

How Barth Got Aquinas Wrong: A Reply to Archie J. Spencer on Causality and Christocentrism

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IN A RECENT issue of *Nova et Vetera*, Archie Spencer has claimed that Aquinas's doctrines of causality and analogy are detrimental to Christian theology.¹ This is particularly the case, he argues, with regard to Aquinas's notions of God's causality of creation, and the analogical names of God, which St. Thomas believes can be derived from creatures considered as God's effects. More specifically, Spencer claims that this medieval causal metaphysics cannot withstand the challenge of Kant's criticisms of classical metaphysics, and in a Barthian vein argues that Aquinas's causal metaphysics inevitably leads to an anthropomorphic conceptual reification of God that obscures the true knowledge of God given uniquely in Christ.

On one level it is odd, of course, that Spencer should choose to challenge Thomists to take seriously Karl Barth's critique of "the *analogia entis*" or "natural theology" by underscoring the diagnostic truthfulness and historical irreversibility of the Kantian critique of Aquinas's medieval understanding of divine causality and analogy. After all, in the spasms of modernity's contemporary self-questioning, need we really affirm auto-reflexively that the age of classical metaphysics is definitively vanquished? Indeed, one of the principal concerns of Thomists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to refute the basic principles, conclusions, and cultural effects of Kantianism as intellectually flawed and illusory.²

¹ See Archie J. Spencer, "Causality and the *Analogia entis*: Karl Barth's Rejection of Analogy of Being Reconsidered," *Nova et Vetera* 6 (2008): 329–76.

² One need only briefly recall in this context the historical trajectory from Vatican I and its interpretation by the Thomistic Roman school of Kleutgen and others who

Suggesting that a Thomist ought to submit to the metaphysical formulations of Kant is rather like presupposing that Frenchmen might wish to adopt English citizenship.

In another sense, however, Spencer's interrogation of Aquinas is more original, insofar as it is distinctly theological. And from this point of view, he is posing a question that is not sufficiently considered. What is the value, or disadvantage, in theological and Christological terms, of Aquinas's use of an analogical metaphysics of causality, which he employs to speak about God's causal activity of creation, as well as the divine names of God? *Does this manner of thinking help or hinder (and if so, how) a more profound understanding of the divinity of Christ?* And, if we may be permitted to turn the question around, what are the presuppositions of a theology that repudiates this form of thinking (one species of which is present in the thought of Karl Barth)? And what are the theological consequences of such a repudiation, including the Christological consequences? The question is not uninteresting, and yet is largely left unexamined—by Thomists, in part, surely, but perhaps especially by Barthians.

In this essay I will not focus on the philosophical questions of Thomism and the Kantian critique of metaphysics, important though these may be.³ Instead, I would like to briefly re-present Spencer's distinctly theological

taught Leo XIII, to the modernist crisis and the Thomistic revival conducted under Pius X, to Cardinal Mercier and the Louvain school, to Maréchal's, Rahner's, and Lonergan's diverse formulations of Thomism in critical response to Kant, to French Thomism's aggressive writings in response to Kant from such authors as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., Jacques Maritain, and Étienne Gilson, etc. Unfortunately, Spencer makes no references to any of the arguments in these traditions of thought.

³ The questions are not unimportant, but rather, too important to try to resolve in an essay of this scope. I try to treat this issue, with references to contemporary literature, in my *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Modern Thomistic Natural Theology* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, forthcoming). For the sake of brevity, one can note that the basic contrast between the two thinkers does not concern their views on knowledge of God or analogy per se, but starting points as regards epistemological realism, and knowledge of existence and causality *in beings we experience immediately*. If we understand the knowledge of the latter on Aquinas's terms, then natural knowledge of God is possible. Not only did Kant not read Aquinas, his critique of metaphysics and knowledge of God as it stands in fact does not apply to Aquinas's metaphysics in the terms in which the latter understands it, but rather to Enlightenment philosophers whose presuppositions differ vastly from those of Aquinas. Three points can be mentioned here to illustrate the contrasts between Kant and Aquinas, and the obstacles facing any critique of the latter through the prism of the thought of the former: (1) Kant affirms that all metaphysical notions are the results of *a priori* synthetic judgments and are pure concepts of understanding, pertaining immediately to the way in which the thinking subject organizes sensations

objections to Aquinas's theories of causality, especially creative causality by God, as he understands them in light of the criticisms of Barth and

internally and logically, but not immediately to the order of reality in itself. (See, for example, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, I, I, 2, trans. N. Smith [London: Macmillan, 1990], 120ff.; II, I, 1, esp. 368ff.) Aquinas, meanwhile, understands metaphysical thought to begin from first, indemonstrable principles that are epistemologically realistic, by which we gain judicative insight into the very nature and structure of existents around us, in what they are, and by virtue of their existence. If Aquinas is correct, then Kant's critique is itself deeply flawed in its presuppositions. (2) Kant's theory of natural theology as ontotheology affirms the usefulness of the concept of God, but merely as a regulative notion of reason permitting the construction of systematic knowledge based upon experience, ordering this knowledge in reference to a needed, ideal first principle that stimulates the deepening of human research. As is well known, then, Kant understands the Ontological argument to be at the base of all theistic speculative argumentation, such as that found in the cosmological argument (taken from the contingency of creatures), or the physio-theological argument (based upon the presence of teleology in creatures). For Aquinas, by contrast, analysis of the question of God cannot begin from notions of possible beings (which pertain to mentally immanent beings of reason), nor from the idea of a possible perfect being. The premises of Kant's approach to any possible knowledge of God are therefore flawed. Instead, Thomistic arguments for the existence of God are *a posteriori* in nature, derived uniquely from the awareness of intrinsic ontological compositions and extrinsic dependencies that characterize the existence of the things around us (and ourselves). The philosophical question of the existence of God is justified by the consideration of the existence of the sensible world as we experience it, which itself suggests the necessity of a transcendent source for its existence. (3) Kant holds to the idea that God is signified by our most common notion of being and is understood by an additional difference added to this most general concept (such as the attribute of omnipotence, infinity, etc.). (See, for example, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, II, III, A 845–46/B 873–74, 661ff.) As known by our human thinking, God is intelligible as a subcategory of the broader "science" of being, even as the notion of God refers to that which is the condition of possibility for all possible being (the ultimate explanation of conceivable reality). We only know God, therefore, under the rubric of an extension of human concepts as a special instance of being among others. Aquinas, by contrast, insists that God is not an object of study within the subject of metaphysics, and the idea of God is not a logical or epistemological prerequisite for the metaphysical consideration of causality in creatures. Not only is God not a member of any genus of being. In addition, he can only be understood as the transcendent cause of the subject of metaphysics (*ens commune*), that is to say, as the cause of everything that depends for its existence on another, and who is himself uncaused. Therefore, God can be known to exist but remains incomprehensible and transcends every human science. At the heart of these three differences, there are radically different conceptions of our knowledge of being in realities that we experience, which in turn give rise to incompatible notions of metaphysics, causality, and analogy. Spencer's assimilation of Aquinas's sense of analogy to that of Kant's (following Eberhard Jüngel) amounts to a very artificial and unconvincing flattening of the history of ideas.

Eberhard Jüngel. Then, I would like to respond in two stages. First I will examine Barth's theological objections to Aquinas's theory of causality, and show why a number of these are either inaccurate, or theologically problematic. I will contrast Aquinas's theory of creative causality, and non-generic, analogical predication with *Barth's own* description of "Thomistic" thought, and will argue that in fact, *only if* one has a theory of analogical predication like the one Aquinas develops can one avoid the kind of *generic* assimilations of God to creatures that Barth himself (falsely) criticizes Aquinas for making. Aquinas offers clear solutions to a problem that Barth seems to have resolved only partially, and imperfectly. In fact, given his theoretical statements about analogy theory, it is inevitably Barth, and not Aquinas, who is in danger of assimilating God and creatures to a generically common set of features in a conceptually anthropomorphic fashion.

Second, I wish to turn to the more fundamental theological question that Spencer's criticisms raise. Why should Kant's critique of causality help advance a theological program that wishes to be genuinely Christocentric, both ontologically and epistemologically? Kant, after all, offers arguments against the intelligibility and possibility of the Incarnation and the existence of grace that stem directly (and logically) from his epistemological presuppositions. Here in particular I will argue that the absence of a sense of the analogical causality of the Creator endangers, rather than accentuates, a true understanding of Christ as God, particularly as concerns right reflection on the "divine nature," or "essence," of Christ as distinct from his human nature. In fact, the Thomistic sense of analogy and causality serve precisely to understand the transcendence and otherness of the divine nature as unlike human nature, but also the intelligibility of human nature as like the divine nature. This is something Barth's critique of Aquinas does not grasp adequately, but which is in fact essential for defending Chalcedonian doctrine against Kant's arguments against the Incarnation. The reason for this is that such a view permits us to rightly understand the freedom of the divine nature to be present in humanity without rivalry to human freedom not despite but because of its transcendence, but also the capacity of human nature to receive the divine revelation due to its likeness to the divine nature, yet without being able in any way to anticipate or procure that presence. In short, Aquinas's doctrine of analogical causality offers us crucial resources by which to respond to Kantian criticisms of Christianity in ways that Barthian thought does not.

I

Spencer's thesis claims that "Barth's rejection of the *analogia entis* can be better understood in the light of his rejection of the Catholic understanding of causality that lies at the heart of the Thomistic doctrine of analogy."⁴ Although Spencer wishes to take issue with recent rehabilitations of Erich Przywara's work (by David Bentley Hart and John Betz), he is careful to claim that whether or not Barth really understood Przywara's project accurately, he did consistently reject the "Thomistic conception" of the analogy of being, and for good reasons.⁵ For the sake of clarity, Spencer's principal arguments can be divided into three.

First, Spencer's chief critique of Aquinas's thought on creation and analogy takes aim at Aquinas's use of the neo-Platonic principle of causal resemblance ("effects resemble their cause"), which was commonly discussed and defended in medieval scholasticism. The axiom is particularly problematic when applied to the relationship between creation and God. Influenced by Barth, Spencer affirms that within Aquinas's thought this principle of causal resemblance "functions as a veritable metaphysics, a totalizing principle, a genus under which all else has its being, and by which we may know being."⁶ Such thinking is problematic because it subsumes both God and creatures under the notions of "cause" and "being" together into a proportionally analogical form of conceptual reflection (a:b::c:d) in which a latent univocity is contained.⁷ This results in a conceptual anthropomorphism that understands God reductively (and problematically) in terms of creatures. God is understood as being and cause in a way that is at base reducible to the way we understand creatures as beings and causes, in which each have their respective place within a system of human making. This anthropocentric way of thinking displaces and obscures the true knowledge of God (in his genuine alterity and humanity) that comes from God's free initiative in grace, through Christ alone.

Second, Spencer claims that the structure of Aquinas's thought needs to be understood in light of Immanuel Kant's "demolition and reconstruction of the argument from causality" in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and other works.⁸ The idea here comes not directly from Barth, but rather

⁴ Spencer, "Causality and the *Analogia entis*," 330.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 331; 348–58. Spencer's narrative on this point largely is derived from Barth's treatment of these subjects in *Church Dogmatics* II, 1, 529ff. and III, 3, 89–154. All citations from the *Church Dogmatics* are taken from the English edition of G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004).

⁷ Spencer, "Causality and the *Analogia entis*," 345–46.

⁸ Ibid., 332.

from Jüngel. The latter thinker attempted to assimilate Barth's criticism of Thomistic causality to a Heideggerian critique of Western metaphysics and theism as "ontotheology."⁹ Because Aquinas conceived of all causality in intra-worldly terms (that is, with God inevitably having to be portrayed as an ontic entity among other entities), *therefore* he could only conceive of God's alterity and transcendence in terms entirely inconsistent with this world (that is, God as wholly other from the world). The only way that Thomism could affirm a real difference between God and the world as we experience it, then, was by formulating a radically apophatic conception of the divine essence, and divine causation. It is the antinomy of divine and human freedom that results from such thinking that Kant himself accurately diagnosed. If we can think God's freedom in causal terms, then human freedom becomes unintelligible, and vice versa. The Kantian diagnostic at base entailed the insight that "cause-effect relations" are in fact constructions of the human mind permitting one to organize the data of empirical sense impressions, but that the scholastic tradition had illegitimately attempted to transfer these pure constructions of reason into the "trans-sensible" sphere. In turn, Kant made clearer something that was latent in the Thomistic tradition: once we have recourse to philosophical notions of causality to speak about God, God cannot be known in terms of the forms of this world, and God is banished from the sphere of empirical existence once and for all.¹⁰ A kind of systematic agnosticism results. "It was Scholasticism, as it followed Aquinas, that set the stage for this."¹¹

Third, then, it is Barth's recovery of an authentic sense of theological divine "causality" that is called for, "a form of causal argumentation that is [exclusively] Christologically determined."¹² It is possible to speak of a certain analogy between God and creation, but only insofar as this likeness is revealed in faith (the *analogia fidei* of Barth), and not derived through philosophical speculation. This presumes that we understand God's causality of creation only in light of "God's self-revelation as the Father of Jesus Christ."¹³ God is made known to us in his relation to the world as Creator only through the human life of Jesus Christ, and in the Son's relation to the Father. Creation is never conceptualized except within the context of a theological study of God's mystery of the election of humanity in Jesus Christ.

⁹ See, for example, Eberhard Jüngel's *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. D. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 277–80.

¹⁰ Spencer, "Causality and the *Analogia entis*," 332.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* For the exposition of Barth's views, see 359–73.

II

Spencer's basic claims are colored by some logical flaws and historical oversights. First, it is clear that the second charge of Spencer that I have noted above (taken from Jüngel) seemingly contrasts notably with the first (taken from Barth). We pass from the accusation against Aquinas of practicing univocal anthropomorphism to the charge of practicing equivocal agnosticism, and these are logically opposing charges. To attempt to harmonize them one would need to show, rather than presume, that Jüngel's ambitious meta-narrative of Western metaphysical history (with Hegelian and Heideggerian points of historical dialectic and synthesis that are not overtly present in Barth's thought) is truly consistent with Barth's own views. However, this is far from evident and suggests an ahistoricism. Second, while Spencer's assimilation of Aquinas's doctrine of analogy and causality to that of Kant's stems from Eberhard Jüngel's well-known work, this argument fails to take into account the substantial amount of historical research conducted in the last few decades on the Enlightenment origins of Kantian and Heideggerian theories of ontotheology that differentiates the targets of their criticisms (and consequently their own presuppositions) from Aquinas's genuine thought.¹⁴ It simultaneously ignores the classical Thomistic responses to the Humean and Kantian doctrines of causality.¹⁵

Here, however, I will not linger on these points, important though they may be, and will return instead to what I take to be the substantive

¹⁴ The contemporary French literature on the subject of Aquinas in relation to Kant and Heidegger is especially important. See, for example, Olivier Boulnois, *Être et représentation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), especially 457–515; idem, “La destruction de l’analogie et l’instauration de la métaphysique,” in Duns Scot, *Sur la connaissance de Dieu et l’univocité de l’étant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), 11–81; idem, “Quand commence l’onto-théo-logie? Aristote, Thomas d’Aquin et Duns Scot,” *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 85–105; Jean-François Courtine, *Suarez et le Système de la Métaphysique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990); idem, *Inventio analogiae: Métaphysique et ontothéologie* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2005); Jean-Luc Marion, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théo-logie,” *Revue Thomiste*, 95 (1995): 31–66; Vincent Carraud, *Causa sive ratio. La raison de la cause, de Suarez à Leibniz* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002); Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht, O.P., *Théologie Négative et Noms Divins chez Saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2005).

¹⁵ A long list could be given here, but see, classically, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *God: His Existence and His Nature*, vol. 1 (London: Herder, 1939), 100–6; 205–32; Étienne Gilson, *l’Être et l’Essence* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1981), 187–207; and, more recently, Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas and the Principle of Causality,” in *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 61–80.

theological question under consideration. Why would Barthians choose to accept the validity of Kant's critique of causality? What are the distinctly Christological advantages (or disadvantageous consequences) for the Barthian in his or her acceptance of the validity of Kant's critique of causality? After all, if one loyally follows the presuppositions and arguments of Kant to their logical conclusions, they render impossible the intelligibility of the basic mysteries of Christianity, a fact that Kant himself insisted upon quite clearly. The Incarnation is not an intelligible notion, as it would attempt to locate a pure idea of moral responsibility that is an object of universal reason in a particular sensible form, and tangible narrative. This would necessarily limit in an artificial, non-speculative, and non-ethical way the principle of transcendental, universal reason to only one of its figurative representations.¹⁶ Otherwise said, the moral absolute cannot be manifest in the sensible sphere because it pertains not to a transcendent reality that has taken flesh, but to the immanent life of human reason, which itself transcends the sensible. Likewise, if grace is a cause of the actions of the moral life, then the human causality by which human beings render themselves responsible is necessarily jeopardized by a kind of logical rivalry between divine causality and human causality that is introduced into any speculative account of human free action.¹⁷ On both these counts, the strictly equivocal character of all knowledge of God (equivalent to a speculative ban on any knowledge of God-philosophical or revealed) is mirrored by an aggressive univocity as concerns the presence of anything in the historical, sensible world that is subject to study by human reason. Everything that comes under the conditions of empirical knowledge has to be understood within the limits of reason alone, as it ordinarily functions both speculatively and practically in its categorical organization of sensible experience. Is a true Christological confession of faith compatible with such an epistemology? Clearly not, as Kant rightly points out. And this is due in part to the basic lack of a pattern of analogical thinking about existence in Kant's own thought.

What, then, are the reasons that Barth rejects a Thomistic account of "analogical causality" and under what conditions would he be willing to

¹⁶ See Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, "The Idea of Pure Reason", Section I, A568/B596–A570/B598, where Kant makes this argument, implicitly but clearly aimed against any notion of the Incarnation. A modified form of the argument is given in Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6:60–6:66, in which the Christ-narrative is seen to have positive moral benefits, once it is reinterpreted in a demythologized, philosophical, and ethical form.

¹⁷ Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:63–64.

entertain such a notion in order to speak about the relation between the world and God? Here I will return to a passage that Spencer discusses.¹⁸ It is a list of five conditions that Barth gives in *Church Dogmatics* III.3 for a right *theological* use of the analogical notion of *causa* to speak of God's positing of creation, and the God-creature relation.¹⁹ In identifying the criticisms that Barth has of St. Thomas's thought in this respect, I will first note several ways in which Barth seriously failed to understand Aquinas's own doctrine of creation as "causality." Second, I will argue that rightly understood, the doctrine of analogical creation as Aquinas sets it out is precisely the fashion that one might avoid the very errors of thought that Barth falsely accuses Aquinas of holding.

The five criteria of Barth are the following:

1. First, a theological notion of causality may in no way be equated with a mechanical (post-Newtonian) concept of causality, as such a notion of causality would be inadequate to signify either the creative causality of God, or creaturely causality within the order of nature derived from God's creative activity. Barth rightly notes that Aquinas did not affirm such a notion of causality, and that this notion is distinctly modern.²⁰
2. Second, "if the term *causa* is to be applied legitimately, care must be taken lest the idea should creep in that in God and the creature we have to do with two 'things.'"²¹ Barth equates reification of God through the concept of cause with the claim to be able to define God (that is, to pretend to have quidditative knowledge of what God is). If God and the creature are reified under the common concept of causality, as if one could "think and speak about them directly," this leads man to think that God and creatures "and their relationship to each other [are] somehow below him."²² That is to say, the human mind pretends to comprehend by its own powers God and his relation to creatures. Aristotle's "dialectic of the causal concept"²³ is to be suspected of leading to this form of thinking. Barth also sometimes intimates that the Thomistic notion of causality reifies both God and creatures within a common system of *quantities*, because the

¹⁸ Spencer, "Causality and the *Analogia entis*," 364–73.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III, 3, 94–107.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 102.

²³ *Ibid.*

oneness of God and the oneness of creatures are articulated as diverse “beings” within a common system.²⁴

3. Third, “if the term *causa* is to be applied legitimately, it must be clearly understood that it is not a master-concept to which both God and creature are subject, nor is it a common denominator to which they may both be reduced. *Causa* is not a genus of which the divine and creaturely *causa* can then be described as species. When we speak about the being of God and that of the creature, we are not dealing with two species of the one genus being.”²⁵ If causality is to be applied to God and creatures, it must be understood that because there is no common genus, there is no similarity between causality in God and causality in creatures, nor even any comparability between the two. The idea of such a similarity—which Barth attributes to the *analogia entis* of the Catholic tradition and explicitly to Thomism²⁶—would unwittingly understand God and creatures within a “common genus” of causality, and God as a being relative to creatures. It is unable to safeguard the absolute unlikeness between *both* God and creatures, *and* between creatures and God.²⁷ In fact, only through revelation is a similitude between *both* God and creatures *and* between creatures and God disclosed to human thought.²⁸ This theological similitude can be called an *analogia operationis* or *analogia relationis*. Evidently for Barth, such “operations” and “relations” that are common to both God and creatures are not to be conceived of within a common genus. According to this theological analogy, “The divine *causa*, as distinct from the creaturely, is self-grounded, self-positing, self-conditioning and self-causing [*causa sui*].”²⁹
4. Fourth, the notion of causality in theology may at no point be turned into “purely philosophical thinking,” as distinct from theological reflection on revelation, philosophy being understood as “projecting a kind of total scheme of things.”³⁰
5. Fifth, divine and creaturely causality can only be understood within the narrative context of a distinctly theological reflection on the

²⁴ See *ibid.*, 102 and 104, where he intimates that philosophical analogies are only possible through a quantitative comparison of entities. See also the explicit claim to this effect in *Church Dogmatics* II, 1, 580.

²⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III, 3, 102.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

divine economy, in which “God, the only true God, so loved the world in His election of grace that in fulfillment of the covenant of grace instituted at the creation He willed to become a creature, and did in fact become a creature, in order to be its savior.”³¹ If we abstract from this theological context to speak about God as a primary cause, we will no longer be speaking about the God of Jesus Christ, and will in fact introduce alien speculation into Christian theology that detracts from a realistic appreciation in faith of the similarity between God and the world *revealed uniquely in Christ*.

If we list the criticisms of Thomist notions of causality from these pages that are either mentioned explicitly or intimated, we can find at least the following:

1. Thomist notions of causality tend toward a conceptual reification of God.
2. They place both God and creatures within a common intellectual system of quantification, such that the divine unity of God is conceived of as a quantity among other quantities, a numeric being and cause justifying or explaining other beings and causes.
3. Thomism attempts to think of God and creatures from within a common genus of “causality” and “being.”
4. Thomist notions of analogical causality are unable to safeguard the absolute unlikeness between *both* God and creatures, *and* between creatures and God.
5. Thomist notions of causality portray God as a being that is necessarily relative to creatures.
6. Thomistic metaphysics aspires to a “purely philosophical form of thinking” about God, one that would attempt to understand the deity “within a total scheme of things” derived from merely human projections, rather than divine revelation.
7. Thomist notions of causality seek in part at least to derive knowledge of God as a cause from non-biblical sources, and thereby introduce elements of reflection into theology that ignore or abstract from the God of Jesus Christ. In this sense, they adulterate our understanding of revelation and obscure the Christocentric character of all true knowledge of God.

³¹ Ibid., 105.

All of these claims are highly problematic, and despite Barth's undisputed greatness as a thinker and theologian, most are fairly clumsy and suggest that Barth did not seriously engage Aquinas's thought in any substantive way before writing about him. Here, I would like to attempt briefly to refute the first five claims by appealing to Aquinas's own teachings (in contradistinction to Barth's portrayal of Aquinas), and I will refer briefly to the last two in the next section of this essay.

The most important and most problematic of the characterizations of Thomism concerns the third point immediately mentioned above: the idea that God and creatures might be understood in Thomism as species of a common genus by appeal to either the concept of being or of causality. Due to his rhetorical style, it is difficult to tell how aware Barth is of the depth of miscomprehension of classical and medieval thought that this characterization represents. Spencer, at any rate, repeats the charge as if it were unproblematic. Yet leaving aside for the moment any question of God, according to both Aristotle and Aquinas, as well other influential medievals such as Scotus and Suarez, *being and causality, even in realities we experience immediately, are never themselves confined to realization within a single genus*. To think that they could be is in fact to have fundamentally misunderstood one of the most basic structures of classical metaphysics, such that a charge like this one renders a serious dialogue between Thomists and Barthians nearly impossible. For contrary to this account being offered of the "*analogia entis*," it is precisely against such an idea (of generic predication) that Aristotle focused upon the metaphysical truth that notions such as being, oneness, goodness, and truth (all of which he names explicitly in this respect) are not in any one genus of being, but said analogously of the diverse genera of being, by proportionality.³²

³² See, for example, *Metaphysics* B, 4, 1001a4–29; E, 1, 1026a24–32; L, 4, 1070b1–3, 5–10; 5, 1071a24–36, and the helpful study of Enrico Berti, "Multiplicity and Unity of Being in Aristotle," *The Aristotelian Society* 101 (2001): 185–207. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 6, 1196a23–29 it is particularly clear that Aristotle is reacting against Plato's theory of Forms with the conception that being and goodness are not in a genus: "Further, since things are said to be good in as many ways as they are said to be (for things are called good both in the category of substance, as God and reason, and in quality, e.g. the virtues, and in quantity, e.g. that which is moderate, and in relation, e.g. the useful, and in time, e.g. the right opportunity, and in place, e.g. the right locality and the like), clearly the good cannot be something universally present in all cases and single; for then it would not have been predicated in all the categories but in one only. . . . But of honor, wisdom, and pleasure, just in respect of their goodness, the accounts are distinct and diverse, the good, therefore, is not something common answering to one Idea. . . . Are goods one, then, by being derived from one good or by all contributing to one good,

Being is ascribed analogically to substances, natures, qualities, quantities, relations, operations, and so on because it is not reducible to any one of the categorical modes of being.³³ The analogical and transcendental structure of being by its very nature implies the impossibility of the idea that being could be signified in a generic fashion. Furthermore, because there are four causes for Aristotle and Aquinas (formal, material, final, and efficient), causality itself is understood also without reference to one genus, and is understood only in a diversified fashion.

What I have mentioned here refers, of course, only to created beings. When it comes to the question of signifying God analogically, even greater problems emerge with the Barthian portrait of St. Thomas. For, in fact, as Thomist historians commonly emphasize, Aquinas is quite insistent that even the transcendental notion of being (which is non-generic) only signifies the “common being” (*ens commune*) that is found in all creatures. It does not in itself signify God in any way, *insofar as God is not a member of ens commune*. Consequently, God is not an object within the science of being as such (such that he could be considered as a “being” alongside ontic creatures), but can only be approached tangentially by the human mind as the transcendent cause of all that exists.³⁴ This is why we must say, for Aquinas, that not only is God *not* in a genus of being whatsoever (such as substance, or quantity, or operation, or relation), but he is not even a member of the set of all beings as such. He utterly transcends

or are they rather one by analogy?” (trans. W. D. Ross, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984]).

³³ Aquinas, *Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, V, lect. 9, 889–90: “Being cannot be narrowed down to some definite thing in the way in which a genus is narrowed down to a species by means of differences. For since a difference does not participate in a genus, it lies outside the essence of a genus. But there could be nothing outside the essence of being which could constitute a particular species of being by adding to being, for what is outside of being is nothing, and this cannot be a difference. Hence the Philosopher proved that being cannot be a genus. Being must then be narrowed down to diverse genera on the basis of a different mode of predication, which flows from a different mode of being; for ‘being is signified,’ i.e., something is signified to be, ‘in just as many ways’ (or in just as many senses) as we can make predications. And for this reason the classes into which being is first divided are called predicaments, because they are distinguished on the basis of different ways of predicating. Therefore, since some predicates signify what (i.e., substance); some, of what kind; some, how much, and so on; there must be a mode of being corresponding to each type of predication. For example, when it is said that a man is an animal, is signified substance; and when it is said that a man is white, is signified quality; and so on” (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. J. P. Rowan [Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1995]).

³⁴ See, for example, Aquinas’s explicit discussion of this in *In Meta.*, prologue.

all that exists, all that is common to being, all that has being (signified variously as *ens commune*, or *esse commune*). For the sake of clarity, it is helpful to cite one of Aquinas's most trenchant texts on the matter, from *Summa theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 3, "Whether any creature can be like God?":

For since every agent reproduces itself so far as it is an agent, and everything acts according to the manner of its form, the effect must in some way resemble the form of the agent. If therefore the agent is contained in the same species as its effect, there will be a likeness in form between that which makes and that which is made, according to the same formality of the species; as man reproduces man. If, however, the agent and its effect are not contained in the same species, there will be a likeness, but not according to the formality of the same species; as things generated by the sun's heat may be in some sort spoken of as like the sun, not as though they received the form of the sun in its specific likeness, but in its generic likeness. *Therefore if there is an agent not contained in any "genus," its effect will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent's form according to the same specific or generic formality, but only according to some sort of analogy;* as existence is common to all. In this way all created things, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being.³⁵

These observations also help us to understand why the charge made against Aquinas of assimilating both God and creatures to a system of quantities is intrinsically problematic. First, this would be to presume that unity as a transcendental notion was reducible to the genus of quantity, which is incompatible with what has been said above concerning transcendental notions. Quantity is a dimension of being intrinsically related to matter, and is only one categorical mode of being, while unity is co-extensive with all that exists. All that has being is in some way one.³⁶ Second, however, Barth's charge presumes that when we attribute oneness or unity to God, we do so in a way that is identical with that of creatures. But precisely because God is not a member of *ens commune*—of those that have been given existence—his unity is utterly unlike that of creatures.

³⁵ Emphasis added. All English translations of the *Summa theologiae* are taken from the 1920 English Dominican Province translation, *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947).

³⁶ See Aquinas, *In IV Meta.*, lect. 2, 561–63. Commenting upon the idea that being and unity are co-extensive, trans-categorical properties, Aquinas states (561): "Since being and unity signify the same thing, and the species of things that are the same are themselves the same, there must be as many species of being as there are of unity, and they must correspond to each other. For just as the parts of being are substance, quantity, quality, and so on, in a similar way the parts of unity are sameness, equality and likeness."

Contrary to the claims of Barth and Spencer, God is in no way *causa sui*, and the attribution of that title to him (whether philosophically by Spinoza, or supposedly “theologically” by Barth) amounts to a problematic conceptual anthropomorphism. *Because* God is utterly un-derived and uncaused, *therefore* the unity of God is utterly unlike that of creatures, particularly in their quantitative dimensions.³⁷

This leads to the refutation of the fourth and fifth points mentioned above. What Barth does not see in Aquinas is that for St. Thomas there is a *non-reciprocity* between the similitude attributed to creatures in relation to God, and the non-similitude attributed to God in relation to creatures. Aquinas is quite clear about this in *ST I*, q. 4, a. 3 (which I have quoted at length above), ad 3 and 4:

Likeness of creatures to God is not affirmed on account of agreement in form according to the formality of the same genus or species, but solely according to analogy, inasmuch as God is essential being, whereas other things are beings by participation.

[Therefore] although it may be admitted that creatures are in some sort like God, it must nowise be admitted that God is like creatures; because, as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* IX, 6): “a mutual likeness may be found between things of the same order, but not between a cause and that which is caused.” For, we say that a statue is like a man, but not

³⁷ In *ST I*, q. 11, a. 3, c. and ad 2, Aquinas makes clear that unity in God is utterly unlike that of creatures because of the Creator’s simplicity: in contrast to all creatures he is uniquely individuated by *what* he is, and his nature is transcendent and incommunicable. “For it is manifest that the reason why any singular thing is ‘this particular thing’ is because it cannot be communicated to many: since that whereby Socrates is a man, can be communicated to many; whereas, what makes him this particular man, is only communicable to one. Therefore, if Socrates were a man by what makes him to be this particular man, as there cannot be many Socrates, so there could not in that way be many men. Now this belongs to God alone; for God Himself is His own nature, as was shown above (*ST I*, q. 3, a. 3). Therefore, in the very same way God is God, and He is this God. Impossible is it therefore that many Gods should exist” (*ST I*, q. 11, a. 3). Aquinas goes on to specify why God cannot be in a common genus with material quantities: “‘One’ which is the principle of number is not predicated of God, but only of material things. For ‘one’ the principle of number belongs to the ‘genus’ of mathematics, which are material in being, and abstracted from matter only in idea. But ‘one’ which is convertible with being is a metaphysical entity and does not depend on matter in its being. [It signifies the absence of multiplicity.] And although in God there is no privation, still, according to the mode of our apprehension, He is known to us by way only of privation and remotion. Thus there is no reason why a certain kind of privation should not be predicated of God; for instance, that He is incorporeal and infinite; and in the same way it is said of God that He is one” (*ibid.*, ad 2).

conversely; so also a creature can be spoken of as in some sort like God; but not that God is like a creature.

The reason for this is precisely because God is not in a common genus of creaturely existence, or even one who may be signified with creatures as “equally” participating in a transcendental characteristic.³⁸ Rather, because he is the unique source of all else that exists, his being and nature are signified only by recourse to analogies of “causality” that respect his non-relationality to creatures and his incomparable dissimilarity with respect to creation. This understanding is in turn illustrated vividly in Aquinas’s discussion of creation as a form of causality in *ST I*, questions 44 and 45. There he underscores the fact that creation may not be understood as a form of change, as if God were a being among beings acting upon them (and being acted upon by them), as intra-worldly created causes do. When we consider the notion of God’s action of creation and the creature’s reception of being, while removing from our notion of causality all that pertains to change and mutual alteration, what alone remains are the notions of relation: God is the source of the very substance of the creature, who is therefore really relative to him in all that it is.³⁹ Creation, therefore, is not *something in the creature*, not a historical process of change in a pre-existing substrate that God must cooperate with.⁴⁰ Rather, creation is the very gift to the creature of existing *per se*, with all that in fact characterizes it.⁴¹ However, for this very

³⁸ Which is one of Aquinas’s chief concerns in *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5 in refusing any use of the analogy of attribution in which God and creatures are understood as two instantiations of being that are both relative to a prime analogate, a more common conception of being.

³⁹ See *ST I*, q. 45, a. 2, ad 2: “Creation is not change. . . . For change means that the same something should be different now from what it was previously. Sometimes, indeed, the same actual thing is different now from what it was before, as in motion according to quantity, quality and place; but sometimes it is the same being only in potentiality, as in substantial change, the subject of which is matter. But in creation, by which the whole substance of a thing is produced, the same thing can be taken as different now and before only according to our way of understanding, so that a thing is understood as first not existing at all, and afterwards as existing. But as action and passion coincide as to the substance of motion, and differ only according to diverse relations (*Physics* III, 3; 202b20), it must follow that when motion is withdrawn, only diverse relations remain in the Creator and in the creature.”

⁴⁰ See *ST I*, q. 45, a. 2.

⁴¹ See *ST I*, q. 45, a. 3: “Whether creation is anything in the creature? . . . Creation places something in the thing created according to relation only; because what is created, is not made by movement or change. For what is made by movement or by change is made from something pre-existing. And this . . . cannot happen in the production of all being by the universal cause of all beings, which is God.

reason, *there is no real relation between God and creatures*, because God does not possess an identity that is in any way determined or perfected by his causation of creatures.⁴² Rather, the contrary is the case: creatures are caused by God because of who he is in his transcendent perfection, and God alone can create.⁴³ Evidently, in such a form of reflection, there is no possibility of God being determined relative to creatures in his existence, nor of his needing to cause them to be in order to be God, nor of his causality as Creator stemming from something other than his eternally free wisdom and love. In fact, only if God's causality is characterized in this radically transcendent fashion is it in fact possible to understand God's creation as an entirely free gift, and the act of creation as truly contingent, that is to say, as something that is in no way compelled, but which derives uniquely from the entirely gratuitous initiative of divine goodness.⁴⁴

This leads us at last to Barth's first charge listed above: that the notions of causality and being implicitly lead theologians to reify in conceptual form a notion of "what" God is. But of course, precisely because of his doctrine of analogical causation, Aquinas insists that there is no quidditative (or reifying) way to characterize God. It is true that by the fact that creatures *do resemble* God as their cause, we can truly signify what God is *substantialiter*, in contradiction to the radical apophaticism of Maimonides (or Kant).⁴⁵ Analogical predication of divine names is not radically equivocal, but signifies God in a true fashion. However, Aquinas (in seeming

Hence God by creation produces things without movement. Now when movement is removed from action and passion, only relation remains, as was said above. Hence creation in the creature is only a certain relation to the Creator as to the principle of its being; even as in passion, which implies movement, is implied a relation to the principle of motion."

⁴² See *ST I*, q. 45, a. 3, ad 2: "Creation signified actively means the divine action, which is God's essence, with a relation to the creature. But in God relation to the creature is not a real relation, but only a relation of reason; whereas the relation of the creature to God is a real relation. . . ."

⁴³ See *ST I*, q. 45, a. 5.

⁴⁴ Aquinas states things succinctly in *Lectura super Ioannem*, V, lec. 3, 753: "For since the good alone is loveable, a good can be related to love in two ways: as the cause of love, or as caused by love. Now in us, the good causes love: for the cause of our loving something is its goodness, the goodness in it. Therefore, it is not good because we love it, but rather we love it because it is good. Accordingly in us, love is caused by what is good. But it is different with God, because God's love itself is the cause of the goodness in the things that are loved. For it is because God loves us that we are good, since to love is nothing else than to will a good to someone. Thus, since God's will is the cause of things, for 'whatever he willed he made' (Ps 113:3), it is clear that God's love is the cause of the goodness in things" (*Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, vol. 1, trans. J. Weisheipl [Albany, NY: Magi, 1980]).

⁴⁵ See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 2.

contradiction to Barth's characterization of him) also adds that God may not be signified in his perfection as a "cause of beings," but only as the one in whom the perfections of all that is pre-exist in a most perfect and incomprehensible fashion.⁴⁶ At the same time, *because* the fashion in which we think of God (the *modus significandi* of our concepts) takes its origin from creatures, *therefore* we cannot know God "quidditatively" as he is in himself.⁴⁷ For Aquinas, we cannot know "what" God is.⁴⁸ The similitude between creatures and God, then, safeguards the idea that God can be signified, but also includes the idea that God cannot be known in a reified fashion because he is known as Creator only *through the medium*

⁴⁶ See *ST* I, q. 13, a. 2: "But as regards absolute and affirmative names of God, as 'good,' 'wise,' and the like, various and many opinions have been given. For some have said that all such names, although they are applied to God affirmatively, nevertheless have been brought into use more to express some remotion from God, rather than to express anything that exists positively in Him. Hence they assert that when we say that God lives, we mean that God is not like an inanimate thing; and the same in like manner applies to other names; and this was taught by Rabbi Moses. Others say that these names applied to God signify His relationship towards creatures: thus in the words, 'God is good,' we mean, God is the cause of goodness in things; and the same rule applies to other names. Both of these opinions, however, seem to be untrue. . . . First because in neither of them can a reason be assigned why some names more than others are applied to God. For He is assuredly the cause of bodies in the same way as He is the cause of good things; therefore if the words 'God is good,' signified no more than, 'God is the cause of good things,' it might in like manner be said that God is a body, inasmuch as He is the cause of bodies. So also to say that He is a body implies that He is not a mere potentiality, as is primary matter. Therefore we must hold a different doctrine—viz. that these names signify the divine substance, and are predicated substantially of God, although they fall short of a full representation of Him. . . . So when we say, 'God is good,' the meaning is not, 'God is the cause of goodness,' . . . but the meaning is, 'Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God,' and in a more excellent and higher way. Hence it does not follow that God is good, because He causes goodness; but rather, on the contrary, He causes goodness in things because He is good." (Emphasis added.)

⁴⁷ See *ST* I, q. 13, a. 3: "Our knowledge of God is derived from the perfections which flow from Him to creatures, which perfections are in God in a more eminent way than in creatures. Now our intellect apprehends them as they are in creatures, and as it apprehends them it signifies them by names. Therefore as to the names applied to God there are two things to be considered—viz. the perfections which they signify, such as goodness, life and the like, and their mode of signification. As regards what is signified by these names, they belong properly to God, and more properly than they belong to creatures, and are applied primarily to Him. But as regards their mode of signification, they do not properly and strictly apply to God; for their mode of signification applies to creatures."

⁴⁸ See *ST* I, q. 3, prologue.

of his causation of creatures.⁴⁹ The fact that God is named from creatures *in the terms that Aquinas formulates from analogical causality* is not the obstacle to a doctrine of divine transcendence, and an instigation to some form of conceptual idolatry, but is in fact the true safeguard against such idolatrous thinking, inspired by a true sense of divine transcendence.

Ironically, in the absence of such a reflection, Barth's own theological appeals to an *analogia relationis* or an *analogia operationis* run an even greater risk of understanding God in a common genus with creatures than anything Aquinas posits, precisely because, of course, "relation" and "operation" or "activity" are themselves categorical modes of being (that is, "genera" of being), and are not necessarily intrinsically analogical notions such as those of being, unity, or causality. Therefore, precisely in order to appeal to them in an analogical sense, it is necessary to underscore the difference between relation or operation with respect to God and these genera as they are found in creatures. In practice, it is simply impossible to do this without recourse to a notion of analogical causality that designates the utter transcendence of God in his operations and relations with respect to creatures.

Whatever terms the Barthian might wish to use to talk about God-being, cause, relation, activity, or anything else—he or she is presumably going to have to clarify ways that these significations are not to be equated with our ordinary (philosophical) uses of the terms, yet how they still preserve some real signification that is not wholly unintelligible. Barth's epigones, and perhaps Barth himself, think that the "philosophical" meaning of these terms is completely inapplicable to God, but that the terms have a "theological" meaning, given by revelation alone, which is true only for God. But what is this meaning? If we circumvent the red-herrings of Barthian rhetoric, which is constantly playing off theology against philosophy, the answer—to the extent that one is given—turns out to be some kind of extension or qualification of ordinary (often "philosophical") usage of terms. This would suggest that Barth and Barthians are just as committed to some sort of analogical naming of God from creatures as anybody else is. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? And so, unsurprisingly, we find Barth appealing to what are implicitly analogical senses of ordinary terms when speaking about God in the very passages in which he condemns the thought of "Thomists" for their appeal to analogy.⁵⁰ Yet Barth's own rhetoric seems to obscure this truth,

⁴⁹ See *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Church Dogmatics* III, 3, 103: "The divine *causa*, as distinct from the creaturely, is self-grounded, self-positing, self-conditioning, and self-causing. . . . [The] creaturely *causa* is not grounded in itself but absolutely from outside and

and his lack of systematic reflection on the topic leads him to do some analogical naming in a roughshod, improper way (for example, Barth's Spinozist idea of God as *causa sui*—for as Augustine long ago pointed out, nothing, least of all God, can be the cause of its own existence). The irony is that the preservation of theological reflection against an anthropomorphic, generic assimilation of God to creatures, and the cultivation of an adequate conceptual respect for the utter transcendence of God both rely in practice upon a seasoned reflection on analogical discourse concerning being and causality, as well as categorical notions such as substance, nature, activity, relation, and so on. It might be that a more careful study of the texts of both Barth and Aquinas would reveal that there is on several levels a fundamental convergence of perspective, albeit one that Barth himself failed to appreciate.

III

To say all this leaves untreated, however, the last two of Barth's criticisms of Aquinas on causality that I have listed above, both of which relate to the Christological character of our knowledge of God. It is true, after all, that while Aquinas and Barth in fact seem to agree in some sense on the transcendence of God and the corresponding dissimilarity between God and creatures, they also disagree (in principle, at least, whether or not in practice) on the question of the human capacity for a philosophical identification of divine names for God. For Aquinas, the human mind is able to identify perfections of created being that can be attributed to God in an analogical fashion, thereby properly signifying (however imperfectly) something of what God is in himself. This capacity does not derive from divine revelation as such, and is grounded in the natural aspirations of our human reason, even if the latter have been severely affected by the negative effects of original and personal sin.⁵¹

The concern of both Barth and Spencer seems to be that Aquinas's importation of an alien metaphysical apparatus into the realm of theological reflection on Christ and revelation in fact risks undermining that

therefore not at all without itself. It owes the fact that it is a *causa* and is capable of *causare*, not to itself but first of all to God, who created it and as the Creator still posits and conditions it, and then to the other *causae* of its own order, without whose conditioning or partial conditioning it would not exist." Note, however, that Barth's notion of God as *causa sui* does in fact obscure the genuine transcendence of God, and is an unwarranted anthropomorphism, lacking analogical rigor.

⁵¹ See the study by Reinhard Hütter, "The Directedness of Reason and the Metaphysic of Creation," in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. P. Griffiths and R. Hütter (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005), 160–93.

reflection from within. It does so (1) with regard to our ontological speculation concerning Christ, as we might seek to understand both the divine and human “natures” of Christ by recourse to the metaphysics of divine causality.⁵² In doing so, we would assimilate the divine nature to a human, intra-worldly concept of nature (a kind of univocity of genus), and correspondingly would be obliged to maintain the transcendence of the divine nature of Christ only by negating the intelligibility of this nature in any terms resembling the human (a radical apophatism).⁵³ In this way, we would implicitly banish the divine from the sphere of human existence and history, and not unlike Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy, would render the Incarnation unintelligible. (2) By introducing into theology the recourse to metaphysics we would initially abstract from the concrete narrative of revelation, the mystery of God’s triune identity, election in Christ, providence and Incarnation, and so on. This epistemological Pelagianism would seek to find God not where he is revealing himself (in Christ alone) but in works of alien human speculations that distort or obscure the true character of Scriptural revelation.⁵⁴ Barth’s rejection of a distinctly philosophical reflection on causality and creation stems most profoundly, it seems, from concerns such as these.

A Thomistic retort to this could readily be formulated as follows: Why does the Barthian *presuppose* the validity of the Kantian critique of classical metaphysics and the epistemological conditions for its warrant? Spencer, after all, simply announces to Thomists the authority of Kant’s critique without any philosophical defense of his views. This serves simply to obscure the real issue: that Barth and Barthians tend to import wholesale Kantian *philosophical presuppositions* into their theology without sufficient justification, despite their prohibition on an “autonomous philosophy” that is distinct from revelation. But why in fact should we consider the classical metaphysical tradition something alien to the right interpretation of Scripture when there is strong evidence to suggest that scriptural revelation itself (especially the Deuterocanonical works and the New Testament) is *intrinsically* affected by the Hellenistic context in which this revelation was given and composed? The metaphysical arguments of the Greek Fathers, Augustine, and Aquinas certainly can be understood to develop in logical continuity with the metaphysical presuppositions of the New Testament itself. Meanwhile, many of the philosophical speculations of Kant and Hegel that work to undermine the classical philosophical tradition in fact inevitably distort a right

⁵² See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III, 3, 103, 105.

⁵³ See Spencer, “Causality and the *Analogia entis*,” 371, 373.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

understanding of the Gospel, and yet these same speculations deeply affect the project of Barth, even as they did the theologies of his liberal Protestant teachers, that he rejected in part. In this case, perhaps Barthians and not Thomists are the ones working in insufficiently examined dependence upon the conventional, non-Christian speculations of their age, and need to take the proverbial log out of their own eye. At any rate, careful arguments are needed rather than mere assertions.

Here I would like to conclude this essay with brief reflections that might contribute to further discussion concerning Aquinas's metaphysics, Barth's Christocentrism, and Chalcedonian Christology. Barth has rightly insisted that the two natures of Christ cannot be conceived in a common genus, and Barthians rightly insist (against Kant) that we cannot conceive of the mystery of divine freedom and human freedom over against one another, such that the notions of the Incarnation, or of grace, would be cast as intrinsically unintelligible concepts, incompatible with our empirical and moral realism. I would like to suggest, then, (in a necessarily abbreviated fashion) three distinctly theological advantages of Aquinas's doctrine of analogical causality *precisely with regard to the Barthian concerns*. First, it allows us to conceive of the two natures of Christ so as to understand the genuine transcendence of God the Son with respect to every genus of created nature, while *simultaneously* underscoring the immanent presence of the Son's divine nature in history. Second, it allows us to affirm the genuine freedom of God to be truly present in history in the Incarnation as God without in any way introducing history into his own triune identity, that is to say, without God becoming intrinsically determined by creation in what he is from all eternity. Third, it allows us to understand why there can be no ontological rivalry between the divine freedom of God the Son and the human freedom of the Son made man. In each of these cases, recourse to the Thomist understanding of analogy and divine causality facilitates a speculative vindication of a Christological concern that is seemingly shared by Aquinas and Barth alike.

The first of these points can be made fairly simply by returning to one of the arguments made above. "Nature" (like "relation" and "operation," other concepts that Barth ascribes to God analogically) is itself historically associated with the classical genera of the categorical modes of being. It is, then, a "genus." To attribute it to Christ in a twofold sense, as Barth wishes to do,⁵⁵ without reducing the human and divine natures of Christ to a common genus of being, it is necessary to ascribe "nature" to

⁵⁵ See in particular *Church Dogmatics* IV, 2, which develops notions of the divine and human "essences" of Christ in a systematic fashion.

God in a wholly non-generic sense. But such non-generic ascription is possible (as Aquinas shows) only because there is a merely analogical resemblance between created natures as we come to know them, and the transcendent nature of God. Precisely because God is the *cause* of all created natures to which he gives existence, his nature is as such outside of every created genus of being.⁵⁶ Likewise, his divine nature utterly transcends our knowledge; therefore he cannot be considered as a being of a determinate kind among other beings.

Does this arrangement not risk banishing the divine nature from the world altogether, precisely because of the dissimilitude between God and all intra-worldly natures? On the contrary, because God gives existence to all things as their transcendent cause, their existence is not alien to him, nor something “outside” of him, even if he utterly transcends them as their divine source. God’s creative causality does not effectuate a change in the creature, nor cause something in the creature, but is itself the source of the entire existence of the creature. Therefore, to paraphrase Aquinas, “God is everything as the cause of everything.”⁵⁷ God is present to all things insofar as they exist.⁵⁸ Far from being banished from the world by his transcendence, then, God, as Aquinas understands him, is uniquely imminent to all that is, without being identified with anything he has created.⁵⁹ He is more intimately present to creatures than they are to themselves because of his transcendence as Creator.⁶⁰ As a consequence, we can say that if Aquinas ascribes to Christ a “divine nature,” this implies that Christ’s deity is not something contained under the genus of nature that is proper to all creatures, and that by the fact that the Son’s nature is divine, he is present to all that exists in created history as

⁵⁶ *ST I*, q. 3, aa. 4 and 5.

⁵⁷ *ST I*, q. 4, a. 2 : “Since therefore God is the first effective cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way. Dionysius implies the same line of argument by saying of God (Div. Nom.V, 8): ‘It is not that He is this and not that, but that He is all, as the cause of all.’ Secondly, from what has been already proved, God is existence itself, of itself subsistent. Consequently, He must contain within Himself the whole perfection of being.” The paraphrase is taken from Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa theologiae* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006), 65. See the excellent discussion of Aquinas’s understanding of our knowledge of God on pp. 65–93.

⁵⁸ See *ST I*, q. 8, a. 1.

⁵⁹ See *ST I*, q. 8, a. 2: “God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby excluded from it; indeed, by the very fact that He gives being to the things that fill every place, He Himself fills every place.”

⁶⁰ See *ST I*, q. 8, aa. 3 and 4.

God is present to his effects.⁶¹ The transcendence of Christ the Word is mirrored in his radical immanence with respect to all that depends upon him for its being, for “through him all things were made” (John 1:3).

This leads us to the second point: only because of the uniqueness of the form of causality that is proper to God as Creator is he alone free to “become” human, to assume a created nature hypostatically, without being in any way alienated from what he is eternally. The substrate of the hypostatic union is the existent person of God the Son.⁶² Therefore, *if there is a hypostatic union*, the causality entailed cannot transpire in a pre-existent material *subject in which* change is effectuated. Rather, this union is the new presence of God in creation existing as a man, with a human soul and body. The subject is the Son.⁶³ Just as creation does not effectuate a change in the creature, but gives existence to it, so too the Incarnation is not an intra-worldly change, but the gift of God existing in human flesh. *Precisely because God alone can act at the level of existence* in a causal fashion, *therefore he alone* can become incarnate in the being of man (at the deepest level of created reality) without ceasing to exist as God. It is truly God the Son (the author of life, in whom we live and move and have our being) who is present in history, yet without any loss of his deity that might somehow result from the Incarnation.

Aquinas, in turn, stresses quite clearly that while the union of the Word incarnate is enhypostatic (taking place in the Person of the Son), it does not render the divine nature of the Son relative to his human nature. However, resulting from the union, his humanity now subsists in the divine being of the Son (or the *esse personale* of the Son) by virtue of its very existence. Consequently, the union does render the human nature of the Son absolutely relative to his divine nature.⁶⁴ The non-reciprocity of

⁶¹ A point made explicitly in *ST* I, q. 45, a. 6, c. and ad 2.

⁶² See *ST* III, q. 2, a. 3.

⁶³ See *ST* III, q. 17, a. 2: “Since the human nature is united to the Son of God, hypostatically or personally . . . and not accidentally, it follows that by the human nature there accrued to Him no new personal being, but only a new relation of the pre-existing personal being to the human nature, in such a way that the Person is said to subsist not merely in the Divine, but also in the human nature.” See the commentary on the subject of the existence of Christ by Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *S. Thomas D’Aquin, Le Verbe Incarné*, vol. 3 (Paris: Cerf, 2002), Appendice 2, 391–402.

⁶⁴ See *ST* III, q. 2, a. 7: “The union of which we are speaking is a relation which we consider between the Divine and the human nature, inasmuch as they come together in one Person of the Son of God. Now, as was said above (*ST* I, q. 13, a. 7), every relation which we consider between God and the creature is really in the creature, by whose change the relation is brought into being; whereas it is not really in God, but only in our way of thinking, since it does not arise from

relationality and similitude of the divine and human that are present in Aquinas's doctrine of creation (and which Barth mischaracterizes) are carried over into his doctrine of the hypostatic union, with respect to the two natures of the God-man.

This is a non-trivial matter, for if by contrast we remove the appeal to the analogy of creative causality from our understanding of the divine and human natures of Christ that are united in his person, then we must conceive of the union of God's divine and human natures not in a trans-historical fashion (aided by recourse to an analogical doctrine of creative causality), but rather by appeal to a likeness from causal becoming in a pre-existent subject. The hypostatic union of the natures will then have to be "narrated" by a movement of the Son from being God alone into being human, understood after the fashion of the change from one specific state or contrary to another within a common genus, whether this be the genus of "nature," "relation," or "operation." The non-relativity (and non-mutual reciprocity) of the divine and human natures will be lost. Instead, God will be understood in a narrative fashion, through historical becoming, as one who is eternally relative in his deity to the human nature of Christ. Therefore, the Incarnation will not be conceivable without ascribing history to the very life of God *in se*, and the very notion of the "immanent Trinity" will be threatened. Interestingly, this is precisely what we see in the post-Hegelian, Barthian inspired theologies of Jürgen Moltmann, Eberhard Jüngel, and Robert Jenson, all of whom reinterpret Chalcedonian Christology dramatically precisely by distancing themselves from classical metaphysical understandings of creation.⁶⁵ It seems that something like this is present in Barth's later thought as well,

any change in God. And hence we must say that the union of which we are speaking is not really in God, except only in our way of thinking; but in the human nature, which is a creature, it is really. Therefore we must say [the hypostatic union] is something created." Aquinas goes on in article 9 to affirm that the unity of the Incarnation is greater than any other created unity.

⁶⁵ See the particularly clear statement of Eberhard Jüngel (*God as the Mystery of the World*, 346–47), in which he makes clear that the understanding of the Incarnation as a *historical becoming of God toward man* entails the notion of history and election as constitutive of the very life of God: "Where the economic doctrine of the Trinity speaks of God's *history* with man, the immanent doctrine of the Trinity must speak of God's *historicity*. God's history is his coming to man. God's historicity is God's being as it comes (being in coming). We must ponder this seriously if we want to take God's history with man seriously as an event in which God is God. In the process, of course, the immanent doctrine of the Trinity, which considers the historicity of God, must take seriously that God is *our* God."

as Bruce McCormack has recently argued poignantly.⁶⁶ And at this point, speaking from a Thomist point of view, one might argue that David Bentley Hart—in his writings on the “analogy of being”—has rightly questioned whether such theologies maintain in sufficient fashion a sense of the transcendence of God with respect to the history of the divine economy.⁶⁷ After all, if God is only intelligible in himself as the triune God in relation to the historical economy (which includes moral evil, suffering, and death), then these latter attributes of history are also in some real sense intrinsically necessary to the developing identity of the historical God.⁶⁸ In this case, the results of the abandonment of a classical metaphysics of divine causality are in fact disastrous, not only for the speculative contemplation of the Trinitarian mystery itself, but also for our ethical and soteriological understanding of the agency of God.

Last of all, only a doctrine of analogical causality allows us to understand that there can be no rivalry whatsoever between the *existence* of created freedom and divine freedom, and consequently no rivalry between

⁶⁶ See, for example, Bruce McCormack, “Karl Barth’s Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006): 243–51.

⁶⁷ See David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 165: “The God whose identity subsists in time and is achieved upon history’s horizon—who is determined by his reaction to the pathos of history—may be a being, or indeed the totality of all beings gathered in the pure depths of ultimate consciousness, but he is not being as such, he is not life and truth and goodness and love and beauty. God belongs to the system of causes, even if he does so as its total rationality; he is an absolute *causa in fieri*, but not a transcendent *causa in esse*. He may include us in his story, but his story will remain both good and evil, even if it ends in an ultimate triumph over evil. After all, how can we tell the dancer from the dance? The collapse of the analogical interval between the immanent and economic Trinity, between timeless eternity and the time in which eternity shows itself, has not made God our companion in pain, but simply the truth of our pain. . . . Only a truly transcendent and ‘passionless’ God can be the fullness of love dwelling within our very being, nearer to us than our inmost parts, but a dialectical Trinity is not transcendent—truly infinite—in this way at all, but only sublime, a metaphysical whole that can comprise us or change us extrinsically, but not transform our very being. . . . Theology must, to remain faithful to what it knows of God’s transcendence, reject any picture of God that so threatens to become at once both thoroughly mythological and thoroughly metaphysical, and insist upon the classical definitions of impassibility, immutability, and non successive eternity.”

⁶⁸ Spencer spends a great deal of time criticizing Hart for his failure to comply with Barth’s doctrine of analogy. But why does he not take up the criticisms of Hart concerning post-Hegelian Trinitarian theology, and discuss whether these criticisms might have some merit?

the divine and human freedoms of Christ. Because he alone is the cause of the existence of creatures (in Aquinas's qualified sense of the term "cause"), God alone is free to be present in and even as a creaturely reality without acting on that reality in the way a created cause would. That is to say, God alone can be freely present in the most intimate ontological depths of the reality he has created without acting extrinsically upon the creature by violence or alienation, and without therefore causing changes in the natural structure of the reality.⁶⁹ In this sense, God the Son in his sovereign will and freedom can be intimately present in our world as man (even through the medium of the hypostatic union) without changing the essential structure of created human freedom. The presence of the divine will in Christ, on the contrary, liberates human freedom so that it can be fully itself.⁷⁰

However, the Incarnation is not merely a question of God's freedom, but also of his ordering wisdom with respect to a created nature that is "adequately proportioned" to represent him. In this sense, it is also essential that there exist a natural similitude between our created human nature and God in order for the Incarnation to take place. For only if there is a natural similitude of the rational nature of man to God is the human nature capable of becoming a vehicle for the gratuitous revelation of God's divine life in human flesh. Only because the human nature of Christ is not wholly alien to his divine nature (that is, entirely dissimilar to it), but is in some sense similar to it, can the human nature of Christ become the medium for the reception of the mystery of God, without doing violence to what that nature is. Concretely, this transpires especially through the medium of human reason.⁷¹ Because God is not wholly alien to human thought and freedom, therefore the freedom of Christ can find its authentic fulfillment, perfection, and beauty in being utterly relative to God, that is to say, in knowing and doing the will of the Father. This will—that Jesus as God shares with the Father—is known by the Son made man through the medium of his human reason and the graces of his human intellect, and this in turn renders him free to do the divine will.⁷² Were there an absolute ontological dissimilitude between the human nature of

⁶⁹ See *ST I*, q. 19, a. 4 and 8; q. 103, a. 6. This point contrasts spectacularly with the thought of Kant. See Brian Shanley, O.P., "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 99–122.

⁷⁰ This is why Aquinas emphasizes in *ST III*, q. 18, a. 4 (in a subtle correction to John Damascene) that Christ made truly human choices in view of the good, and in fact, made these choices more profoundly and freely than other human beings.

⁷¹ See *ST III*, q. 6, aa. 1 and 2.

⁷² Aquinas's teaching in *ST III*, q. 18, a. 5 suggests that Christ's earthly knowledge of God through the medium of the beatific vision makes him more perfectly human

Christ and the divine nature, there would be simply no possibility of a cooperation of the human will of Christ with his divine will, as the revelation of the will of the Father would remain wholly alien and unintelligible to Christ's human nature, even in the presence of divine grace. In point of fact, however, Christ's human knowledge of his divine life shared with the Father deepens his human freedom by augmenting his human potential to love and to choose what is authentically good with wisdom. In this way it is the source of the unique freedom of Christ.⁷³

IV

If in the eschaton the theological lambs lie down with the theological lions, the Thomists will probably not have to surmount the fear of being eaten. They may have to acquire greater virtues of magnanimity and humility in the interim. Nevertheless, if what I have sketched out in the above essay (only too briefly) is correct, then Thomists are warranted in their spirited defense of the analogical metaphysics of divine causality as understood by Aquinas. When responsibly portrayed, that metaphysical account does not fall prey to the Barthian critique of divine causality as a system of ideas that falsifies a right understanding of the divine transcendence and immanence of God by introducing an alien system of philosophical speculation into divine revelation. Rather, it safeguards a true sense of the uniqueness of God with regard to any and every created reality, such that God may in no way be assimilated to the world of human creatures. But precisely for this same reason, God may be present in creation in a way that no created reality can be.

Furthermore, this notion of causality does not supplant or distort the knowledge of God that comes through Christ and the mystery of the Incarnation. Rather, it allows us to understand more profoundly how it is God who is truly present in Christ historically, and who, without prejudice to either his divine transcendence or his human nature, truly acts in an integral way by virtue of both his divine freedom and human freedom. A deepened discussion between Barthians and Thomists should focus on the subject of Christ's two natures, and the ways that the Chalcedonian tradition makes implicit use of an analogical discourse concern-

and free than we are. I have argued this in greater detail in my "Dyothelitism and the Instrumental Human Consciousness of Jesus," *Pro Ecclesia* 17 (2008): 396–422.

⁷³ Aquinas points out in *ST* III, q. 7, a. 13, ad 2 that the habitual grace of the soul of Christ is "natural" to him in a way that is unique among all men, insofar as it stems from his hypostatic identity as Son. It acts within the depths of his human nature so as to conform his human freedom with his divine will, and yet this is only "normal" for Christ, because he is the Son himself existing as man.

ing being and causality to reflect on the Incarnation of the Word. In this conversation, perhaps it is the thought of Aquinas, and not that of Kant, that has a more constructive role to play for the right formulation of thinking about the Christological deposit of faith.⁷⁴ N.V

⁷⁴ I would like to thank Bruce D. Marshall for comments on this essay that greatly helped to improve its argument.

