet of the late Augustine (and the St. Thomas of the second Parisian period) regarding the *initium fidei*, was erroneous primarily in matters *philosophical*.

The epochal Erasmus–Luther exchange offers exemplary evidence of the fact that it is deeply problematic to discern the mystery of grace and free will ostensibly on the grounds of Scripture alone while leaving the implied philosophical conceptualities unaddressed. As we will see, both Erasmus and Luther could claim with some legitimacy to be Augustinians of sorts, Erasmus drawing exclusively upon the early Augustine up to and including *De libero arbitrio* and Luther relying completely on the Augustine of the late Pelagian controversies. But how was it possible for both to see themselves as apologists of Augustine, especially on the matter of grace and free will?

St. Augustine's Complex Position³⁶

It is notoriously difficult to get a full grasp of the vast corpus produced by the preeminent “Doctor of Grace” during his long life. In his prolificacy he might be rivaled only by St. Thomas and Martin Luther. Throughout his life, St. Augustine maintained most of what he argued for in his relatively early work *On Free Will (De libero arbitrio)*.³⁷ However, on one single—albeit theologically decisive—point, he corrected his position. In a nutshell: The early Augustine, prior to his elevation to the episcopate in 395, taught the same error he later refuted most vigorously, namely, the Semi-Pelagian error,

³⁶ For a concise introduction to the complex controversy in which Augustine was involved toward the end of his life, see Marianne Djuth, “Initium fidei,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 447–51, and for a detailed historical reconstruction of Augustine's teaching on operative grace, see J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980).

³⁷ St. Augustine began to compose this work in 388, one year after his baptism, and completed it in 395.

which attributed the beginning of salvation (*initium fidei*) to the human's free will. This claim is precisely what St. Thomas, by the time he was composing *Summa theologiae* I–II, identified as the error of the early St. Augustine,³⁸ what Erasmus submitted as his definition of “free will” in his *De libero arbitrio*, and what Luther most intensely attacked in his *De servo arbitrio*.

St. Augustine's mature position emerged in a complex process. Around the year 418, his doctrine of the divine operation of conversion, that is, of the *interior* operative grace, seems to have been in place. It was only around 426, when he began to compose his treatise *On Grace and Free Will* that he defended a second operative grace completing the first—the grace of perseverance.³⁹ For our purpose, three aspects of his mature position, handily available in *On Grace and Free Will*, are most pertinent. First, he continued to hold that God has revealed to us through his Holy Scriptures that there exists free will, *liberum arbitrium*, in the human being.⁴⁰ After settling the abundant scriptural evidence for this truth, he emphasized, second, that for an action of the free will to be genuinely good, the grace of God must precede and accompany it.⁴¹ Third, and most important, he argued that only after humans have received God's grace do they begin to have good merits.⁴² It might be safe to say that St. Augustine's theology of grace reaches its very peak in the axiom that these merits are themselves God's gifts. And here we find the core of a theology of merit, sadly absent in the German pre-Reformation and early Reformation period: “If therefore your good merits are gifts of God, then God does not crown your merits insofar as they are your merits, but insofar as they are his gifts.”⁴³ At the very core of this teaching of merit stands St. Augustine's crucial distinction between two moments, or types, of grace: first, operative grace (*gratia operans*), through which God gives the good will itself to perform good acts; and second, cooperative grace (*gratia cooperans*), through which God cooperates with the human free will in the actual performance

³⁸ *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 114, a. 5, ad 1. Cf. Augustine, *Retractiones*, 1.23.

³⁹ For a more detailed description, see the nuanced account in Burns, *Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*, 141–82.

⁴⁰ *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, 2.2: “Revelavit autem nobis per Scripturas suas sanctas, esse in homine liberum voluntatis arbitrium” (PL 44:880).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.15: “Si ergo Dei dona sunt bona merita tua, non Deus coronat merita tua tanquam merita tua, sed tanquam dona sua” (PL 44:891). In a somewhat abbreviated form, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in the section on merit, quotes from a sermon of Augustine: “Grace has gone before us; now we are given what is due. . . . Our merits are God's gifts” (*Ante gratia donabatur, modo debitum redditur. . . . Dona Ipsius sunt merita tua*). *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, no. 2009.

of the good act. Hence, St. Augustine would maintain that God operates the good will in human beings without their assent, but when human beings will and do what is good, God cooperates with them. Put negatively, without God's operative and cooperative grace, neither faith, hope, and love nor good works are possible.⁴⁴

Lest Augustine's teaching on the beginning of faith be dismissed as the bygone position of an all too dominant theological figure, and just that—the teaching of one theologian in the Church's long tradition—consider the fact that St. Augustine's teaching on the *initium fidei* became the Church's teaching, at the Second Council of Orange.

An Augustinian Excursus: The Second Council of Orange

In 529, after a lengthy period of complex disputes between Augustinians and Semi-Pelagians in the Gallic Church, the Second Council of Orange, arguably one of the most important provincial Church councils in the history of the Latin Church, declared Augustine's teaching on the *initium fidei* to be *de fide*—indispensable to the Christian faith. To cite, in only the briefest form the teachings from Orange II most relevant for our concerns:⁴⁵

CANON III: "That the grace of God is not given at man's call, but itself makes man call for it."⁴⁶

CANON IV: "That God, to cleanse us from sin, does not wait for, but prepares our will."⁴⁷

CANON V: "That the beginning of faith is not of ourselves, but of the grace of God."⁴⁸

CANON VI: "That without the grace of God mercy is not bestowed upon us when we believe and seek for it; rather, it is grace itself which causes us to believe and seek for it."⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Augustine draws upon Phil 2:13 and Rm 8:28 in order to support his notions of *gratia operans* and *cooperans*, respectively.

⁴⁵ The full text of the Latin original and an English translation can be found in F. H. Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange, A.D. 529: Text, with an Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Oxford: James Thornton, 1882). Except where noted otherwise, all quotations of the council text are taken from this edition.

⁴⁶ "Quod gratia Dei non ad invocationem detur, sed ipsa faciat ut invocetur." Cf. Denzinger and Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no. 373.

⁴⁷ "Quod Deus, ut a peccato purgemur, voluntatem nostram non expectet, sed praeparet." Cf. *ibid.*, no. 374.

⁴⁸ "Quod initium fidei non ex nobis, sed ex gratia Dei sit." Cf. *ibid.*, no. 375.

⁴⁹ "Quod sine gratia Dei credentibus et petentibus misericordia non conferatur, cum gratia ipsa faciat ut credamus et petamus." Cf. *ibid.*, no. 376.

CANON VII: "That by the powers of nature without grace we are not able to think or choose any good thing pertaining to our salvation."⁵⁰

CANON IX: "Of the help of God, by which we do good works—It is of God's gift when we think rightly, and keep our steps from falsehood and unrighteousness; for as often as we do good, God works in us and with us that we may work."⁵¹

CANON XXII: "Of the things which properly belong to men—No man has anything of his own but falsehood and sin."⁵² Which sounds like a quotation from Martin Luther, who would say: "Free will prior to grace is capable only of sinning."⁵³

The Second Council of Orange maintains time and again that *liberum arbitrium* exists; it was not annihilated by original sin. At the same time, "through the sin of the first man, free choice was so biased and weakened that no one can afterwards either love God as he ought or believe in God or work for God's sake what is good, unless the grace of divine mercy prevents [e.g., goes before or precedes: R.H.] him."⁵⁴ These canons and definitions surely lack the conceptual sophistication and rhetorical brilliance of Augustine's own theology; nonetheless, they constitute the normative

⁵⁰ "Quod viribus naturae bonum aliquid quod ad salutem pertineat, cogitare aut eligere sine gratia non possumus." Cf. *ibid.*, no. 377.

⁵¹ "De adiutorio Dei, per quod bona operamur. Divini est muneris, cum et recte cogitamus, et pedes nostros a falsitate et injustitia continemus; quoties enim bona agimus, Deus in nobis atque nobiscum ut operemur operatur." Cf. *ibid.*, no. 379.

⁵² "De his quae hominum propria sunt. Nemo habet de suo nisi mendacium et peccatum." Cf. *ibid.*, no. 392.

⁵³ Luther, *Contra malignum I. ecclii iudicium*, *idem, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2, 647, lines 3 ff: "Eccius Lipsiae concessit, liberum arbitrium ante gratiam non valere nisi ad peccandum: ergo non valet ad bonum sed tantum ad malum. Ubi ergo libertas eius?"

⁵⁴ Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange*, 45. "Quod per peccatum primi hominis inclinatum et attenuatum fuerit liberum arbitrium, ut nullus postea aut diligere Deum sicut oportuit, aut credere in Deum, aut operari propter Deum quod bonum est possit, nisi eum gratia misericordiae divinae praevenierit" (44). Canon 1 refers to the soul injured ("laesa") by the sin of the first human. Canon 8 refers to the *liberum arbitrium* as weakened ("infirmatum") and injured ("laesum") by it. In canon 13 we find an even stronger formulation. Not only is the choice of the will weakened in the first human ("in primo homine infirmatum"); it is also described as "lost" ("amissum"). Might this one word offer the key for an ecumenically constructive understanding of what Martin Luther was pursuing by way of rhetorical overkill in his *De servo arbitrio* in order to unmask and confront a pervasive Semi-Pelagianism in a theological landscape dominated by nominalism and humanism?

inscription of fundamental tenets of Augustinian theology into the tradition of the Latin Church.⁵⁵

The fate of the Second Council of Orange, however, was a curious one. As Henri Bouillard has convincingly argued, until about the eighth century its decrees were held in high esteem. Yet from the tenth to the middle of the sixteenth century, theologians seem to have been utterly unaware of the fact that there had been a Second Council of Orange and that it had produced these normative teachings, to the effect that Augustine's late struggle against what was much later dubbed "Semi-Pelagianism" was lost on virtually all medieval theologians.⁵⁶ Only at the Council of Trent were these decrees rediscovered and reaffirmed.⁵⁷ Following Bouillard, Max Seckler and Joseph Wawrykow are inclined to think that St. Thomas probably did not have access during his Roman period to the acts of the Second Council of Orange, but quite likely did have access to the full text of such important treatises of the late Augustine as *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, *De correptione et gratia*, *De dono perseverantiae*, and *De praedestinatione sanctorum*—texts that were otherwise either unavailable to most medieval theologians or, at best, selectively available in the form of various collections of Augustinian *dicta*.⁵⁸ Hence, we should assume that St. Thomas, in his later life and antecedent to his second Parisian period, became a rare exception to the virtually collective medieval amnesia about St. Augustine's late theology of grace.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ One important tenet of the late Augustine's theology, embraced by Luther and Calvin, was expressly rejected by the council: "Aliquos vero ad malum divina potestate praedestinos esse, non solum non credimus, sed etiam si sunt qui tantum malum credere velint, cum omni detestatione illis anathema dicimus." Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange*, 46.

⁵⁶ Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 97–102. Notable exceptions are the Lombard, Gregor of Rimini, and students of St. Thomas Aquinas such as John Capreolus and Henry of Gorkum. For an instructive study on this matter, see Denis R. Janz, *Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), esp. 43–91.

⁵⁷ Denzinger and Schönmetzer's *Enchiridion symbolorum*, 36th ed., puts it the following way: "Hoc concilium, utpote solummodo provinciale plurimis ignotum et mox per saecula oblivioni traditum, disputationibus demum Concilii Tridentini memoriae redditum est" (131).

⁵⁸ Consider the fact that Luther "discovered" the late Augustine only shortly before 1517 in the relatively recent (1506) Amorbach edition of Augustine's works.

⁵⁹ See Max Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1961), 90–98; and Joseph P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action: "Merit" in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 266–76.

In a day and age when not a few post-Vatican II theologians are eager to dilute or even jettison the Church's teaching on original sin, as well as prevenient grace, for the sake of an easier—but thereby misunderstood—evangelization, it is crucial to remember and reappropriate the canons of this council. Orange II's unwavering insistence on prevenient grace, as well as the arrant impotence of the *liberum arbitrium* in matters of salvation, constitutes a small but critical bridge across the Reformation divide. To put the matter differently, had the canons of the Second Council of Orange been alive and well in late medieval theology, Luther would not have been in need of "rediscovering" Augustine against the nominalist theologians of the *via moderna* by rigorously appropriating, albeit in a new key, central tenets of Augustine's late theology. But alas, only at the Council of Trent were the canons of Orange II fully reclaimed and reinstated, and this by way of a thorough retrieval of the theology of the *doctor communis*.

Divine Transcendental Causality: St. Thomas's Surpassing Augustinian Synthesis

I shall conclude our *tour d'horizon* by turning finally and explicitly to the *doctor communis* himself. I should like to propose that by way of the pivotal Thomist axiom that grace presupposes as well as perfects nature⁶⁰—as

⁶⁰ *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2: "Cum enim gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat, oportet quod naturalis ratio subserviat fidei; sicut et naturalis inclinatio voluntatis obsequitur caritati." *ST* I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1: "Sic enim fides praesupponit cognitionem naturalem, sicut gratia naturam, et ut perfectio perfectibile." All citations from the *Summa theologiae* are taken from Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, 3rd ed. (Turin: Edizioni San Paolo, 1999); the English citations are taken from the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, originally published in 1911, revised in 1920, and reissued in 1948.

For an instructive account of the emergence of the axiom "gratia supponit naturam" in the Patristic theologians to its full development in St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas, see J. B. Beumer, S.J., "Gratia supponit naturam: Zur Geschichte eines theologischen Prinzips," *Gregorianum* 20 (1939): 381–406. I would emphasize that in the subsequent discussion of St. Thomas I shall consider exclusively his mature views on the *initium fidei* from his second period of teaching at Paris (1268–72). On his biography, see exhaustively Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), esp. 197–223; on the development of St. Thomas's thought on the *initium fidei*, see the definitive account by Bernard Lonergan, *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 1, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 21–43, 98–104; and on the related topic of merit, see Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*. In the following, I am especially indebted to Lonergan's penetrating analysis of operative grace in St. Thomas's theology.

substantiated by St. Thomas's metaphysics of being, which climaxes in the surpassing beauty of divine transcendental causality—can we successfully avert the reductive alternatives of Erasmus's theologically erroneous as well as Luther's philosophically erroneous Augustinianism.

Undoubtedly, St. Thomas's salient axiom serves first and foremost to illuminate the supernatural end of humanity, the beatific vision, and the way God moves us to this end. Nevertheless, the same axiom also serves as a premier aid in understanding that the root of the mystery of divine and human operation in the act of conversion lies in the very nature of created freedom itself. For human free will, in its very natural structure, is a created reality all the way down. Hence, not only does it fall without remainder under the purview of divine providence,⁶¹ but even more important, natural freedom as created reality is constituted and sustained by God's first gratuitous act *ad extra*, namely, his act of creation, which is to give being (*dare esse*).⁶² It is precisely in this regard that St. Thomas is most faithful to St. Augustine's mature intentions by developing a metaphysics of being that accounts for the ontological difference, that is, the principal difference between Creator and creature and, simultaneously, for utter creaturely dependence upon the Creator.⁶³ In the *dare esse*, the first and fundamental act of divine gratuity, God is the sole agent, such that *ipsum esse* is God's first effect.⁶⁴ This effect, however, does not subsist by itself but only in the plenitude of beings.⁶⁵ The latter we might convey

⁶¹ On this topic, see Stephen A. Long, "Divine Providence and John 15:5," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Dauphinais and Levering, 140–52.

⁶² *I Sent.*, 37.1.1c.: "Creare . . . est dare esse." In elucidating divine transcendental causality primarily by way of St. Thomas's metaphysics of being, the subsequent modest and rather preliminary sketch does by no means claim to offer a sufficiently elaborated analysis of the human act in the *initium fidei*. Rather, a full account of the act of conversion would need to attend in much greater detail than the scope of the present essay allows to St. Thomas's metaphysical psychology, which is as precise as it is compelling in its analytic rigor.

⁶³ For a comprehensive and detailed recent historical reconstruction of St. Thomas's metaphysics of being, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000); and for attempts at reconstructing the metaphysics of being strictly *ad mentem Sancti Thomae*, see the numerous instructive and penetrating articles by Lawrence Dewan, O.P.

⁶⁴ *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, 6, ad 2. "Ipsum esse est actus ultimus qui participabilis est ab omnibus; ipsum autem nihil participat."

⁶⁵ *Sententia libri Metaphysicae*, 12.1 (Marietti 2419): "Ens dicitur quasi esse habens, hoc autem solum est substantia, quae subsistit"; cf. *ST I*, q. 45, a. 4, c.

niently abbreviate with the notion “nature.”⁶⁶ Hence, in and through the act of being, God is always already closer to the creature than the creature to itself.⁶⁷

Since quite obviously for St. Thomas, free will must be part and parcel of creation all the way down, the substantiation of his theology of creation by his metaphysics of being obtains also, for our purposes most relevantly, for the reality of natural freedom. Consider his reasoning:

The movement of the will is from within, as also is the movement of nature. Now although it is possible for something to move a natural thing, without being the cause of the thing moved, yet that alone, which is in some way the cause of a thing's nature, can cause a natural movement in that thing. . . . Accordingly man endowed with a will is sometimes moved by something that is not his cause; but that his voluntary movement be from an exterior principle that is not the cause of his will, is impossible.

Now the cause of the will can be none other than God. And this is evident for two reasons. First, because the will is a power of the rational soul, which is caused by God alone, by creation, as was stated in the first part (q. 90, a. 2). Secondly, it is evident from the fact that the will is ordained to the universal good. Wherefore nothing else can be the cause of the will, except God Himself, Who is the universal good: while every other good is good by participation, and is some particular good, and a particular cause does not give a universal inclination. (*ST* I–II, q. 9, a. 6, c.)

Bernard Lonergan offers a succinct interpretation of St. Thomas's argument: “Because God creates the soul, He alone can operate within the will; again, because the will tends to the *bonum universale*, this tendency cannot be the effect of any particular cause but only of the universal cause, God.”⁶⁸

God causes the will—which is just one particular faculty of the soul, together with the soul itself—to be according to its own particular nature, that is, to tend to the *bonum universale*, whereby “inclinations of the will remain indeterminately disposed to many things”⁶⁹ depending on what

⁶⁶ St. Thomas uses the notion of “nature” in numerous analogous ways. I refer here to his use of “nature” in the general sense of the whole order of creation (“Ipse est conditor et ordinator naturae.” *De potentia*, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1) and subsequently, also to his use of “nature” as the essence of a thing, that is, that by virtue of which it is what it is, under the aspect of its characteristic action. See *De ente et essentia*, 1, 45.

⁶⁷ *ST* I, q. 8, a. 1, c.: “Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt.”

⁶⁸ Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 103.

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 6, c.; Davies, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 457.

the intellect proposes to the will as a good to tend to. Hence, the will in its particular nature is a function of God's *dare esse*:

What first moves the intellect and the will is something superior to them, namely, God. And since He moves every kind of thing according to the nature of the moveable thing, . . . He also moves the will according to its condition, as indeterminately disposed to many things, not in a necessary way. Therefore, if we should consider the movement of the will regarding the performance of an act, the will is evidently not moved in a necessary way.⁷⁰

So also the external acts that result from deliberation (*consilium*) and choice (*electio*)—from the interplay between intellect and will⁷¹—that is, acts of genuine contingency, do not fall outside the divine giving of being and hence remain fully under the purview of divine providence: “And so it is not contrary to freedom that God cause acts of free choice.”⁷²

What we have considered thus far pertains to nature, the effect of the *dare esse*, God's first and fundamental gratuity *ad extra*. The *initium fidei* does not, however, belong to this effect; rather, it is the distinctive effect of grace. Grace in the precise sense must be understood as a *second*, unfathomable, surpassing gratuity (always already presupposing the gratuity of the *dare esse*) and, in that, fundamentally different from nature by (1) being contingent in relationship to nature, and (2) efficaciously turning human beings from sin to God, directing, and moving them to their supernatural end. Lest the fundamentally and exclusively Christological and pneumatological character of grace be lost, let me stress that for St. Thomas “the mystery of Christ's Incarnation and Passion is the way by which men obtain beatitude” (*ST* II–II, q. 2, a. 7, c.); specifically, “men become receivers of this grace through God's Son made man, whose humanity grace filled first, and thence flowed forth to us” through the action of the Holy Spirit (*ST* I–II, q. 108, a. 1, c.). Consequently, grace is most intrinsically and hence constitutively the created effect in the human being of the Son's and the Spirit's saving mission (*ST* I, q. 43, a. 3).

⁷⁰ Davies, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 459.

⁷¹ For a more detailed account of the intellect's and the will's interaction, see my chapter in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hüter (London/New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 160–93, esp. 174–78; and most recently, Michael S. Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 18–62.

⁷² Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4; Davies, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 239. “Et sic <non> repugnat libertati quod Deus est causa actus liberi arbitrii.” Ibid., 238.

Grace works by the logic of *convenientia*—a very Augustinian category—that is, by the logic of an unfathomable fittingness, calling forth praise and delight. But because nature is the “way of being,” grace always comes “on the way of being.”⁷³ For everything is included in the act of being.⁷⁴ Yet what does this mean for grace? Is grace to be understood as an intensification of being (*esse*), on the same scale as nature, just infinitely more? No. For if it were so, the act of being would not be perfect in and of itself but would require grace for its perfection. Is grace then extrinsic to the act of being, a second act, foreign to and superimposed upon the first? Grace cannot be that either, since everything is contained in the act of being, the *actus ultimus*. Rather, the instantaneous unfolding of the *actus essendi* into the order and hierarchy of beings entails that everything is generally ordered to God, who is the universal good. This ordering comes about by way of the ordering of each being to its own proper ends. As we will see, grace is the created effect of the gratuitous divine act—always coming on the way of being—that directs human beings to their supernatural end, that is, to God as their overarching specific end. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Remember that at present we are concerned exclusively with the initial conversion of the human being *sub conditione peccati* to God, an act that does not involve an infusion of habitual grace but solely the original and fundamental operation of God converting the soul to himself—in short, operative grace. Hence, it should not surprise that the *initium fidei* is not the total conversion St. Thomas envisages but rather the very *beginning* of a comprehensive conversion in which the human—on the basis of habitual grace—increasingly takes part:

Every movement of the will towards God can be termed a conversion to God. And so there is a threefold turning to God. The first is by the perfect love of God; this belongs to the creature enjoying the possession of God; and for such conversion, consummate grace is required. The next turning to God is that which merits beatitude; and for this there is required habitual grace, which is the principle of merit. The third conversion is that whereby a man disposes himself so that he may have grace; for this no habitual grace is required; but the operation of God, Who draws the soul towards Himself, according to Lamentations 5:21: “Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted.” (ST I, q. 62, a. 2, ad 3)

⁷³ Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus: Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin Bieler and Florian Pitschl (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1998), 333.

⁷⁴ *De potentia*, 1.1, c.: “Esse significat aliquid completum et simplex sed non subsistens.”

The conversion identified by St. Thomas in the third place is indeed the first and fundamental one, and the only one considered here.

Operative grace denotes the special act of God by which the human being is efficaciously ordered to God as his or her supernatural end, that is, his or her overarching particular end. Put differently, operative grace is nothing other than the divine *initium* of the second gratuity by which God brings about the returning to God of the *actus essendi*, as it comes to subsist as human being, a returning that comes about by way of a gratuitous elevation of the human faculties of intellect and will. In order to understand the operation of grace correctly, we need to consider five distinctive, albeit closely interrelated, aspects of operative grace.

1. *The orientation of the will.* First, we need to call attention to the fact that in operative grace God acts on the will and not on the intellect. As Lonergan rightly avers: "The first act does not presuppose any object apprehended by the intellect; God acts directly on the radical orientation of the will."⁷⁵ Because the will is the efficient cause of all human acts and because it moves all the other powers of the soul to their acts, the will is the first principle of sin (*ST* I–II, q. 74, a. 1). And consequently, of all the powers of the soul, the will has been most fundamentally infected by original sin (*ST* I–II, q. 83, a. 3; *De Malo*, q. 4, a. 2, c.). For this reason, it is the will that first and foremost needs to be restored. However, operative grace does not merely restore the will but orients the will such that God becomes the overarching specific end to which the will tends. It is on the basis of this gratuitous reorientation that the will commands the intellect to the act of faith.⁷⁶
2. *The special motion of operative grace.* Next we need to emphasize that St. Thomas distinguishes the special motion of operative grace very clearly from the will's universal motion to the *bonum universale*:

⁷⁵ Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 128. Lonergan's insight does not contradict the fact that every free act of the will is informed by the intellect (*ST* I–II, q. 77, a. 2, c.). Concrete sin is in the act of the *liberum arbitrium* and hence is the product of the will as well as the intellect: "Dicendum quod peccatum essentialiter consistit in actu liberi arbitrii, quod est *facultas voluntatis et rationis*." *ST* I–II, q. 77, a. 6 [emphasis added].

⁷⁶ *ST* II–II, q. 2, a. 9, c.: "Now the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God"; and *ST* II–II, q. 6, a. 1, c.: "Faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace." For a detailed and nuanced account, see Sherwin, *By Knowledge & By Love*, 119–46.

God moves man's will, as the Universal Mover, to the universal object of the will, which is good. And without this universal motion, man cannot will anything. But man determines himself by his reason to will this or that, which is true or apparent good. Nevertheless, sometimes God moves some specially [*specialiter*] to the willing of something determinate, which is good; as in the case of those whom He moves by grace. (ST I–II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3)

Lonergan rightly points out that while this grace may be a habitual grace, “it may also be an actual grace that is a change of will.”⁷⁷ In order to substantiate this claim, Lonergan refers to *De Malo*, where St. Thomas states: “And an external cause alters free choice, as when God by grace changes the will of a human being from evil to good, as Proverbs 21:1 says: ‘The heart of the king is in God’s hands, and God will turn it whithersoever He willed.’”⁷⁸ This changing of the will from evil to good comes always on the way of being and consequently does not violate or contradict the will’s proper operation. For “the will advanced to its first movement in virtue of the instigation [*instinctus*] of some exterior mover [*exterior movens*]” (ST I–II, q. 9, a. 4, c.), who is God himself (ST I–II, q. 9, a. 6, c.). Thanks to the divine *instinctus*,⁷⁹ the appetitive inclination of the will tends to God himself as the overarching specific good.

3. *God’s external, transcendental causality operating internally.* St. Thomas uses the notion of an external cause to refer to God’s alteration of free choice. “External” is here distinguished from “internal,” where the latter is the proximate cause in the order of secondary causality. God as external cause is in no way extrinsic to the creature’s nature or existence but external only to the creature’s proximate causality. It is precisely the metaphysics of being that prevents this “externality” from being understood in the modern sense of a “first cause,” issued by a “highest” or “perfect” being—that is, infinitely superior to all other causes and beings but still on an ontic continuum and hence in a competitive relationship with them because it cannot transcend the ontological level of secondary causality. For St. Thomas, God’s external causality remains transcendent causality all the way down and

⁷⁷ Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 104.

⁷⁸ *De Malo*, q. 16, a. 5, c.; Davies, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 877.

⁷⁹ At this point I can only stress the pivotal role the term “instinctus” plays in the development of St. Thomas’s thoroughly anti-Semi-Pelagian theology of grace. For a full account, see Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille*; and more recently and accessibly, Sherwin, *By Knowledge & By Love*, 139–44.

hence is not competitive with the internal proximate causality of the will—whose first universal mover is also God.

Lonergan, in his interpretation of St. Thomas's theology of operative grace, overcomes this noxious modernist misunderstanding thanks to the "theorem of divine transcendence," which he sees at work in St. Thomas: "The Thomist higher synthesis was to place God above and beyond the created orders of necessity and contingency: because God is universal cause, his providence must be certain; but because He is a transcendent cause, there can be no incompatibility between terrestrial contingency and the causal certitude of providence."⁸⁰

It would be a mistake, however, to create a competitive relationship between what Lonergan describes as a theorem and St. Thomas's metaphysics of being.⁸¹ Rather, the theorem is consequent upon the cosmic emanation scheme operative in St. Thomas's metaphysics so that the former presupposes the latter: "For an instrument is a lower cause moved by a higher so as to produce an effect within the category proportionate to the higher; but in the cosmic hierarchy all causes are moved except the highest, and every effect is at least in the category of being; therefore, all causes except the highest are instruments."⁸² David Burrell brings Lonergan's insistence upon God's transcendent causality (that is, transcending necessity as well as contingency) succinctly to the point when he states:

So what freely comes forth from God in its very being can be brought to act freely by that same One who keeps it in existence. The how escapes us in both cases, of course, but using the language of "theorems" links us expressly to the originating activity, and so

⁸⁰ Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 81–82.

⁸¹ Lonergan characterizes a theorem as "something known by understanding the data already apprehended and not something known by adding a new datum to the apprehension, something like the principle of work and not something like another lever, something like the discovery of gravitation and not something like the discovery of America" (idem, *Grace and Freedom*, 147). David Burrell rightly points out that "we must speak here of *theorems* and of their *corollaries*, . . . because we cannot determine anything in the creature which indicates that it is an instrument. . . . That is, we know that the hammer did not build the house, yet that the carpenters who did are themselves instruments as well—that we cannot see. Yet we must assert it, although we can only assert it as a theorem." David B. Burrell, C.S.C., "Jacques Maritain and Bernard Lonergan on Divine and Human Freedom," in *The Future of Thomism*, ed. Deal W. Hudson and Dennis W. Moran (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 165 [original emphasis].

⁸² Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 83.

reminds us that just as the how of creation escapes us (it is not a motion), so does the manner in which God causes agents to cause by “applying causes to effects.”⁸³

To summarize: Under the category of God as transcendent cause, operative grace is identical with the very act of the will willing God as supernatural end. Again quoting Lonergan: “God as external principle moves the will to the end, and in special cases He moves it by grace to a special end. Conspicuous among the latter is conversion, which is expressed entirely in terms of willing the end.”⁸⁴

4. *Divine instrumentality: The external cause moving internally.* When St. Thomas responds to the question whether human beings can prepare themselves for grace without the external aid of grace, he emphasizes that the gift of habitual grace is the precondition for right operation and enjoyment of God. In other words, the very medium for right operation and enjoyment of God is the acquired Christian freedom. But what is the first cause of this acquired freedom? Remember that it is precisely in this context that St. Thomas introduces the concept of the divine *instinctus*. Is the first cause of this freedom internal, intrinsic to its own proper causality—leading to an infinite regress of causes? Or is it external—violating the very nature of free choice itself? We must conclude that the first cause moves internally, interior to the will itself, but as external cause—the divine *instinctus*. Clearly, it is only a genuinely transcendent mode of causality that can fulfill these conditions. Hence, the divine *instinctus* cannot be simply the first in a chain of secondary causality. Rather, the whole sequence of secondary causality must relate instrumentally to the transcendent first cause.

Let us attend to St. Thomas’s response at length:

Now in order that man prepare himself to receive this gift, it is not necessary to presuppose any further habitual gift in the soul, otherwise we should go on to infinity. But we must presuppose a gratuitous gift of God, Who moves the soul inwardly or inspires the good wish. For in these two ways do we need the Divine assistance, as stated above (aa. 2, 3). Now that we need the help of God to move us, is manifest. For since every agent acts for an end, every cause must direct its effect to its end, and hence since the order of ends is according to the order of agents or movers, man must be directed to

⁸³ Burrell, “Jacques Maritain and Bernard Lonergan on Divine and Human Freedom,” 166.

⁸⁴ Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 125.

the last end by the motion of the first mover, and to the proximate end by the motion of any of the subordinate movers; . . . And thus since God is the first Mover simply, it is by His motion that everything seeks Him under the common notion of good, whereby everything seeks to be likened to God in its own way. Hence Dionysius says (*De Divinis Nominibus*, IV) that “God turns all to Himself.” But He directs righteous men to Himself as to a special end [*ad specialem finem*], which they seek, and to which they wish to cling, according to Psalm 72:28, “it is good for me to adhere to my God.” And that they are *turned* to God can only spring from God’s having *turned* them. Now to prepare oneself for grace is, as it were, to be turned to God; just as, whoever has his eyes turned away from the light of the sun, prepares himself to receive the sun’s light, by turning his eyes towards the sun. Hence it is clear that man cannot prepare himself to receive the light of grace except by the gratuitous help of God moving him inwardly.⁸⁵

Note the crucial sentence: “Now to prepare oneself for grace is, as it were, to be turned to God” (*Hoc autem est praeparare se ad gratiam, quasi ad Deum converti*). To prepare oneself for the gift of habitual grace, for acquired freedom, *is* to be turned to God. Such is the grammatical instantiation of understanding God as transcendent cause to move interiorly as a genuinely external cause. In other words, one’s own act of preparation is caused by God without that act’s losing its integrity as the will’s proper operation, being drawn toward its end—but now being the special end of adhering to God. If this indeed obtains, there is no ontological difference between operative and cooperative grace; rather, they are to be understood as two moments of God’s actual grace simply differentiated according to their different effects.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ ST I–II, q. 109, a. 6, c. [original emphasis]: “Sic igitur, cum Deus sit primum movens simpliciter, ex eius motione est quod omnia in ipsum convertantur secundum communem intentionem boni, per quam unumquodque intendit assimilari Deo secundum suum modum. Unde et Dionysius, in libro *De Divinis Nominibus* [c. 4 §10], dicit quod Deus ‘convertit omnia ad seipsum.’ Sed homines iustos convertit ad seipsum sicut ad specialem finem, quem intendunt, et cui cupiunt adhaerere sicut bono proprio; secundum illud *Psalmi* 72 [28]: ‘Mihi adhaerere Deo bonum est.’ Et ideo quod homo convertatur ad Deum, hoc non potest esse nisi Deo ipsum convertente. Hoc autem est praeparare se ad gratiam, quasi ad Deum converti: sicut ille qui habet oculum aversum a lumine solis, per hoc se praeparat ad recipiendum lumen solis, quod oculos suos convertit versus solem. Unde patet quod homo non potest se praeparare ad lumen gratiae suscipiendum, nisi per auxilium gratuitum Dei interius moventis.”

⁸⁶ ST I–II, q. 111, a. 2, ad 4: “Operating and cooperating grace are the same grace; but are distinguished by their different effects.”

5. *Operative and cooperative grace*: “voluntas mota et non movens and voluntas mota et movens.” Let us now attend more specifically to the particular distinction between operative and cooperative grace. In order to appreciate this distinction, we need to grasp that it presupposes a pivotal distinction in the voluntary action itself:

Now, in a voluntary action, there is a twofold action, namely, the interior action of the will, and the external action: and each of these actions has its object. The end is properly the object of the interior act of the will: while the object of the external action, is that on which the action is brought to bear. (*ST I-II*, q. 18, a. 6, c.)

While the interior action is concerned solely with the end itself, the external action pertains to the means that lead to the end, means that can entail proper proximate ends of their own, which are respectively objects of interior acts of the will.

This distinction is put to work as St. Thomas considers how God converts the soul to himself by giving himself to the will as a special good to be desired:

Now there is a double act in us. First, there is the interior act of the will, and with regard to this act the will is a thing moved, and God is the mover [*fistum actum, voluntas se habet ut mota, Deus autem ut movens*]; and especially when the will, which hitherto willed evil, begins to will good. And hence, inasmuch as God moves the human mind to this act, we speak of operating grace. (*ST I-II*, q. 111, a. 2, c.)

Hence, the operative grace of conversion is the very act of the will willing God as the overarching special good to be desired, that is, as willing God as the supernatural end.⁸⁷ Lonergan explains:

The *voluntas mota et non movens* is the reception of divine action in the creature antecedent to any operation on the creature's part. So far from being a free act, it lies entirely outside the creature's power. But

⁸⁷ Though not irresistibly: “God does not cause grace not to be supplied to someone; rather, those not supplied with grace offer an obstacle to grace insofar as they turn themselves away from the light that does not turn itself away, as Dionysius says” (*De Malo*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 8; Davies, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 233). However, if God so wishes, God can move the will infallibly by inclining the person to good unto the end. Hence, “perseverance of the wayfarer does not fall under merit, since it depends solely on the divine motion, which is the principle of all merit. Now God freely bestows the good of perseverance, on whomsoever He bestows it.” *ST I-II*, q. 114, a. 9, c.

though not a free act in itself, it is the first principle of free acts, even internal free acts such as faith, fear, hope, sorrow, and repentance.⁸⁸

Accordingly, the internal act of faith, arising from the new principle, is a free act, an act of *liberum arbitrium*: “Now the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God, so that it is subject to the free will [*liberum arbitrium*] in relation to God; and consequently the act of faith can be meritorious” (*ST* II–II, q. 2, a. 9, c.).

How does St. Thomas account for the second aspect of the “twofold action,” the exterior acts by which the human person chooses (on the basis of the will’s consent with the intellect’s *consilium*) the means to attain the end?

Since [the exterior act] is commanded by the will, . . . the operation of this act is attributed to the will. And because God assists us in this act, both by strengthening our will interiorly so as to attain to the act, and by granting outwardly the capability of operating, it is with respect to this that we speak of cooperating grace. (*ST* I–II, q. 111, a. 2, c.)

Consequently, as St. Thomas emphasizes: “God does not justify us without ourselves, because whilst we are being justified we consent to God’s justification [*justitiae*] by a movement of our free will. Nevertheless this movement is not the cause of grace, but the effect; hence the whole operation pertains to grace.”⁸⁹ The difference between *voluntas mota et non movens* and *voluntas mota et movens* is the difference between willing the end and willing the means leading to this end. *Voluntas mota et movens* simply renders the actualization of acquired freedom in the efficacious choice of means, as the will’s proximate causality is now directed to its special end, God himself.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 424.

⁸⁹ *ST* I–II, q. 111, a. 2, ad 2: “Deus non sine nobis nos iustificat, quia per motum liberi arbitrii, dum iustificamur, Dei iustitiae consentimus. Ille tamen motus non est causa gratiae, sed effectus. Unde tota operatio pertinet ad gratiam.”

⁹⁰ In his commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans—another of his late works—St. Thomas applies this actualization of the acquired freedom to the reality of the spiritual person, that is, the person who is moved by the higher prompting [*superiori instinctu*] of the Holy Spirit: “Homo spiritualis non quasi ex motu propriae voluntatis principaliter, sed ex instinctu Spiritus Sancti inclinatur ad aliquid agendum. . . . Non tamen per hoc excluditur quin viri spirituales, per voluntatem et liberum arbitrium operentur, quia ipsum motum voluntatis et liberi arbitrii Spiritus Sanctus in eis causat, secundum illud Phil. II: *Deus est qui operatur in nobis velle et*

Thus, cooperative grace is nothing but the grace of conversion, the willing of the supernatural end, but now as moving the will to will the means leading to this end.

What remained ontologically implicit in St. Augustine's controversial concerns becomes explicit by way of St. Thomas's metaphysics of being. Lonergan stresses rightly that

in both cases the same theory of instrumentality and of freedom is in evidence: the will has its strip of autonomy, yet beyond this there is the ground from which free acts spring; and that ground God holds and moves as a fencer moves his whole rapier by grasping only the hilt. When the will is *mota et non movens, solus autem Deus movens, dicitur gratia operans*. On the other hand, when the will is *et mota et movens, dicitur gratia cooperans*. . . . In actual grace, divine operation effects the will of the end to become cooperation when this will of the end leads to an efficacious choice of means.⁹¹

Because it comes on the way of being (*esse*), operative grace, by way of the divine *instinctus*, is closer to the human will than the will to itself. Consequently, operative grace neither competes nor conflicts with the exercise of created freedom, or *electio humana*, as St. Thomas calls it. Rather, divine instrumentality and created freedom are the two sides of one and the same reality.

Now we have reached the apposite point to revisit the topic of necessity and contingency that drove the debate between Erasmus and Luther. Recall that Erasmus understood Wyclif's and Luther's "necessitarianism" to imply that humans are only instruments in God's hand, with their *liberum arbitrium* reduced to nothing and therefore their very humanity reduced to a subhuman form of existence. In an important sense, Luther agreed with Erasmus's judgment, except that he regarded such a humiliation as the most appropriate medicine to destroy the worst pathogen of original sin, *superbia*. Neither Erasmus nor Luther was able conceptually to conceive divine transcendent causality in the way St. Thomas did. Thus the possibility of understanding instrumentality in a way that would encompass necessity as well as contingency was lost on them. While Erasmus even referred to the Scholastic distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae* in order to score a point against Luther's position, he did not have the slightest clue how to put this crucial distinction to work conceptually.

perficere." *Super romanos*, 8.3; *S. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici in Omnes S. Pauli Apostoli Epistolas Commentarii*, vol. 1, 7th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1929), 111.

⁹¹ Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 147.

Had he not despised the discipline of Scholastic argumentation and been thoroughly uninformed with regard to St. Thomas's metaphysics of being, he might have been able to respond differently to Luther's alleged necessitarianism. Luther, as we have noted, rejected the distinction itself on clearly nominalist grounds and therefore faced the problem of a potential account of contingency that would be inherently competitive with the infallibility of the divine will and thus had to be rejected as well.

We have seen that an account of divine causality that transcends as well as encompasses both necessity and contingency depends on a metaphysics of being concordant with the notion that "God's will universally causes being and every consequence of being, and so both necessity and contingency."⁹² Moreover, created freedom, the capacity to choose between alternatives and decide for or against a course of action, remains always intact, even *sub conditione peccati*, because the free will pertains solely to the interior act of deliberation in regard to the end(s), along with the *electio* of the external means to move toward the end(s). Regarding the end to which it is drawn, it is "wired" to the *bonum universale*. Under the condition of sin, this can take the form of whatever seems to be a good, even to a person fully habituated into malice.⁹³ Only when the will's inclination is reoriented by God's particular operation of grace, the divine *instinctus*, to the special overarching end, indeed, the supernatural end per se—God himself—does the quality of the human's *electio* fundamentally change. Nonetheless, because God as transcendent, external cause, by way of operative grace, moves internally, the ensuing change is the person's own preparation.

So, my modest proposal is simply this: By way of his metaphysics of being, as it accounts for divine transcendental causality "all the way down," St. Thomas offers a salutary way of preserving St. Augustine's fundamental insight that grace and free will do not need to come into a conflictual competition in the mystery of the *initium fidei*. On matters of grace and free will in the *initium fidei*, St. Thomas is a profoundly Augustinian theologian. This is obvious. What is less obvious and in

⁹² *De Malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 15; Davies, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 911.

⁹³ *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 12, c.: "And a habit sometimes inclines the will, when customary behavior has, as it were, turned the inclination to such a good into a habit or natural disposition for the transient good, and then the will of itself is inclined to the good by its own motion apart from any emotion. And this is to sin by choice, that is, deliberately or purposely or even maliciously." Davies, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 301.

need of recovery is the fact that even his metaphysics of being, rightly understood, ultimately serves none but proper Augustinian ends and that by way of his metaphysics of being St. Thomas is capable of achieving a surpassing Augustinian synthesis of unparalleled depth and beauty. The ongoing evangelical and hence ecumenical significance of this synthesis is that it offers a potent prophylactic against the pathogens of (semi-) Pelagian as well as (quasi-) necessitarian accounts of the *initium fidei*, numerous afloat in contemporary theology.⁹⁴ N-V

⁹⁴ Unfortunately, the important and original work by Dom M. John Farrelly, O.S.B., *Predestination, Grace, and Free Will* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964), came to my attention only after the completion of this essay. In this noteworthy book—in good Benedictine fashion deeply immersed in the study of Scripture and the patristic tradition—Farrelly, not unlike Lonergan in the end, but by way of other means—argues for the surpassing superiority of St. Thomas’s position in comparison to those advanced by the contestants in the (in)famous “De auxiliis” controversy. Anyone wishing to return to the speculative intricacies of this greatly instructive controversy cannot afford to bypass Farrelly’s book, for the latter demonstrates convincingly that speculative theology can only afford to ignore at its own peril the rich wisdom accrued by positive theology’s surpassing attention to Scripture and the patristic tradition. Contrary to some later scholastics, St. Thomas never committed this mistake, nor for that matter the opposite one we had the occasion to witness in Luther and Erasmus. This is one of the reasons why St. Thomas’s work remains the single most important source for a proper theological *ressourcement* in the Latin tradition of the Church.