

The Mystery of Problems for Modern Theological Methodology

BRUNO M. SHAH, O.P.

Providence College

Providence, RI

Recent trends in Catholic theology emphasize the category of “mystery.” But “problems,” which can seem distinct from and even opposed to mysteries, have a constitutive role in the work of theology as well. If the object of faith is God, and if theology’s goal is typically defined as “faith seeking understanding,” then the object of theology must include the seeking’s problematical quotient. At the very least, problems condition the faith-and-reason labor of theological enquiry. This essay claims that problems philosophically orient and index the theological articulation of mysteries—not the mysteries themselves—particularly in a modern key, and that they require explicit attention in theological methodology and pedagogy.

First, I explain my concern with the “return to mystery” in conciliar-era Catholic theology. This explanation entails, second, describing the special attention to “problems” in neo-Kantianism, which bequeaths the tension between the empirical world and transcendental freedom to modern theology. These two historiographical matters in methodology set up the tension between problems and mysteries for Catholic thinking. Third, I briefly return to Aristotle’s thoughts on the matter, which are a lodestone for the tradition. Fourth, I evaluate the positions of Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel, the most important conciliar-era thinkers who thematized the relationship between problems and mysteries. My treatment will show how both ontological (Maritain) and existential (Marcel) dynamics of mystery are necessarily linked to metaphysical and spiritual problems. The

critical ascertaining of theological mystery formally requires orientation via philosophical problems.

My concern here is fundamental, ecclesial, and professional, interested that those who serve the Church through theological writing and teaching do so in a recognizably common or compatible manner, and in a way that can meaningfully stimulate theological interest. If the teaching of theology would invite students to embark upon the *via inventionis* and not merely yield to the *via doctrinae*, there must be fundamental advertence to ontological and existential problems as the theologically constitutive point of departure.¹ Theologians do well to think in correlative terms of problems and mysteries. As a fifth and final point, then, I suggest that the quintessential starting point for (fundamental) theology today is the problem and mystery of the human person.

Historical Context 1: The Return to Mystery

Contemporary Church life and theology have witnessed a “return to mystery.”² “Mystery” refers to some range or dynamic of reality that is essentially inaccessible apart from some feature of religious or spiritual practice. Christian reference to “mystery” or “mysteries” etymologically intimates that there are realities of which we cannot and/or ought not to speak, even as these mysteries have in some way been disclosed.³ Mysteries, therefore, are tensional in that they indicate at once contact and transcendence, knowledge and nescience. Christians and others communicate in religious mysteries through liturgical exercise and creedal confession, as well as through personal prayer and even existential trial. They are mediations of what is categorically transcendent, of what constitutively eludes or escapes

¹ See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dado-sky, 2nd ed. (1972; repr. Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto, 2017), 318–21.

² The literature on this matter is considerable and well-known. See e.g., Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Boersma’s study does not pay special attention to the liturgical renewal in the Catholic Church or the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and its influential studies of ancient mystery religions. Arguably, in charting the twentieth century’s emphasis upon mystery, one could also consider the great attention certain philosophical thinkers (from Wittgenstein to Derrida) have paid to apophatic/negative theologies, although the word “mystery” does not figure as thematically or centrally.

³ For the neotestamentary notion of the word and comparative background, one may begin by reviewing Günther Bornkamm, “μυστήριον/μυστήριον,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 802–28.

the categories of our objectifying consciousness. Accordingly, the mysterious regards the inarticulable.

That the substance of religious mysteries is real or true cannot be proven beyond all question, not according to commonly accessible human criteria of justification. For Christians, the gift of faith provides the convincing motive to believe in the reality of Christian mysteries through a kind of thinking with felt decision. Granting this claim, the work of theology is to reflect upon the mysteries of faith and develop expressible knowledge. Theology articulates (the) faith, extrapolating upon the reasons that the heart has for its belief. To do this work, theology trades upon fixed standards of confessional speech, liturgical practice, and perhaps also moral action, which provide lexical cogency and communicable intelligibility.

The late nineteenth century witnessed attacks upon theology's claims to objectively or universally valid expression, owing especially to challenges from both epistemology and historiography.⁴ The surge of post-Enlightenment liberalism was surely catalytic as well. The Catholic Church initially aggregated these attacks in terms of "modernism." But then—as the standard history continues—conciliar theology gave fresh and viable riposte to what was unacceptable in "the synthesis of all heresies," not least through expropriating what was valid in the latter's own goals and strategies.

To cite one monumental example of the new theology, Karl Rahner argued that only God is truly or ultimately mystery.⁵ For Rahner, "mysteries" strictly understood have to do with the form of God's relationship to himself (Trinity) or to humans (in Christ, and through Eucharistic communion). Rahner pared down the material phenomena of mediation to their essential ontological or psychological structuration of reality. He responded to challenges against the Catholic faith's theological objectivity and universality through opting for a kind of transcendentalism that is at once epistemological and existential.

⁴ For an orientation, see John W. O'Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2018); Gerald McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury, 1977).

⁵ To begin, see Karl Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology" (1959), in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1966), 36–73; Rahner, "Mystery," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury, 1975), 1000–1004. For a recent overview, see Peter Joseph Fritz, "Rahner Saying Mystery," in *Karl Rahner's Aesthetics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 159–84. Fritz's work has the advantage of surveying standard interpretations while advancing his own thesis that Rahner's work is a "countersubjective" aesthetics.

For theologies that (directly or indirectly) incorporate Kantian and Heideggerian features, as did Rahner's, the structure of consciousness or spirit as reflexive governs the multiplicity of mysteries. As a result, for idealist-inspired metaphysics or phenomenology, there is only either immediate immediacy as pertains to the Godhead or mediated immediacy as pertains to the Christ—whether historically (as in Jesus of Nazareth) or sacramentally (as in the Eucharist). Hence, Rahner and others prefer to emphasize grace in terms of the uncreated grace that is the Holy Spirit.⁶

This may sound abstruse and academic but also incomplete. Nevertheless, Rahner's vision—that is to say, more broadly, what it represents for our essay—won the day at the Second Vatican Council. One need only consider the earlier, first Vatican Council's *Dei Filius*, which teaches that what is “proposed for belief are *mysteries*.” With respect to these mysteries of the Catholic religion, “reason” can achieve some “understanding of the *mysteries*, and that most fruitful, both from the analogy with the objects of its natural knowledge and from the connection of these *mysteries* with one another and with man's natural end. But it never becomes capable of understanding them in the way it does *truths* that constitute its proper object. For divine *mysteries* by their very nature [far] exceed the human intellect.”⁷ Theological mysteries, as multiple, are indexed according to the categories of the human intellect.⁸

On the other hand, Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (*DV*), speaks nowhere of mysteries in the plural, since the emphasis is on God's unitary self-revelation and grounding of communion. It speaks of divine revelation as communicating one essential “mystery,” the “mystery of salvation” that the “Old Testament” records, fulfilled in the “mystery” of Christ's incarnate life and work and communicated in the celebration of the Eucharistic “mystery.”⁹ Accordingly, Vatican II describes the task of theology in the following manner, focusing on the sources rather than the instruments of analysis and understanding: “Sacred

⁶ See e.g., Karl Rahner, “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace” (1939), in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, *God, Christ, Mary and Grace*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1961), 319–46; Rahner, “Nature and Grace [1960],” in *Theological Investigations*, 4:165–88.

⁷ The plural forms of *mysterium* are consistently used in the passages quoted. See First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (1870), in Denzinger-Hünermann [DH], nos. 3015–16 (emphasis added).

⁸ Accordingly, the challenge for theology is maintaining the integral interconnection of the multiplicity. See Conor McDonough, “*Dei Filius* IV: On Theological Method and the *Nexus Mysteriorum*,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 20, no. 3 (2022): 891–908.

⁹ See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, §§2, 15, 17, 26.

theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the *mystery* of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word" (*DV* §24; Denzinger-Hünemann [DH] no. 4231). This conciliar document essentially spoke of one mystery¹⁰—the revelation of salvation as communion with God in Christ through the Church and Eucharist.¹¹

We could mention other theologians and models as representative of the new theology's vindication; but Rahner provides a handy and well-known point of reference. In reading Rahner, whose "theological investigations" formed the bulk of his influential oeuvre, one justifiably assesses that, for him, whatever else he might rightly say about holy mystery, he is rather preoccupied with problems. Many of his articles begin by addressing a seeming contradiction or dilemma, with one of the horns often erected upon Heinrich Denzinger's catalogue of things that must or must not be said, and the other provided by some situational or intellectual challenge. Rahner's work is subject to various interpretations and evaluations.¹² But what is unarguably the case, not least because it follows Rahner's own avowal, is that his theological mindset—systematic in itself—was occasional and ad hoc in its articulation, notwithstanding his early systematical monographs in the philosophy of religion and the late, widely disseminated *Foundations of Christian Faith*.¹³

¹⁰ One may consider the singularity of mystery in *Dei Verbum* pursuant to the uniqueness of the human person, whose integral life is bound up with the response to God's self-revealing offer of salvation to all of history. See Hanjo Sauer, "The Doctrinal and the Pastoral: The Text on Divine Revelation," ch. 3 in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 4, Italian ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and English ed. Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 198–199. One could also refer more broadly to ecclesial mystery/sacramentality as core. See Ormond Rush, "Principle 9: Mystery/Sacrament," in *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Academic, 2019), 81–100. Of course, the conciliar texts are not the work of one author or mind and went through stages of re-drafting. On the opening paragraphs of what became *Dei Verbum*, see Jared Wicks, *Investigating Vatican II: Its Theologians, Ecumenical Turn, and Biblical Commitment* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 80–97.

¹¹ The difference of emphasis need not amount to a divergence of understanding. John Paul II's 1998 *Fides et Ratio* affirms the teaching of both Vatican I and II, and therefore speaks of mystery both in terms of unitary structure and multiple objects. Be that as it may, the difference is methodologically significant.

¹² See, e.g., Robert Masson, "Interpreting Rahner's Metaphoric Logic," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2010): 380–409, who identifies the plurality of systematic interpretations and proffers his own.

¹³ In his preface to the book, Rahner manifests his misgivings in publishing a book

The foregoing presents a continuous account of development *grosso modo*, presuming the reader's broad familiarity with the subject matter. But we can tease out the presence of two general models of theological concern—the one, concerned with mysteries, pointing to the afterlife of heaven, and the other concerned with Mystery, pressuring us with the experience of life on earth. The one focuses on analogical articulacy, while the other focuses on epistemological transcendency; the one leads to conclusive knowledge (*scientia*) about what God has revealed, while the other leads to the interpretation (hermeneutics) of revelation's handing-on, and easily addresses personal and political application. These are crude categories, the one leaning in the direction of Vatican I and the other in the direction of Vatican II; but again, they are heuristic for the purposes of our argument.

Whereas the earlier approach trusts in the essential reliability of analogical discourse with respect to the substantively transcendent, the latter approach tends to emphasize the need for interpretation in the sociological and historical order of subjectual experience. We should appreciate, though, that both models are analogical: the former relies upon some proportional measure between human thought and divine reality that is susceptible to analysis; the latter relies upon some proportional measure between modes and instances of human thought or experience across space and time.

Not without reason, one might think that these tendencies in theology are incompatible, that they are incompatible because they do not really agree upon the same principles or a shared grammar.¹⁴ The one will be tend to be authoritarian (and conservative), since it is essentially deductive; the other will tend to be subjective (and progressive), since it is essentially productive. The one focuses upon propositional analogicity, which secures the universality of creedal and liturgical expression, grounding theological argument and development. The other focuses upon mediated experience, which begins with description of concrete circumstances, advancing the applicability and scope of theological appreciation.

As I have constructed the working models, though, nothing requires them to be essentially at odds with one another. Neither rejects the uniqueness of ultimate mystery, nor the necessity of creedal specificity. However, these two models or modes of theology appear inversely related to one another according to an axis of problems and mysteries: the one leads to a multiplicity

that would certainly be received as a systematic and comprehensive treatise. See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978 [German original, 1976]), xi–xv.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Paul Griffiths, "Theological Disagreement: What It Is and How to Do It," in *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 69 (2014): 40–45.

of mysteries pursuant to dogmatic confession; the latter proceeds from a multiplicity of problems attendant to intellectual and historical difficulties of coherence and practicability.

Indeed, apart from political tendencies and methodological divergence, the overall “return to mystery” associated with Vatican II can claim proponents in Rahnerian, Balthasarian, Thomistic, and other schools or trends. Nevertheless, across the board, there has been little focus upon what a “problem” is, and how it enters the theological enterprise. One does not have to search long to find its usage in the title of an article, dissertation, or book, irrespective of theological agenda. At the same time, some theologians would resist the place of problems as ingredient to theological operation.¹⁵ Of course, ethical and political thinkers may hesitate in speaking of mystery, and aver that social problems (must) lie in the foreground of theology. But in this case, the exigency of problems is *de facto* treated as self-evident, and thus needing no theoretical or analytical grounding.

It is well to address the nature of problems for the theological community—especially as it pertains to the contemporary U.S. American academic context—that is, in terms of teaching undergraduate introductions to theology. How is reflection upon mysteries and Mystery rooted in the awareness of problems?

This article claims that there can be general agreement across models and styles of theology about the fundamental problem of being human, whose postlapsarian life is marred by sin but called to glory. The universal problematic of the human condition opens upon prospects of theological mystery, as the Church proposes it to all peoples. This fundamental theology is something that theologians can accept and consider orienting in the work of theological reflection and teaching, since it is not a matter of epistemic content, but personal structure.¹⁶

I provide only a sketch here that gestures toward fuller demonstration of the foregoing claims. But to get our bearings, we can begin by turning to the modern re-emergence of “problems” as a fundamental category of philosophical thinking. For the purposes of this article, I narrow my account of the modern concern with problems upon the influence of neo-Kantianism. (A fuller account could justly consider the work of thinkers as diverse as Friedrich Nietzsche and Bertrand Russell.)

¹⁵ See Thomas Weinandy, “Doing Christian Systematic Theology: Faith, Problems, Mysteries,” *Logos* 5, no. 1 (2002): 120–38.

¹⁶ The account in Weinandy, “Doing Christian Systematic Theology,” is different but not fundamentally divergent.

Historical Context 2: The Neo-Kantian Preoccupation with Problems¹⁷

Neo-Kantianism is specifically pertinent to our treatment here in three important respects. First, as a broad range of philosophical concern, neo-Kantianism is programmatically concerned with problems.¹⁸ Second, the phenomenological styles of thinking that shaped much conciliar-era theology were born out of neo-Kantianism's failure, giving rise (alongside other currents) to the alternative between analytical and continental styles of philosophy. Third, detailed attention to the myriad influences of neo-Kantianism upon modern religious or theological Catholic thought remains largely absent in current scholarship.

Neo-Kantianism emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the German academy. As has been routinely the case in the history of Western thought, the designation "new" was initially deployed to signal disapprobation. But the label stuck, even if it was overly general. There were different schools of varying influence, and that influence was not reducibly

¹⁷ For this section, I rely primarily upon the work of Klaus Köhnke and Frederick Beiser. Köhnke situates Germany's intellectual and academic developments with an interpretive eye on the March Revolution of 1848 ("The Philosophical Crisis at the Time of the 'New Era,'" in *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy between Idealism and Positivism*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [1986; repr. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 109–48). Beiser appreciates the magisterial status of Köhnke's work, but Beiser—himself a master of late-modern German thought—is more interested in the properly philosophical concerns latently at work in the "forgotten" origins of neo-Kantian thought (*The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796–1880* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2014]). For a handy collection of neo-Kantian texts in English translation, see *The Neo-Kantian Reader*, ed. Sebastian Luft (London: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁸ Leo Catana has shown that there is a late-modern negligence in defining the nature of problems, and that it ironically stems from the neo-Kantian strain of thought—i.e., that range of thought most likely to invoke the fundamental significance of problems. In brief, the rational positivist grandchildren of neo-Kantianism tended to reduce philosophy to analytical problem-clarifying—e.g., from Bertrand Russell (e.g., *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912) to Roger Scruton (e.g., *Philosophy: Principles and Problems*, 1996). Along with the positivist strain, the emergence of the history of philosophy (as opposed to intellectual history or the history of ideas) treated the history of thought as a catalogue of problems ("Philosophical Problems in the History of Philosophy: What Are They?," in *Philosophy and Its History*, ed. Mogens Laerke, Justin E. H. Smith, Eric Schliesser [New York: Oxford University Press, 2013], 115–34). More generally, Jorge E. Gracia identifies the "problematicist" approach as one of ten types of approaches in the history of philosophy (*Philosophy and Its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 234–35 and 269–73).

intellectual. Klaus Köhnke has highlighted the political concerns for culture and democracy at the outset of *Kulturkampf*. And the German system of higher education further complicates the assessment of neo-Kantianism's goals and effects. Like the neo-Scholasticism that was coincidentally birthed around the same time (and, to a significant degree, in Germany as well), it was as institutional and social in kind as it was intellectual.

The movement attempted to re-found Germany's philosophical project by rejecting the spirit philosophies after Hegel (in the main). Before Edmund Husserl summoned a "return to things," thinkers were expressly clamoring for a creative *Zürück zu Kant*. A renewed appropriation of Kantian thought promised a way beyond the impasse facing the two regnant *Weltanschauungen*. Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg had identified the irreducibly competing worldviews of what he called "Democritism" and "Platonism," that is, materialism and idealism. The way forward was to return to the recent philosopher who had best tried to resolve the post-Cartesian range of philosophical dilemmas between body and mind, skepticism and rationalism, nature and freedom. That philosopher was Immanuel Kant.

For neo-Kantians, philosophy would do well to appreciate once again the gains empirical science has made, even as it would adopt for itself a critical and non-materialist method. By this time, Germany had not only witnessed pronounced advancements in the empirical sciences: its academe had also arrived at the settled conviction that history could be scientific in the proper sense. Speculative objectivism could proffer little in the face of the more modest and democratic truths of concrete nature and history. After all, the Enlightenment had urged freedom from mystification. Thus, the Kantian critical binary of nature and reason or phenomenon and noumenon morphed into that between nature and humans (which is in fact what had engendered or enabled German idealism's concern with spirit). The neo-Kantians sought the unitary foundations to the project of knowledge in the *duplex ordo* of science and freedom.

Thomas Willey has summarized well the "fundamental questions of neo-Kantianism": "how to find appropriate but distinct methodologies for the physical and humanistic sciences, how to overcome the relativistic implications of historicism, and how to establish human autonomy against the claims of scientific determinism."¹⁹ Neo-Kantianism sought ways to make philosophy scientifically respectable, if not scientific itself, while preserving the transcendental orientation of human persons and communities.

¹⁹ Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 23.

It regarded philosophy as obliged to honor its prerogative to oversee, if not explain, the unity of knowledge.

Consequently, neo-Kantianism required the synthesis of two fundamentally divergent approaches to understanding reality. But, unlike the spirit philosophies, it generally did not presuppose their essential unity as ontological ground. And more specifically, unlike Hegel's thought, it did not idealize history as the phenomenal return to absolute identity. Rather, neo-Kantianism was formally and constitutively problematic. It worked to balance what is essentially out of balance. Like modern science, its work could never be complete. With good reason, then, Ernst Orth has identified the specifying theme of neo-Kantianism as the ongoing problem of the unity of knowledge.²⁰ In its scientific aspirations for philosophy, it sought a unitary foundation for both the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Humanwissenschaften*. But the form of its thought was the problematical relation between these two tendencies of scientific progress.

Of course, in thematizing the tension between the order of nature and the order of persons, neo-Kantianism was simply manifesting what had been the problematical structuration of philosophical thought since the Renaissance. Technological man had been increasingly able to reject sacred authority and metaphysical knowledge; but in doing so, he supplanted his situation *in* and above nature, projecting it as one *outside* of nature. The modern era, it could be said, then, is simply the problem—not the decline—of transcendence. And the problem of transcendence is the situation of persons-versus-nature.

As for the tactics of the neo-Kantians, they could not sustain their vanguard for long. History had essentially upstaged philosophy as the science of sciences, and neo-Kantianism had formally opened the door to hermeneutics. The positivistic streak in neo-Kantianism appropriately thought that society and culture could be a site of mediation between nature and persons. But as it happened, the openness to interpretive practices (already anticipated by Friedrich Schleiermacher) would spell the demise of continental philosophy's scientific aspirations. Particularly in its Marburg variety—likely the strain most influential upon Catholic theology—neo-Kantianism bore an internal tension between philosophy as knowledge and philosophy as a way of life.²¹ What is now still generally called “continental” philosophy

²⁰ See Ernst Wolfgang Orth, “Die Einheit des Neukantianismus,” in *Neukantianismus: Perspektiven und Probleme*, ed. Ernst Wolfgang Orth and Helmut Holzhey (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1994), 12. Appropriately, Hans-Ludwig Ollig's monograph on neo-Kantianism (*Der Neukantianismus* [Stuttgart: Springer, 1979]) is divided into two parts—the one part, biographical, the other part, a *Problemanzeige*.

²¹ The trinity of Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, and Ernst Cassirer constitute the pillars

essentially opted for the latter emphasis. The great and under-acknowledged example of neo-Kantianism's self-exhaustion is Martin Heidegger; who, at least according to one way to write the story, dropped the axe that divided continental from analytical approaches, divorcing concerns with description and interpretation from those with logic and conclusion.²² Owing to his influence, especially upon theology, it is well to say a bit more about him.

Heidegger the Neo-Kantian

Trained as a neo-Kantian, Heidegger's early orientation was attuned to scientific questions concerning the human animal in its world.²³ (Not dissimilarly, his teacher, Husserl, began with the categorical disciplines of logic and mathematics before variously advocating transcendental attitudes.)²⁴ But Heidegger soon abandoned concern with the philosophy of nature and life in favor of a groundless and hermeneutical task concerned with the modes of feeling and behavior of *Dasein* ("being-there"). Heidegger's emphases would continue to develop, but he regarded his later focuses upon event

of that school. Although Cohen is the paterfamilias, and Cassirer may remain the most well-known, Natorp deserves mention. He influenced the development and originality of the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, the latter succeeding Husserl's post at Marburg. Natorp taught or collaborated with giants in and important for theology, such as Rudolf Otto, Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. And unlike the other two of the trinary, Natorp maintained a close interest and familiarity with the science of his day. His relatively short work of 1911—*Philosophie: Ihr Problem und ihre Probleme*—was and can still be considered emblematic of the so-called Marburg school. See Sebastian Luft, *The Space of Culture: Towards a Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²² For this interpretation, see Peter Eli Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). Gordon contrasts the "spontaneity" of subjective constitution according to Kant with the "thrownness" into the existence of being according to Heidegger. For an original take on the Heideggerian revolution and its shortcomings, see Cyril O'Regan, "Heidegger's Illusory Rapprochement with the Christian Theological Tradition," *Church Life Journal*, May 23, 2022, churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/an-apocalyptic-double-bind-and-the-impossibility-of-tradition/.

²³ See, e.g., Martin Heidegger, "The Problem of Reality in Modern Philosophy," in *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910–1927*, ed. Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007); Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1929–1930), ed. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), particularly the second half of the book, beginning with 186.

²⁴ See Dermot Moran, "Life and Writings," in *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2005).

(*Ereignis*) rather than being (*Sein*) in line with what preceded it.²⁵ For his part, Heidegger regretted that his philosophy was considered subjective, since subjectivism was precisely what he was trying to avoid, as it was for Kant before him.²⁶

In any case, knowledge for Heidegger is not about positive judgments of fact, but interpretive insights into existence.²⁷ For our purposes, this is to say that Heidegger abandoned the neo-Kantian hope to keep the categorical-empirical-scientific and transcendental-spiritual-philosophical orders in complementarity, or at least in creative tension.

Consciously or not, the emphasis in modern theology upon starting points and insights rather than principles and conclusions betrays the hermeneutical turn, away from the objective claims of logic and science, toward projects of interpretation and practice. One could say that Heidegger himself turned to mystery in this fashion. Of course, this hermeneutical turn toward mystery is itself a kind of anti-Kantian Kantian critique. Not for nothing does Heidegger's *Being and Time*-era thought feature his unique re-reading of Kant, which rejected the neo-Kantian tendency toward rationalism and scientism.²⁸ Even so, Heideggerian philosophy retains the mold of thought as essentially problematical, since it is not so much nature against which spiritual freedom must work itself out, but rather the nothing or death. The historical upshot of Heidegger's inheritance in this regard is so impactful that even those who would resist Kant or Heidegger (or Nietzsche) cannot reasonably avoid thinking fundamentally in terms of problems: confronting the modern situation of critical epistemology or nihilist humanism requires addressing their constitutive problematics.

The utilization of Heidegger for a "return to mystery," then—whether by a Rahnerian or Balthasarian—is ironical for the historian of philosophy. Arguably, such resourcing can be had only by lowering the *Deus ex machina*

²⁵ But see, e.g., an argument to the contrary in William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

²⁶ See Michael Allen Gillespie, "History as Being," in *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 116–76.

²⁷ In general, I follow the interpretation of Heidegger—not uncontroversial—as found in Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

²⁸ See Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (1929; repr. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990), known commonly as the *Kantbuch*. For a contemporary thinker who essentially follows Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, see David Walsh, "Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' as Existential," in *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Existence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–26.

upon the dramatic scene of Heideggerian being in the world. (Heidegger objects to both the *Deus* and the *machina*.)

But is not the Heideggerian questioning of being a kind of modernly natural analogue to theological mystery? Is not Heidegger's frustration with rationalism and technologism, and his desire to retrieve the original wonder of the free, human spirit, essentially open to a theological orientation to the God who reveals himself, whatever the German philosopher's programmatic atheism? I demur before these questions about Heidegger.²⁹ I want only to suggest—and in but one way, since there are many important others—that the problematical constitution of being in the world is essential for modern philosophical thinking, essential for those who are philosophical in the Western tradition(s) but working in the present time.

Moreover, and in a way that is itself in line with Heidegger's original project of retrieval, we can ascertain the problematical constitution of philosophy in the very thinker who, at least by way of history's development, lays the groundwork for metaphysical, analogical thinking—according to which the categories of speech and thought have a working isomorphism with the essential intelligibility of reality. Of course, I mean Aristotle, to whom we now briefly turn.

Aristotle on the Problem with Wonder

Recent Catholic thinkers of a metaphysical mindset routinely declare that philosophy begins in wonder.³⁰ And wonder in some way regards mystery. Metaphysics—also known as theology for the ancients—claims that speculative thought concerns itself with mysteries. We need not disagree.

Classically, in this respect, book I of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* tells us about the origins of philosophical thinking. There, the Stagarite argues that wisdom is not ultimately a productive science: it is not essentially a knowledge ordered toward making things. Wisdom, for Aristotle, is ultimately theoretical; and the wonder of the theoretical enterprise is not only wondrous, but also, and even firstly, problematical.

²⁹ Again, consider Sheehan, *Paradigm Shift*, and O'Regan, "Illusory Rapprochement."

³⁰ The claim is now enshrined in John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, §4. The idea, however, is important for non-Catholic and even non-metaphysical thinkers as well. See the following study that considers, among others, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Derrida: Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the great matters. . . . A man who *is puzzled and wonders* [*aporōn kai thaumázōn*] thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of Wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders); therefore, since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently, they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end.³¹

One easily divines the echo of Aristotle's teacher Plato here. For some readers, Plato's (early) Socratic dialogues are genealogical iterations of Sophism, tending to end in befuddlement—for instance, no one can truly say what justice is.³² Rather, one must know oneself and one's own ignorance. Regardless of this historical and interpretive concern, Aristotle's connection of *aporia* and wonder indicates the existential origination of his thought.³³ He evidently holds that puzzles are integral to the marvelous work of theoretical knowing.³⁴ The wise man is the one who deals with problems.

Aristotle exposes a unique kind of puzzle that, despite the impasse it presents, invites consideration, promising wisdom. He does not seem to have only a negative or critical kind of reflective knowledge in mind. After all, he says that mythology is adjacent to the operations of a theoretical philosopher.

³¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1.2.982b.11–12, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941) (emphasis added).

³² See, e.g., Gareth B. Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity and the Nature of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999). Of course, there is considerable debate regarding the kinds and significance of definitional impasse. For an interpretation that remains influential, see Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35, no. 138 (1985): 1–31; Vlastos, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1971). The author is indebted to Philip Neri Reese, O.P., for conversations about philosophical problems and the reference to Vlastos.

³³ See e.g., Denise Schaeffer, "Wisdom and Wonder in 'Metaphysics' A:1–2," in *Review of Metaphysics* 52, no. 3 (1999): 641–56. See also Pierre Aubenque, "Aristotle and the Problem of Metaphysics," *Philosophy Today* 6, no. 2 (1962): 75–84, noting that Aubenque studied under Heidegger.

³⁴ Aristotle's followers continued their master's concerns, developing the collection of "problems" as a genre unto itself. See E. S. Forster, "The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems*: Their Nature and Composition," *Classical Quarterly* 22, no. 3/4 (1928): 163–65. Forster translated the *Problems* [*Problēmata*] into English, which much of tradition had treated as a text of Aristotle's own. This and other such collections were influential through medieval and early Renaissance times, focusing upon questions of medicine and nature.

What becomes called “metaphysics” is therefore a kind of “theology” in its own right. More fundamentally, the “stating of difficulties about greater matters” is *peri tōn meizōnōn diaporēsantes*: there is a real kind of advance through (*dia*) the *aporia*, or problem. Recognizing the problem seems to mediate and promise seeing beyond it. Problems are provocative. Theoretical wisdom’s sublimity lies in its unitary oscillation between puzzlement and wonder. The darkness of problems is latent with the light of mystery.

We may add to Aristotle’s reflections and return to “problems” by deploying etymology suggestively. The word derives from the Greek, *pro ballein*; and thus, a *problēma* can be “anything thrown forward” or “projecting.”³⁵ There is a suggestive ambivalence to that derivation. On the one hand, the putting forward of questions alludes to presenting questions before the seat of learned persons. Problems are intellectual quandaries that are not easily or individually resolvable. They are placed before others, to seek their counsel or test their acumen. Problems can be like proverbial riddles and enigmas for proving wisdom, but also like practical and judicial cases needing resolution. (The medieval model of the *disputatio* is of course but another form of testing knowledge and wisdom through problems.) The problem, while intellectual, is also social or dialogical and in that sense, at least, dialectical.

“To throw forward” suggests another sense as well. Not only is a problem that which is cast forth; it also casts another forth. In this way, a problem is that which throws the person who faces it more deeply into reality.³⁶ Questions are quests in embryo. Though a problem indicates the obstruction of progress, in this meaning of the word, it also bears the potentiality for conducting or at least propelling the one who faces it beyond its own limitations.

A quintessential dynamic of the *homo sapiens* is the facing of problems. Wisdom deals with problems; it dwells within them and lives through them. Paradoxically, then, problems are both the despair and the hope of humans. We are transcendental animals. Our problems are not just biological, but neither are they only factual or even logical. Our problems are existential

³⁵ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, rev. Henry Stuart Jones et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), s.v. “πρόβλημα.”

³⁶ See Xavier Zubiri, *Inteligencia y razón* (1983; repr. Madrid: Alianza, 2013), 63–65. Zubiri would not call his descriptions on this matter “phenomenological,” but rather “noergic,” because he thinks the former remains unfortunately idealistic. Taking up insights from phenomenology about the relational and world-ed structure of human intellection, Zubiri’s metaphysical realism holds that the physical encounter of reality sends the noetic agent into and beyond the depths of the real things that are experienced into reality itself. Zubiri’s position recalls the “facticity” and “thrownness” that Heidegger famously identified; but it is freed from the German thinker’s atheistic and groundless ontology.

and ontological as well. They are the living intimations of our spirituality, of our openness to wonder and mystery. Thus, it is vital to maintain both these dynamics of human problematicity—the concrete and the spiritual. But how are we to deal with this ugly ditch?

To query the metaphysical and unitary fecundity of problems, let us now examine the positions of two thinkers who introduced the distinction between problems and mysteries into Catholic thought—the French philosophers Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel. Both were very much religious (convert) philosophers. Whatever the problem of “Christian philosophy,” their attention to metaphysical mystery is surely inspired by their own loving regard for the God of faith. They can help us identify the problem–mystery structure of fundamental theological thought.

Metaphysical Mysteries and Problems 1: The Ontological, as in Jacques Maritain

As described above, one model of theology trades heavily upon classical metaphysics, ordered toward the realistic articulation of supernatural mysteries. Jacques Maritain’s 1934 *A Preface to Metaphysics* can serve propaedeutically for describing a theological account in this line.³⁷ The original French title to Maritain’s work tells us what he aims to provide: *Sept leçons sur l’être et les premiers principes de la raison speculative*—*Seven Lessons on Being and the First Principles of Speculative Reason*. He will show us the metaphysical subject matter of “being” and provide us with the ascertainment of the “first principles” for the kind of “speculative reason[ing]” that theology in this style exercises. If one’s canon of metaphysical judgment is considered conclusive (i.e., logically “scientific”), one can lay the foundations for the work of theological knowledge.

Metaphysics, according to the Aristotelian-Thomist school that Maritain develops, can tell us *that* God exists. With that established, theology can credibly and intelligently reflect upon *who* God has revealed himself to be. The way to provide this metaphysical foundation is by an analysis of being—that which is most common and most universal and, in a sense,

³⁷ See Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being*, trans. E. I. Watkin (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939) [French original: *Sept leçons sur l’être et les premiers principes de la raison speculative* (Paris: Pierre Téqui, 1934)]. I often amend or change Watkin’s translation but provide his pagination, with that of the original French in parentheses. The pagination from the French is taken from Jacques Maritain and Raïssa Maritain, *Oeuvres Complètes, 1932–1935*, vol. 5 (Paris: Saint-Paul, 1982), 517–683.

most real and concrete. Through the categorical or analytical examination of being, the metaphysician can show that a self-subsistent being necessarily exists ("God").

Since the intellectual object is "being," Maritain teaches that the "ontological plenitude," according to whose light the intellect searches, is fundamental "mystery." Were we to exhaust that plenitude, "that would be God, . . . the very author of being." Indeed, the "supereminent type of 'mystery'" ("le type suréminent du 'mystère'") is supernatural, and proper only to faith.³⁸ Therefore, akin to metaphysics, theology concludes with "intelligible necessities," gleaned from bodily and temporal experience, since humans have no other resource.³⁹ And in fact, the Christian revelation is grounded in historical events, and therefore, always requires a multiplicity of mysteries, indexed according to temporal phenomenality.⁴⁰ Although Maritain's thought is surely committed to the unicity of supreme Mystery, the operations of metaphysical judgment—and therefore theological—that build the body of scientific knowledge are inescapably multiple.

For the metaphysical task, Maritain tells us, it is crucial to get clear on the distinction and relationship between problems and mysteries.⁴¹ (He confesses that he draws upon and reformulates the ideas of Marcel, with whom this distinction originates, and whom we shall consider presently.) For Maritain, metaphysics is properly "scientific," by which he means that it leads to conclusions that cannot be gainsaid: it is necessary knowledge. It is partly in view of contemporary scientism (and its intractable progressivism) that Maritain poses his advertence to mysteries. Although in different proportions, the empirical, metaphysical, and supernaturally theological sciences are all nourished by the mystery of being. If a thinker does not concede that logical reflection upon reality entails an unavoidably mysterious quotient, the way for philosophy (and by extension, theology) will never open up: one's path toward sheer mystery will be obviated. Lacking metaphysical range, then, all invocation of "human values" will be lacking in genuine worth because discordant with truly "intellectual values." That is Maritain's

³⁸ See Maritain, *Preface*, 4–5 (*Oeuvres*, 5:529).

³⁹ See Maritain, *Preface*, 21–25 (*Oeuvres*, 5:547–51), where he discusses the concrete existentiality of being.

⁴⁰ See Maritain, *Preface*, 93–97 (*Oeuvres*, 5:624–28), on the locution "being is being" and the principle of identity.

⁴¹ My treatment of Maritain largely centers on the first lecture in Maritain, *Preface*, 1–16 (*Oeuvres*, 5:525–41), where he focuses upon the distinction between mystery and problem at 3–12 (*Oeuvres*, 5:528–36).

worry. For him, true humanism requires the transcendent operations of speculative thought.⁴²

For Maritain, the mind closes itself to its own properly intellectual and metaphysical horizon when it reduces thinking to the working-out of problems. He has the Comtean French tradition of positivism in mind, but his critique equally applies to Anglophone varieties of the same. Positivism aimed to extirpate philosophy of its mystical hue. In this line of thought, there is no need for the deferral of human knowledge and hope in favor of some imaginary world. History itself, through the progress of science, provides the form of wisdom. Having learned from the Enlightenment, positivism rejects all categories of the super-sensible. Crucial to this endeavor is the distillation of intellectual work to the solving of practical and logical problems. Knowledge is constituted by answers to problems or to the narration of problems in the history of thought. In any case, a problem here is nothing other than a logical equation whose answer is so far unknown. Once discovered (as if inevitably), it is added piecemeal to the body of knowledge, whose growth demonstrates progress.

Importantly, Maritain admits that all cognitive labor entails some quotient of the problematical. Any time the human mind objectifies for itself some reality or concern, that very objectification of things occasions the problematical measure. Problems arise when the mind considers one object of thought in view of another. Now, the mind cannot but proceed according to this analytical path of “composition and division.” The finite work of analyzing all that is or all that one encounters into an ordered arrangement of some things versus other things is necessarily problematical. Think of a math equation: the answer to the problem is on the right side of the equal sign. But, until we obtain that unitary conclusion, the parts of the equation to the left of the equal sign constitute the problem (whose solution is more generally the operation performed, not the specific answer that follows the equal sign). In fact, any unknown part of the equation on either side is what establishes the statement as a problem. Problems are analytical in nature; more fundamentally, analysis is problematical in nature, owing to its partitive or mereological structure that nevertheless presumes fundamental unity. Problems arise because the metaphysical *unum* is, for us, logically many.

For Maritain, though, the processes of reasoning are not absolutely or ultimately problematical. That is why metaphysics, which attains to the

⁴² See, e.g., Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1943); Maritain, *True Humanism*, trans. Margot Adamson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938) [French original: *Humanisme Intégrale: Problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté* (1936)].

unitary (albeit analogical and transcendental) notion of “being” is so fundamental to every other project of knowledge. The human mind restlessly tries to figure out “what” things are. But every “what” betrays the fundamental fact “that” they are. Reality everywhere betrays the presence of “being.” Any and all things, if they be real in any measure, share in being according to their essential measure of what-ness. Regardless of the diversity of beings, all beings—including God, in some way—enjoy being, such that there is one *esse commune* in which, if anything is at all, it is a member. This ontological depth to everything that is, the charge of being present in all things, signals for Maritain the mystery-quotient to all things. The objectivity of the mind is itself mysterious, he tells us, because the object of *l’intelligence* is what he identifies both as “the real itself” (“le réel lui-même”) and, of course, being (*l’être*).⁴³ The plenitude of reality’s ontological intelligibility essentially exceeds the mind while being conformable with it.

Every rational operation, therefore, has some admixture of problem and mystery. But the possibility of the former is underwritten by the latter. “[There is] mystery because there is always some degree of being, and its depth and thickness must be penetrated. [There is also] problem, because we are naturally able to penetrate being only by way our conceptual formulae, which naturally get tied-up into problems to be resolved.”⁴⁴ An intellectual vision that rejects ontological depth is blind to the fundamental mystery of reality. It is even blind to itself; since the very reason that problems are problems is that the objectification of things by the mind lifts them out of their sheer ontological intelligibility. For *nous* to become articulate it must stammer.

But if problem and mystery are “combined” (*joints*) in every intellectual endeavor ordered toward knowing, and if mystery is present because being is present, how do we know “being?” This is of course a problem in itself; and Maritain concedes that. His response, though, is to double down on the mysterious nature of mystery. First, he says that some thinkers are simply unable to hear the susurrations of being. Thus, there must be a kind of spiritual attunement to the song of being. Nevertheless, he is not (intentionally) advocating philosophical elitism or esotericism. He believes everyone can come to know “being,” since that knowledge is latent or implicit in every

⁴³ See Maritain, *Preface*, 4 (*Oeuvres*, 5:529).

⁴⁴ See Maritain, *Preface* 6 (*Oeuvres*, 5:530). Maritain clearly has the notion of “*aporia*” in mind, referring to the way conceptual formulae “naturally get tied-up” (“se nouent naturellement”). Consider, again, Aristotle: “the difficulty [*aporia*] of our thinking points to a ‘knot’ [*desmon*] in the object; for in so far as our thought is in difficulties, it is in like case with those who are bound” (*Metaphysics*, 995a.30–33).

intellectual operation, in every human interaction with reality. How, then, is this attunement obtained?

Maritain breaks with Thomist tradition and holds that being is grasped by a pre-conceptual (but not un-intellectual) encounter of being, given directly through experience.⁴⁵ The reflexive nature of experience is capable of shocking its subject with the awareness of being's inescapably gracious reality. Such experience may come through fine art, nature, or even reflection upon the self. Unlike more traditional teachers on the matter, Maritain does not hold that the idea of being is essentially gleaned by human knowers through the conceptual act of rational judgment. Rather, if all realistic reasoning presupposes the ontological measure of all things, and if being is what first "falls into the intellect" (as the bulk of Scholastic tradition says), then being must always be that which is anticipatory of every real act of awareness, which certain experiences can thematically disclose. For Maritain, every real thinker should be open to this kind of metaphysical experience. Such is the way to salvage the "human values" that late modernity must win back for humanity.

In speaking of "metaphysical experience," we do well to point out two further aspects to Maritain's doctrine, both of which deal with the nature of problems in speculative thinking. We shall see that Maritain's unique position is generated through intellectual contest.

The first aspect has to do with particular positions in his doctrine. Maritain's teaching on the pre-conceptual and immediate intuition of being is developed against the thought of Henri Bergson, his teacher. Owing to his eventual rejection and systematic critique of Bergson,⁴⁶ the Maritainian/Thomistic literature has generally underplayed or ignored Maritain's debt to him.⁴⁷ But the idea that there is a pre-conceptual and felt grasp of "being"

⁴⁵ See John F. Wippel, "Maritain and Aquinas on Our Discovery of Being," *Studia Gilsoniana* 3 (2014): 415–44; and Wippel, "Metaphysics and *Separatio* in Thomas Aquinas," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 69–104.

⁴⁶ See Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 2nd ed., trans. Mabelle L. Andison (1929; repr. New York: Philosophical Library, 1955). See also Isabelle Moulin, "Le bergsonisme à l'épreuve du thomisme: la métaphysique de Bergson lue par Jacques Maritain," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 94, no. 2–4 (2020): 313–40.

⁴⁷ But see Thomas L. Gwozdz, "Young and Restless: Jacques Maritain and Henri Bergson," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2010): 549–64; Ralph Nelson, "Maritain and the Continuation of Bergson," *Maritain Studies* 6 (1990): 107–28. See also, more generally, Gerald McCool, *The New Thomists*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 54–58, 81–96; Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Greenwood, 1955).

both depends upon Bergson and alters his thought.⁴⁸ It is not merely a question of how to read Thomas.

Bergson held that the object of metaphysics is obtained through the act of “intuition,” grounded in our “sympathy” with reality.⁴⁹ For Maritain, though, this sells short the properly speculative range of human intelligence; it remains within the domain of experience and never rises to the level of essential thought. Thus, Maritain expropriates the Thomistic idea of “connaturality” for his own purposes to counter Bergsonian sympathy.⁵⁰ For Maritain, the connaturality between human and world is what enables the feeling of being to rise to the level of the thought of being. Against Bergson, Maritain rejects that there is any discordance between the idea of being and its reality, as if to say that there is no real problem in this area. The tranquil adequation between mind and reality, indexed according to pacific connaturality rather than poignant sympathy, yields the enjoyment of truth that is, in itself, not subject to change. As a result, speculative intelligence attains to causes that yield explanations. But for Bergson, if metaphysics would be scientific, it must be something that progresses and changes, one with sheer duration. Maritain rejects this positivistic undercurrent that runs through Bergson’s desire for a post-Kantian metaphysics. If philosophy would be “perennial,” being and metaphysics must be fundamentally unproblematic.

Our point here is methodological rather than strictly metaphysical: the substance of Maritain’s metaphysical doctrines is generated through his problematical encounter with Bergson (or Kant and whomever else). Maritain admits that all real intellectual endeavors combine problem and mystery. But he holds that the two are inversely related upon a spectrum—as if the higher

⁴⁸ Maritain concedes: “The characteristics of intuition that I have just sketched might seem, at first glance, to represent Bergsonian intuition. Indeed! Except . . .” (*Preface*, 46 [*Oeuvres*, 5:574]).

⁴⁹ Bergson’s employment of the category develops, but see *Creative Evolution* [1907], trans. Arthur Mitchell (1907; New York: Henry Holt, 1911), 175–79; Bergson, “Introduction to Metaphysics” (1903), in *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946). Bergson wants to identify the similarity and distinction between human and non-human animal knowing. Sympathy and intuition are not precisely fungible with one another. See David Lapoujade, “Intuition et Sympathie chez Bergson,” *Eidos* 9 (2008): 10–31.

⁵⁰ See Jacques Maritain, “On Knowledge through Connaturality,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 4, no. 4 (1951): 473–81. Although essential to his mature psychology, connaturality features prominently in his aesthetics and spiritual theology. See Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, 4th ed. (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1959), 260–63; Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon, 1955), 111–41.

the metaphysical pitch, the lower the problematical pull. But reading him closely, it rather seems that the ways mystery and problem relate are not so much as ontological coefficients but as cognitional co-principles.

Is it not the case that the problems the metaphysician faces in dealing with the mystery of mysteries are in fact greater than those the biologist faces? The biologist may be vexed with greater details and greater challenges in experimentation. But is it not, for example, equally problematic, if not more so, to understand how things stay the same and yet change? And in fact—to evoke Heidegger’s post-neo-Kantian metaphysical questioning—is it not a fundamental problem for humans, who both stay the same and change, to try to understand how all things stay the same and change; especially if this path of reflection is to discover that which always stays the same, the foundation underlying all that changes? Heidegger wanted to retrieve the mystery of being via realizing that it is a problem: how can being be discovered by the kind of being whose being is to ask about being? Maritain’s faculty psychology gets him out of the quandary. But even so, he is clear and we agree: the intellectual advertence to mystery is never free from problematical engagement.

Metaphysical Mystery and Problems 2: The Existential, as in Gabriel Marcel

Maritain drew his problem–mystery distinction from Gabriel Marcel, about whose philosophy Maritain was uneasy. Like his concerns with Bergson, Maritain’s concerns with Marcel are that his philosophy does not truly rise to the level of the speculative and metaphysical.⁵¹ For human values to be salvaged in late modernity, Maritain held that the intellect’s pure and truly universal (and most real) purchase upon reality had to be maintained. This is to say that truth ultimately had to do with what is not subject to change, to what is free from contingency. But as with Bergson’s claim about there being “metaphysical experience,” Marcel held that mystery is essentially

⁵¹ Maritain’s challenge is to maintain what he calls (per Bergson, no doubt) the “vital” dynamism of the speculative intelligence, while holding to the immaterial simplicity of *ens in quantum ens*. Therefore, he identifies three original and influential thinkers whose attempts at metaphysical thought risk groundlessness in their otherwise estimable goal to emphasize the metaphysical significance of “concrete” existence: Bergson, Heidegger, and Marcel (see Maritain, *Preface*, 49–51). Marcel had emphasized early on that he was attempting a “concrete” path.

about something dramatic. Not for nothing are his great metaphysical works (rather astoundingly) not analytical treatises but ruminative diaries.⁵²

Like Maritain, Marcel was a convert to Roman Catholicism.⁵³ Both thinkers held that scientific materialism and positivism were significantly to blame for the malaise and anomie that was manifestly afflicting (French) society. The reduction of human life to the facing of technical problems was dehumanizing. Marcel noted the baleful fragmentation that results when reality is interpreted according to mechanistic logic and utility. But, whereas Maritain emphasized the contemplative draw of being, Marcel emphasized its dramatic adventure.⁵⁴ Whereas Maritain emphasized the ontological “depth” of reality, Marcel emphasized the ontological “exigence” for persons.

On the heels of publishing his immensely significant *Metaphysical Journal*—which, coincidentally, appeared the same year as Heidegger’s *Being and Time*—Marcel formulated his position on problems and mystery in 1933, in the paper “Position et Approches Concrètes du Mystère Ontologique.”⁵⁵ Notably, he published a fuller version as an appendix to one of his plays, thereby emphasizing the dramatic dynamics of philosophy as he saw it.⁵⁶ For Marcel, the situation of the human subject is “metaproblematic”

⁵² See Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary*, trans. Katharine Farrer (1935; repr. New York: Harper and Row, 1965/1949); Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (1927, repr. Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1952).

⁵³ The autobiographical element in Marcel’s thought is prominent. See Gabriel Marcel, *Awakenings*, trans. Peter S. Rogers (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2002) [originally *En Chemin, vers quel éveil?* (1971)]; Marcel, “An Autobiographical Essay,” in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp and Lewis E. Hahn (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1984), 3–68.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the compatibility of the two thinkers’ visions, see Brendan Sweetman, “Non-Conceptual Knowledge: Marcel and Maritain,” ch. 8 in *The Vision of Gabriel Marcel: Epistemology, Human Person, the Transcendent* (New York: Rodopi, 2008), 121–34. Sweetman acknowledges the differences of their philosophies but focuses upon their compatibility with respect to “non-conceptual knowledge.” For Marcel, problems enter in with “primary reflection” upon lived experience—a point with which Maritain would not disagree. Although the line between the two is porous, mystery is ascertained via “secondary reflection,” which urges a kind of conversion of attitude and reappropriation of self.

⁵⁵ See Gabriel Marcel, “Séance du 21 Janvier 1933: Position et Approches Concrètes du Mystère Ontologique,” *Les études philosophiques* 7, no. 3/4 (1933): 95–100.

⁵⁶ Gabriel Marcel, *Le Monde Cassé (pièce en quatre actes) suivi de Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1933). Quotations are taken from a later edition: *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1967). English translations are my own. Marcel “[remains] convinced that metaphysics concretely grasps and defines itself in and

(*méta-problématique*).⁵⁷ It is not something to be solved, but rather vitally intimates the transcendent.⁵⁸ Similar to Maritain, Marcel describes mystery by way of mystery. It is not easily articulable. There is no logical guide for how one can become aware of it. A mystery is “a problem that threatens its own premises, invading them and then surpassing itself considered as a mere problem.”⁵⁹ A mystery is the self in fundamental question, according to which the integral personal supposition of thinking is at stake.

One feature of problems, as Maritain also claims, is that they are objective, they are a feature of consciousness. The person who is dealing with an intellectual problem is dealing with something that is essentially other than him or herself. Hence, when posing problems, we are disposed to control and solve them. But differently, what Marcel calls “ontological exigence” (*exigence ontologique*), appears when certain problems disclose that the human knower and its life or meaning is essentially concerned.⁶⁰ A world reduced to scientific and technological problems would eviscerate being of this marvelous exigency.⁶¹ But there are certain problems—in fact, they are meta-problematical—that open the human up to the drama of its own being, disclosing that life is not reducible to mechanical function, but enjoys the terrible liberty of spirit. The mysteriousness of these questions owes both to the dramatic “exigency” and to the bleeding through of boundaries between subject and object, self and world, person and nature.⁶²

through drama” (67). In making this avowal, Marcel names his conflict with Maritain, suggesting that the latter’s thought is unduly abstract (and mentioning Heidegger in the same breath). The publication dates of Marcel’s *Position* (1933) and Maritain’s *Preface* (1939) signal broader contemporary debates about the possibility of Christian Philosophy. For a comprehensive overview and selection of the most important texts in that controversy, see Gregory B. Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: the 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2011).

⁵⁷ See Marcel, *Position*, 57.

⁵⁸ Marcel does not want to speak of mystery as pursuant to cognitive “intuition” (*Position*, 65–66).

⁵⁹ The original French is worth quoting: “Un mystère c’est un problème qui empiète sur ces propres données, qui les envahit et se dépasse par là même comme simple problème” (Marcel, *Position*, 57).

⁶⁰ For example, see Marcel, *Position*, 50–51.

⁶¹ Marcel emphasizes the element of wonder. (See my discussion of Aristotle in the main text, above.) For Marcel, the human being’s *puissances d’émerveillement* atrophy when dedicated merely to positivistic questions. It is worth noting that, for Marcel, “wonder” means something like “a sort of living exchange [*circulation vitale*] between astonishment and miracle” (*Position*, 51).

⁶² For example, “in love we can see well the way the border between the ‘in me’ [*en moi*]

Like Maritain's, Marcel's position is developed against philosophical interlocutors. For Marcel, Kant had threatened the realistic purchase of human knowing. Knowledge was about phenomena or abstract moral law.⁶³ Understood in this way, Kant's thought was just as much skeptical as it was rationalistic. More generally, idealism of all stripes begins by questioning whether the human subject of knowledge is not so involved in the process of knowing that whatever is known is reducible to the subject's structure or operations of knowing, such that reality as known is not fundamentally other than its being known.

Marcel turns the egological structure of idealism upon its head. If the subject issues the given data and premises (*les données*) of problems, that can be the case only because there is something *méta-problématique* that is giving (*donnant*) one the possibility of the problem. Marcel does not have an exhaustive phenomenological structure of experience in mind here, but one that is existentially indexed.⁶⁴ Only certain kinds of problems are haunted by an ontological exigency that makes them possible. He gives three examples, upon which he imaginatively reflects: the distinction between the body and soul, the question of what death is, and what accounts for a life-changing encounter.⁶⁵ We could also add the religious conversion of others.⁶⁶ None of these problems can be adequately addressed merely as problems of objective thinking. In various ways, the questioner is him or herself radically at stake—"implicated" (*impliqué*), as one might be implicated in investigation or trial.⁶⁷ What grounds these problems is adequately understood only in terms of ontological mystery; for, the questioner cannot be the exhaustive source of the question's utterly unsettling, but equally certain, reality.

The Marcelian metaproblematic is what enables one to question whether and how mind is distinct from body in oneself, since one's mind and body are factors in this very questioning. Likewise, something other than oneself is what enables one to question what constitutes one's death, since he or she is clearly the term of this question in some way. And finally, something other than objective problematicity is what establishes the quandary of

and 'before me' [*devant moi*] disappears" (*Position*, 59).

⁶³ See, e.g., Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 205–6 and 210–11.

⁶⁴ See, of course, Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (2002; repr. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013) [Originally *Etant Donné* (1997)].

⁶⁵ See Marcel, *Position*, 58.

⁶⁶ In his play *La Grâce*, Marcel dramatizes the way the religious conversion of others is unsettling and provoking for oneself (in *Le Seuil Invisible* [Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1914], 9–210); cf. *Awakenings*, 84.

⁶⁷ See Marcel, *Position*, 58–59.

what accounts for one person's unforeseen but life-altering encounter with another. Indeed, the ontological exigency of a life-changing event prompts the person to question its own explanation. Why did it seemingly have to happen? How is it that I can no longer be otherwise?

For Maritain, these Marcelian reflections may all be true to experience, but that is of no real help for metaphysics. A "mystery" in Marcel's usage, however, necessarily escapes formulation and expression, the temptation of the scientific *libido dominandi*. It can be intimated, but it never becomes patient of definition. For Maritain, although metaphysical experience begins with what is not itself propositionally rendered, it can be subsequently conceptualized and even analyzed. It is for this reason that Maritain expropriates the problem-mystery distinction from Marcel. He appreciates Marcel's rejection of positivism and its reduction of reality to problems. But he seeks to correct what he sees as the mystification of philosophical thinking, which dismisses its epistemic prerogative to hold scientific form.

Most simply put, the two thinkers just considered fall on either side of analogical thinking—the one in favor of logic and conclusion, the other in favor of metaphor and intimation. (We could also characterize them as representing two different attempts to import existentialism into Christian philosophical thought.) Although each sees himself as concerned with what is fundamental to reality and constitutive of it, I have specifically labeled the approach of Maritain "ontological" because of his concern with the analysis of being; and I have called the approach of Marcel "existential" because of his concern with the drama of being. But both are, in fact, personal and metaphysical thinkers. Moreover, both believe that the philosopher must somehow hear a call beyond his or her problems that issues from the transcendency of mystery. Whether it is the call of the First Cause or the summons to make one's life, they are the two mysterious sides of the same problematic coin that is the human seeker of answers, of the way to wisdom. What is it that invites me deeper (Maritain) and drives me forward (Marcel)?

Conclusion: Introducing the Problem-and-Mystery Structure of Theological Thinking at the University Level Today

En route to issuing a summary conclusion, we can identify a fivefold chain of observations, based upon our review of Maritain and Marcel. (1) Problems might seem reducible to epistemology. Like all sentient organisms, humans necessarily face problems in living their lives. For both Maritain and Marcel, human problems are specifically cognitive in nature, having to do with the way thought handles reality through objective or categorical reasoning. All

thinking is problematically situated. (2) The methodological corollary is that problems are elemental to the thinking enterprise. Not only are problems essentially cognitive; human cognition is fundamentally problematical. (3) Even metaphysics, then—that highest of philosophical branches according to some traditions—is forged in dialectical tension. The way of discovery is never abandoned, even in teaching. Least of all branches of knowledge, then, can metaphysics afford to surrender its problematical constitution in the perennial quest to know being qua being.

The insights of Maritain and Marcel reviewed above, at least according to the *via inventionis*, are had by way of conflict with other thinkers and their doctrines. The subject matter of metaphysics (being) may itself be a sheer mystery (just as, analogously, “God” is pure mystery). But this conclusion becomes ascertainable only through problematical constitution. Reality *in se* is not problematical but the human way toward understanding it always is. (4) For both Maritain and Marcel, mystery refers to that hidden principle that accounts for the reality of the real, whether conceived along more speculative and contemplative lines (as with Maritain) or along more existential and dramatic lines (as with Marcel). Both support philosophy’s transcendency against the modern foreclosures of positivism, or what today is more generally identified as scientific materialism. But also, each has forged his position about the nature of mystery, not only in view of scientistic ideology, but also against each other’s (kinds of) accounts of being as logically pure or existentially suspenseful.

(5) Finally, then, the basic reason for the divergence between Maritain and Marcel lies in the fact that one is more concerned with being in view of substance, whereas the other is more concerned with becoming in view of the subject.⁶⁸ Their divergence essentially tracks their appreciation of the modern era’s so-called “turn to the subject”—the one resistant, the other hospitable. Possibly, though, this turn was always etymologically and textually possible, given the ambivalence of the foundational Aristotelian term *hypokeimenon*.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ For an analogous employment of Marcel apropos the distinction between primary and secondary reflection, see Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 34. The author is indebted to Michael C. Magree, S.J., for noting this treatment by Anatolios. See also note 54, above.

⁶⁹ For an analysis of the meaning of *hypokeimenon* and other related words in Aristotle, see Keren Shatalov, “*Hypokeimenon* vs. Substance,” *Review of Metaphysics* 74, no. 2 (2020): 227–50; Xavier Zubiri, *The Fundamental Problems of Western Metaphysics*, trans. Joaquín Redondo and Thomas Fowler (1969–1970; repr. New York: University Press of America, 2010), 39. Hegel’s speculative retrieval—certainly, at least, insofar as it is found in the preface to his *Phenomenology*—echoes and exploits this ambivalence

In any case, the fully traditional thinker must incorporate both substance- and subject-based models into metaphysical theological reasoning. But the status of that incorporation itself remains relatively problematic. In seeking to understand the nature of problems for speculative thought geared toward mystery, this article has landed upon a fundamental problem—that there are two basic models of Catholic metaphysical thinking: ontologically explanatory and existentially interpretive.

We had set out to establish that problems are propaedeutic to mysteries, such that theology must begin by recognizing its own fundamental condition of problematicity. We pursued this aim in light of two important tensions in the historiography of Catholic theological methodology. First, having noted the turn to mystery, we described twentieth-century Catholic theologies as seeming to prefer either analogical deducing or contextual interpreting as methodologically orienting. Genealogically, we regarded the twin emphases upon mysteries/mystery apropos the category of problems, pursuant to the influence of neo-Kantianism. Second, we then described how modern theology inherits the neo-Kantian constitution of philosophical thinking in terms of nature–freedom problems, even as it opposes reductions to the empirical order through emphasis upon the transcendent. Then we turned to consider Maritain and Marcel, for they each thematized what may be called “the mystery-problem problem” in their rejection of scientific materialism and positivism. However, presenting their treatments of mystery as the methodological concern of Catholic thought, we discovered their problematical relation to each other in articulating the problem–mystery structure of thinking. Each opts for one end of the nature–person binary—Maritain by doubling down on the ontology of created things, and Marcel by opening-up the creative drama of persons. I propose that their representative contest between orders of analogical ontology and existential adventure, between the mysteries of what believers confess and the mystery of the believer’s structure of life, is itself the fundamental (modern) problem to thinking

to conjugate being in terms of becoming. As he proclaims, “everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance [*Substanz*], but equally as Subject [*Subjekt*]” (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller [1807; repr. New York: University of Oxford Press, 1977], 10 [no. 17]). Heidegger notes a similar ambivalence, e.g., in commenting upon Kant’s analysis of the transcendental ego. For Heidegger, it is appropriately focused on the subject, but in such a way that it slips back into substantialist implications—thus, Kant’s subject of experience tends to become a thing in the world (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [1927, repr. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962], 364–70).

about all mystery, which is always *quoad nos*. This problematicity orients its researcher to the mystery of the modern version of the perennial *imago Dei*.

The wake of neo-Kantianism and its failure bequeathed to theology, not only the preoccupation of thinking problematically, which in some ways marks philosophical and scientific thought as such, but also the tendency of surrendering the tension between natural and transcendental orders. Truly metaphysical thought, however, does not require merely the invocation of “being”; it requires preserving the real intelligibility of reality as unitary. A modern metaphysical outlook faces the challenge of maintaining both ontological and existential concerns for the essences of things and the adventure of spirit. It can do this precisely by appreciating the theological fundamentality of their unitary problematic, worked out through human life and understanding.

Much more to needs be said about the way theologians can treat this fundamental problem in speculative thought in view of other categorical problems, and in conversation with other disciplines. Especially in view of theology’s place (or not) in the modern university, there is much thinking yet to be done regarding the hard sciences, and theology’s need to maintain an intelligent and sophisticated dialogue with those disciplines that tend toward positivism and material reductivism. Apart from addressing these larger issues, I will conclude with one modest but important claim about the teaching of theology in the U.S. American context.

Especially at institutions where such courses are required, introductions to theology ought to begin according to the twin concerns of being and existence, linking the transcendental first cause of all that is to the creature whose task is to figure out what to make of itself. The problem of the One and the Many is itself the thinking and acting person made in the image and likeness of God. The creedal multiplicity that provides theology with its disciplinary categories can thereby find orientation toward the turning-into-one that is the university’s humanistic project of forming persons in view of transcendent truth and goodness.

Catholic teaching has never abandoned the claim that the existence of God is theoretically knowable according to reason. And in fact, establishing the reality of an immaterial subject of study is vital, not only for providing evidence of the discipline’s inherent credibility, but also for alluring students to the poetic mystery of reality itself. At the same time, theology—at least theology in the present times—is fundamentally interested in the creature made in the image and likeness of God. This creature—the human person—finds itself in a sea of problems, which can be indexed and addressed in a variety of ways. But the first problem that the student most intimately knows

is that he or she is a problem for himself or herself. How shall I manage the tension that is life itself? What shall I make of myself or do with myself? What shall I say about the issues in the world that require me to take a stand? Moreover, one might claim that the core crisis of our period is that of the human person.⁷⁰ For modern theology, the twin foundations of theological thought are the world and the person—the ontologically rich world of nature and the dramatically glorious theater of freedom. Appropriately, the

⁷⁰ Russell Hittinger argues that John Paul's monumental and prophetic innovation was to shift the way the church addresses major crises, moving from fundamental attention to social institutions to that of human persons. The spiritual crisis of our time, according to Hittinger's reading of the Pope, is anthropological ("From Institutions to Anthropology: The Christian Humanism of John Paul II and the Crisis of Modern Times," ch. 12 in *Re-Envisioning Christian Humanism: Education and the Restoration of Humanity*, ed. Jens Zimmermann [New York: Oxford University Press, 2017], 239–52). Thus, if theologians think of their teaching in humanistic as well as evangelical terms, the spiritual crisis of the human receives foundational attention. Furthermore, Hittinger identifies that John Paul's genius maintained the unity between objective human nature and subjective experience. Without the ontological analysis of human nature, thought about natural law and common good becomes impossible. It is this unity that separates a position like John Paul's from that of contemporaries who would otherwise express the same commitments to modern man's puzzling experience. Consider Walter Kasper on the matter: "If God is for man [the *imago Dei*] the ever greater mystery, so is man. A mystery is different from a puzzle. A puzzle can be solved; a mystery cannot." This anthropological principle leads Kasper to endorse a "negative anthropology," like post-Kantian negative theology, which sees theological systematics in essentially critical terms—i.e., as "a critically liberating power over against all other attempts to grab hold of man and define him" ("Christian Humanism," *Proceedings of the Catholic Society of America* 27 [2012]: 1–17, at 8–9). But it is precisely the "negative anthropology" of modernity that John Paul's vision aims to redeem, according to Hittinger (citing Rocco Buttiglione). Classical ontological analysis and modern existential sensitivity need to be kept together, if not integrated (Hittinger, "From Institutions to Anthropology," 248). Arguably, Kasper's reliance upon the puzzle/problem–mystery distinction precisely as a dichotomy is what enables his slippage into thinking that man is essentially an existential problem, although he strives to follow Rahner in describing man as "the being of absolute mystery." The concern is that, without the analytically analogical world (including the human itself) whose causal intelligibility the human mind theoretically grasps by natural disposition, the constitutive supernatural of human openness to the transcendent (according to Rahner's supernatural existential) becomes equivocal, such that man himself seems to become "absolute mystery" in Kasper's hands. Arguably, this weakness is already present in Rahner's early philosophy of religion. See Thomas Joseph White, "The Human Person as Being-Toward-Truth: The Case of Karl Rahner," in *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 171–98. To be fair, Kasper clearly believes that his thought avoids such results, but he does so according to the historical—that is, eschatological—order in a way that prescind from the properly ontological.

1993 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expressly teaches that “the world” and “the human person” are the two fundamental “ways” of coming to know God.⁷¹

Taken together, the twin metaphysical problems of ontology and adventure prepare the way to wisdom. The questions just outlined are fundamental questions of wisdom: What is the nature of reality? What is my place in the world? What should I say or do in a particular situation? The conciliar era charted a sort of return to mystery, among other ways we could describe its prominent motifs and trends. But at the same time, mystery irrupts into and erupts out of our problems. Sundry are the ways that theology today can try to think through the categories of faith, whether systematically, or historically, or ethically, or culturally, and so on. But any such ways can commence according to the problem–mystery structure of theological reflection—and what is more, according to the fundamental problem–mystery of our world: the human person open to God’s self-revelation.

“Every man remains to himself an unsolved puzzle [quaestio insoluta], however obscurely he may perceive it. For on certain occasions no one can entirely escape . . . self-questioning, . . . especially when life’s major events take place. To this questioning, only God fully and most certainly provides an answer as He summons man to higher knowledge and humbler probing.” These words of *Gaudium et Spes* (§21), which do not gainsay the doctrines or even pertinence of Vatican I, evidently name human restlessness as the starting point of modern theological reflection, ordering it toward what the pastoral constitution calls the *mysterium hominis*. Made in the divine image and likeness, humans want to figure themselves out, and the triune God’s economy is the mysterious answer already revealed. N.V

⁷¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §§31–35, §46. Also see Thomas Joseph White, “Gaudium et Spes,” ch. 4 in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 113–44.