

## God as God exists in our Understanding and Knowledge: a Thomist Perspective

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To move toward an analogical understanding of God’s uncreated, immaterial understanding or, appositely, God as an uncreated, immaterial act of understanding, a useful point of departure is the fact that, given the principle of intelligibility which says that nothing exists without some kind of meaning or possible reason for it (however difficult or elusive could be our apprehension and knowledge of this pertinently relevant meaning or reason),<sup>1</sup> the non-contingent and so the ongoing, abiding, and necessary character of divine understanding is the chief point of division which, as a catalyst, immediately distinguishes and separates the understanding of God from the understanding of any other living subject: subjects who exist as created, contingent, living beings since the understanding of every creature *qua* conscious subject, is always limited by the fact that it has been made and created (having not created or effected itself). Hence, it cannot exist on a par with the understanding which has somehow created or produced it. Understanding as an effect cannot but come from some kind of greater understanding. If this were not the case, and if the understanding of a creature were on a par with the understanding which has created and produced it, a creature’s created understanding *as an effect* would equal a creator’s uncreated understanding *as a cause* and the difference between creature and creator would then be obliterated. A real distinction would no longer exist. In such a situation thus, a creator, as an effective cause, would only be remaking or reduplicating itself and, in this act of reduplication, no difference in species could possibly exist between the being of a cause and the being of an effect or, in other words, between the being of prior, initial things and the being of later, subsequent things.<sup>2</sup>

The complete absence of any potentiality in God’s divine understanding accordingly explains why the divine act of understanding exists as an absolutely simple kind of thing and why it possesses more understanding than any other act of understanding.<sup>3</sup> In its infinity and, in other words, in its unlimitedness or in its unrestrictedness, the pure actuality of divine understanding cannot be lacking in its understanding of anything that could be somehow other than itself or which could be how this understanding exists in itself.<sup>4</sup> So basic and crucial is this infinity and unrestrictedness. What we

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<sup>1</sup>See Viktor E. Frankl's autobiographical reflection that is given in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. In conditions and situations which appear to be entirely bereft of meaning or intelligibility, it is not impossible that some meaning can be found in a way which points to a mysterious ordering of events and persons that is sufficient for new emergences and apprehensions of meaning and goodness that would otherwise not exist (not be possible).

<sup>2</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 4, a. 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Compendium theologiae*, 1, c. 9; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 1. See also q. 3, a. 1 & ad 2; 3a, q. 10, a. 2, ad 3. As Aquinas simply expresses it (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 87, a. 1): “the Essence of God, the pure and perfect act, is in itself simply and perfectly intelligible.”

<sup>4</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 2 & ad 1; q. 14, a. 4; q. 15, a. 2; q. 54, a. 1; q. 79, a. 2; cf. q. 2, a. 3; q. 3, a. 2. The lack of potentiality in divine understanding explains why, in an especially eminent way, divine understanding is not essentially discursive. Divine understanding does not have to work from what is known to what is unknown since, through its apprehension of but one intelligible form (the form of being or form of what is), it understands all things in one single act. This absence of potentiality in turn easily explains why God’s understanding is in a state or condition of pure act or pure operation. It is an operation that is always fully actual and complete and, so in this completeness,

cannot understand, it can understand and so easy and effortless is its grasp and understanding. Hence, not only does divine understanding know all things in general but it also knows all things in particular (to the degree that one thing differs from another in any kind of way).<sup>5</sup> In terms of attributes (if we should want to speak in terms of attributes in an ordering of predicaments and qualities): divine understanding can be said and it is said to be wholly perfect,<sup>6</sup> complete,<sup>7</sup> immutable,<sup>8</sup> and timeless (though we do not understand what these different things could mean as we try to move from a restricted kind of intelligibility that we can grasp toward an unrestricted kind of intelligibility that, unfortunately, we cannot enjoy and grasp).<sup>9</sup> The pure actuality of divine understanding excludes all forms of non-being or, in other words, all forms of possibility and potentiality.<sup>10</sup> No real distinction can therefore be drawn between the existence of a divine intellect as a mind (as a power, faculty, or agent) and an act of understanding which such an intellect experiences or consists of. God's intellect is

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divine understanding is infinite in both the extent of its range and the depth of its profundity. It is totally lacking in any measure which we could possibly use to judge and evaluate it, and so its infinity makes it the measure of all other sorts of understanding, whether we speak about working of our human understanding or about the understanding of creatures which would be purely spiritual if they are lacking in senses that are only proper for the being of incarnate subjects. In an analogy which draws from the simplicity of understanding that is understood as an intuition, divine understanding is one completely simple act that is always permanently transcendent in the character of its being and existence. Its fullness does not depend on any relation which might exist between what it is in itself and the existence of anything which possesses any material and temporal coordinates.

<sup>5</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 6; q. 14, a. 11.

<sup>6</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 5, a. 1. Aquinas's general principle, as he states it, simply says that "a thing is perfect so far as it exists."

<sup>7</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, aa. 9-12.

<sup>8</sup>*In 1 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 8, q. 3, a. 1; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 9, a. 1; q. 14, a. 15; q. 16, a. 8.

<sup>9</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 10, a. 1; a. 2, ad 4; q. 13, a. 11; q. 14, a. 7; a. 9. See also q. 16, a. 7; a. 8 where Aquinas argues from the timelessness or the eternity of God's divine understanding to the timelessness or the eternity of the truths that are known by this understanding. The pure actuality of divine understanding explains why everything is understood by divine understanding as if all things are immediately present in divine understanding. There is no before or after in any self-experiences of succession or change (manifested through shifts, changes, or movements in conscious experience) which, for human beings, provide a meaning for time as a succession or as a continuum of past, present, and future events (*In 1 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 1; *Sententia super Physicam*, 3, 2, 284; 4, 17, 571-581; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 7, a. 3, ad 4; q. 10, a. 1; q. 10, a. 2, ad 1; q. 79, a. 6 & ad 2). Time exists as a numbering or as a measuring of motion as it occurs in something that is moving or changing (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 15, 3; *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 14, ad 1, ii). Instead however, in the pure actuality of God's understanding, in the absence of any form of succession in divine understanding, an eternal now exists which includes every form of succession which, in turn, provides a meaning for time or temporality within the created historical order of things since the unrestrictedness of divine understanding is such that it precludes any new acts of understanding which could give to God an internal experience of succession that would be definitive of time as a succession which denominates an order of things which is specifically temporal. The one act of divine understanding which exists in God (and which is God) is to be correlated with the experience and meaning of eternity rather than with an experience and meaning of time (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 9). Hence, it is said that "eternity is the proper measure of permanent being" (*Summa Theologiae*,

to be equated with its being as an apprehension, instance, or act of understanding.<sup>11</sup> Cognition and metaphysics, knowing and being, indissolubly exist together in a oneness which is so fundamental that no form of real distinction can be possibly alluded to, admitted, or affirmed.

Hence, since God, in terms of being, is immaterial to the highest degree, in this immateriality and in the unrestrictedness of this immateriality, God naturally possesses knowledge and understanding to the highest possible degree (in a way or manner which we cannot fathom or imagine).<sup>12</sup> A direct relation exists between the degree or the completeness of the existing immateriality (its fullness and its radicalness) and the degree and the completeness of the operative cognitive activity (also its fullness and radicalness).<sup>13</sup> The more radical the immateriality, the more radical the cognition. Since, at the same time too, God exists as form or intelligibility to the highest possible degree (hence, absolutely or radically), and since all knowledge comes through the principle of form or through the principle of intelligibility, God is allegedly most knowable or God is most intelligible in terms of who and what God is in terms of the being or the reality which allegedly exists as God.<sup>14</sup> In its unrestrictedness, God's understanding (as this exists in terms of self-understanding and as this self-understanding leads to an understanding of all other things) – this understanding exists in a way which, accordingly, is entirely self-contained or it is entirely self-willed or it is self-moved. It is self-directed, proficient, and productive in an utterly inexhaustible way. It does not need to be moved by anything else that could be other or different from itself.<sup>15</sup> Divine understanding does not need to be received in any kind of way through the functioning and the operation of a passive kind of understanding and, hence, a limited form of understanding which can only receive what is given to it; hence, possibly, only enjoying a determinate or a limited amount of understanding. The passivity imposes limits on the amount of understanding which it can properly have and enjoy.<sup>16</sup> No kind of increase in understanding can come from anything unless it were to exist as an active or as a self-generating type of understanding. No initiative or expansion would be possible. Active understanding always exists as something which is more or other than passive understanding. In the condition of our humanity, if we could but willingly succeed in all of our strivings and efforts, we would prefer to move or to transition from having a passive kind of understanding toward always having an active type of understanding in a way which

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1a, q. 10, a. 4, ad 3). It is the measure of a being which never changes and which can know no succession in any of its acts or operations. See *Sententia super Physicam*, 4, 18, 585-586; and Brian J. Shanley, "Eternity and Duration in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 541, 545. In the context of our own life experience, to move toward an understanding of eternity, we best turn inwardly toward the life of our souls in its acts of understanding which occur immediately or instantaneously whenever they happen to occur, and which are to be sharply distinguished from acts of reasoning which occur over time in a process, and which are to be understood as incomplete motions or as incomplete operations. Cf. *Super Librum De causis*, lect. 9, cited by *St. Thomas Aquinas Philosophical Texts*, trans. by Thomas Gilby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 197, n. 531. In contrast with how we might come to a consciousness of eternity, a consciousness of time comes from our experience of a succession of different acts. An identical subject experiences a succession of different acts. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *The Incarnate Word*, unpublished manuscript translated 1989 by Charles C. Hefling, Jr. from the Latin of the *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press *ad usum auditorum*, 1964), p. 186.

10 *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, ad 7; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 18, 2; 1, 28, 3; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 34, a. 2, ad 1; cf. *Super Librum De causis*, prop. 9.

11 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 27, a. 2, ad 2.

12 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 1.

immediately points to the special kind of primacy and preeminence which always belongs to the kind of understanding which exists as active understanding.

As a general principle that we can invoke as an explanatory principle when, initially, we refer to how limitations exist with respect to any acts of understanding when we refer to ourselves and to our passive acts of understanding: citing Aquinas, “whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the receiver.”<sup>17</sup> The being of the receiver, in the kind of reality which it has, determines the knowing of the receiver; the being, the cognition. More explicitly however in terms of cognition (within the kind of order which exists as cognition), “a thing is known by a knower according to the mode of the knower.”<sup>18</sup> In every kind of knowing, a thing is known by a knower according to the mode of a knower’s cognitive being where what is grasped, known, and understood is regulated according to how a given thing is being known by a given knower.<sup>19</sup> From the kind of knowing which exists in a knower (and whether we refer to a passive kind of knowing or to an active kind of knowing), in our knowing about this knowing, we know about the kind of being which exists as a knower as we try to move from the kind of order which exists within and as cognition toward the kind of order which exists as some kind of metaphysical determination. Each immediately points to the other: the knowing, the being; the being, the knowing. Obviously however, without being or apart from the actuality of being, no knowing can exist at all although, on the other hand, it is to be admitted that, to some degree or partially, a thing’s being is determined by the kind of knowing which, possibly, it has. We find that, within ourselves, we can use our knowing to effect changes in the manner of our being.

Hence, where being and knowing exist together, and as the order of being points to the order of cognition and as the order of cognition points to the order of being, in its essential, immaterial simplicity: in the being, in the immediacy, and in the necessity of God as both act of being and act of understanding, who or what God is in terms of understanding and intelligibility cannot be distinguished from God as existing when we refer to the truth or the reality of God’s existence.<sup>20</sup> Unrestrictedness of intelligibility or unrestrictedness of intelligence accompanies or it points to the unrestrictedness of being. If, speculatively from within ourselves, we move from the partial and the discursive character of our human acts of understanding (in the kind of fragmented or incomplete completeness which it happens to have) toward the possible character or reality of God as *per se* understanding (or as

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13 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 1.

14 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 12, a. 1, ad 2.

15 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 18, a. 3.

16 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 7, a. 1.

17 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 75, a. 5. *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, q. 5.

18 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 12, a. 4. *Cogitum...est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis*. See also q. 14, a. 1, ad 3; q. 16, a. 1; q. 19, a. 6, ad 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 79, 7; *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3.

19 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 12, a. 4; a. 11. See also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 98, 4-9.

Quoting one text (*SCG*, 2, 98, 7):

Each of the separate substances knows God, by its natural knowledge,  
after the manner of its substance [italics mine].

20 *Compendium theologiae*, 1, c. 11.

understanding as it unrestrictedly exists in itself), we begin by initially saying to ourselves (as we notice this truth within the data of our self-understanding consciousness) that the understanding which belongs to the understanding of an intelligibility or a form perfectly combines with its grasping, understanding act as this act exists within ourselves and then, later, it would have to be completely joined with the kind of understanding which happens to exist in terms of judgments that we might make about the reality of this or that thing and the kind of actuality which exists whenever we refer to our acts of judgment.<sup>21</sup> In us, if, again, we should refer to the data of our inner cognitive experience, no real distinction exists between an initial act of understanding and what is grasped by us in an initial act of understanding. Act and term or act and idea - these exist together. You cannot have one without the other or separate one from the other. In addition too however, no real distinction exists between an act of reflective understanding as a judgment and a truth that is grasped by a reflective act of understanding. Insight, conclusion, truth - these also exist together. However, with God, these two acts exist as one undifferentiated act of cognition (as, definitively, an all embracing act of understanding). In one act, what is understood or grasped is the same as the act or the experience of understanding and, in addition or more fully, in this same one act, the truth or the reality of a thing is to be identified with what is being understood as the term of the originating or the logically prior simple, absolute act of understanding which exists as the actuality of God's divine understanding.<sup>22</sup> No distinction exists between understanding and judgment in God and, in addition too, between knowing and willing or knowing and doing, both exist together in a way which points to the absence of any kind of real distinction although, commonly and naturally for us (for the sake of our understanding and in the context of our discursive acts of understanding), through our own acts of analysis, hypothesis, and understanding, we can choose to make distinctions which would exist as an ordering of conceptual, intellectual distinctions. Real distinctions differ from postulations that would want to speak about the possible relevance of mental, conceptual distinctions that can be also possibly known because of the meaning which exists in them. Through our mental conceptual distinctions, we can move from both an experience and an affirmation of oneness that, directly, we cannot fathom or understand and which we do not directly understand, toward apprehensions that can point to forms of delimitation and an assembly of different variables that, in ourselves, we would seem the better to grasp and understand (since each variable exists as but a part and not as a whole and since our understanding, in its discursiveness, best works with parts instead of with wholes) although, from within ourselves or as we introduce our nuances and as we make our distinctions and postulate differences, the underlying context continues to exist as a grounding awareness which knows about the reality of a greater, encompassing, mysterious oneness which links all these different variables with each other.

The pure actuality and simplicity of divine understanding (when it is used as a first, prime principle of order) in turn explains why a number of properties can be properly attributed to divine understanding in a way which can show how the order of all created things is grounded in a constantly functioning, prior act of understanding which sustains all things in both their life and being:<sup>23</sup> functioning as both a point of origin from which all things flow, derive, and depend; and also functioning as a final goal to which all things naturally tend and return if, like other things or lesser ends, this final or ultimate goal exists also as something which God intends and has brought into a condition of being through the mediation of causes which only God understands, orders, and controls.<sup>24</sup> The perfection of any given thing

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21 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 16, a. 5, ad 1. Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5.

22 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 4; q. 34, a. 1, ad 3.

23 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 8, a. 1.

24 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 8, a. 3. As a point of origin, God is present as an efficient cause

always exists more perfectly if it can be joined to the summit and the absoluteness of perfection which alone exists as the good and as the intelligibility and intelligence of God. God's understanding causes all things to the degree that, as understanding, it is joined or it exists also as an inclination, an expressiveness, or an ordination and direction that orders all things toward their right and proper ends (and so, reiteratively, we can say that nothing outside of God causes or effects the being of God's act as divine understanding).<sup>25</sup> God's understanding, in this context, is always to be correlated with a distinct type of causality which exists as God's providential causality (or, in other words, with the ordering and rule of God's providential government).<sup>26</sup> God's understanding and knowing exists as the cause of all things whereby, literally, God "knows things into being."<sup>27</sup> *Scientia Dei est causa rerum.*

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but, as a final goal, God exists within things as the term or as the object of their operations.

<sup>25</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 8; q. 18, a. 3. As Aquinas quotes from Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Bk 15 (as cited by Leo Vincent Serroul in "*Sapientis est Ordinare: An Interpretation of the Pars Systematica* of Bernard Lonergan's *De Deo Trino* from the Viewpoint of Order," an unpublished dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Michael's College and the Department of Theology of the Toronto School of Theology, p. 334), "God does not know all creatures spiritual and temporal because they exist; rather, they exist because God knows them." Cf. *Incarnate Word*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>26</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 8; q. 14, a. 11, q. 57, a. 2. See also Jeremy D. Wilkins, "Trinity, Mission, and Grace in Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Bernard Lonergan: The Reception and Transformation of a Tradition," (a paper presented at the Third International Lonergan Workshop, Erbacher Hof, Mainz, Germany, January 2-7, 2007), p. 7. For a better understanding about why the simplicity of God's being as a single act of understanding is not only compatible with the created existence of a multitude of things which God makes but also, for an explanation which best explains why God's providence is best administered if God's understanding exists as a simple, single act, we can turn to an argument that is given by Aquinas in the *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 8; p. 48 which avers that "it is not contrary with a thing's simplicity to have many relations toward other things: indeed the more simple a thing is the greater the number of its concomitant relations: since its power is so much the less limited and consequently its causality so much the more extended....a united force is less confined than a distributed force." Cf. *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 8 as cited by Bernard Lonergan, *De Deo trino, II: Pars systematica*, appendix 3, "De Relationibus," 314, trans. Michael Shields, 1999, as cited by Serroul, p. 87. In any relation which can exist between two things where it is said that one thing proceeds from another, a change occurring in one thing does not necessarily imply a change in the other. Change occurs in what is changed or moved. Change occurs in an effect. It does not have to occur in any first principle which functions as an agent or as the first cause of change in other things. If a relation between two things ceases to exist, the explanation can be a change only in one of the terms and not in both. No need for change needs to be postulated in what does not change or in what does not have to change. As we attend to the nature of an act of understanding and as we move toward a knowledge of a human act of understanding, we discover a whole network of internal relations that is immediately given within every human act of understanding. Then, as we identify these different relations, we can come to understand why a more perfect act of understanding is related to a far larger, wider number of things. An unrestricted act of understanding is related to an infinity of objects: things which exist and things which can exist. By an analysis of a human act of understanding which, as an analogy, best helps us move toward an understanding of God as a simple, single act of understanding, as cited by Serroul, p. 87, Bernard Lonergan accordingly is able to argue as follows:

Hence, from all this and as we have been suggesting, God possesses the qualities and attributes of life and vitality to the highest possible degree, or a life and a vitality which exists in a radically absolute way (in an absolute sense).<sup>28</sup> As the meaning or the intelligibility of any created thing is only understood thus if its relation or ordering to other things is properly grasped and understood, in the same way thus, different orders of things are only understood if the ordering of all these orders is understood in a way which can reveal how all things come from God in an orderly, intelligible, intelligent way from an utterly simple, unrestricted, effective act of transcendent, divine understanding. God's doing and willing, as intelligent things, exists within a context that is essentially determined by the willing of God's understanding as *actus purus* (God as pure act).<sup>29</sup> To speak about the primacy of God's willing relative to God's understanding, or to speak about the primacy of God's understanding relative to God's willing, is to speak in a way which only works with an order of conceptual distinctions. Within a kind of ordering which points to the being of a cosmos or universe and not to the being of things which would exist as some kind of welter or chaos, once something exists in terms of its proper act or operation (in its existence and function), it accordingly follows from this that the more this act or operation exists as an act or operation in its completion or perfection, the more fully it will exist as a fully active, coordinating, cooperative, fruitful principle and cause, and so as a subsidiary source of governing and ordering with respect to the being of a range of other activities and acts.<sup>30</sup> In terms of effects and in any ordering which exists in terms of effects, a given act or operation causes more than any effect which would exist as an immediate or as a proximate type of effect. Other effects will also occur and arise but with a weight and an influence that, from the context of our

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One and the same act of understanding relates simultaneously to (1) the agent intellect from which [understanding] exists as from its principal cause, (2) the phantasm from which it exists as from its instrumental cause, (3) the phantasm in which it beholds its species illuminated, (4) the acts of sensing from which the phantasms were derived, (5) the objects of sensation which were known through the acts of sensing, (6) the noncomplex inner word which proceeds from the act of understanding, (7) the complex inner word by which the objectivity of the noncomplex word is judged, (8) the real things that are known in the word, (9) the goods which are known through judgments of value, (10) the acts of the will which are consequent upon the intellect, (11) and to the operations that are directed and carried out by the intellect and will; (12) finally, the more perfect the act of understanding, the more it comprehends as a unified whole, and thereby extends to more sensible objects, more acts of sensing, more phantasms, more noncomplex and complex words, more goods, more acts of the will, and more operations.

27John H. Wright, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," *Theological Studies* 38 (1977): 453. As Wright expresses it, God's knowledge is causative and his causality is cognitive. Hence, as Wright argues, God's knowing an existing thing is the same as the causing of its existence. One cannot occur without the other. God's unrestricted knowing is to be perfectly correlated or identified with the unrestrictedness of his willing, doing, and causing.

28*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 18, a. 3.

29*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 21, a. 1, ad 2.

30Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), p. 134, n. 64.

understandings and judgments, we cannot initially imagine or entirely foresee and understand. We cause more than what we do, cause, or intend where, here, the fecundity of our causality serves as an apt analogy for possibly thinking about how much greater must be the fullness and the fecundity of the causality which alone exists and belongs as God.

Hence, as we consider and speak about a number of properties which belong to the character and the actuality of God's understanding (although, in us, as we have been noting, no understanding of these properties is commensurate with the extent or the reach of our human understanding, given the limitations of our human understanding within the context of our present, current life), as we move from God to the being of other things and then back toward God on the basis of how God is joined to the being of other things as both their point of origin and as their destination, we can move toward possibly, partially understanding how the understanding which grounds God's willing as understanding is also an understanding and a willing which must inevitably point to the intelligibility, the goodness, the benevolence, and the loving providence of God's government with respect to how all things exist and relate to each other. In love, no greater goodness exists: no greater wonder, no greater intelligibility.<sup>31</sup> God, and no one else, exists as the proper Lord and administrator of both our human history and the history of our physical, material world and so He is to be known as our Lord and governor, and, in a real sense, as our heavenly Father. From an understanding of the order which exists within this providence and dispensation (it belongs, for instance, to God's understanding and willing that, as human beings, we are given the gift of freedom as something which is eminently good and precious despite the risks and pitfalls that accrue with the actuations of choice which exist with regard to how we exercise our acts of human freedom), we can then possibly move, within and also into a heightening of meaning and order which exists within the parameters of Christian belief and theology, toward an understanding which can then begin to grasp why Christ's incarnation and saving death is to be understood as a species of divinely proffered, curative solution which brings the order or the ordering of God's providential care toward a perfection or toward a completion which would otherwise not have been possible if this order of redemption were not to exist as a fit and proper means for bringing the created order of existing things from its condition of incompleteness and potency toward a further, new condition of act, and so possibly toward an absolute degree or a heightened species of realization: into a life which can only properly exist if, in some way, it and we are reconnected and so rejoined to the kind of life and being which only belongs to the life and being which alone exists as God. Through first a physical and then also through a moral type of incarnation and embodiment that encompasses our human acts of understanding and willing, as a transformative active form which creates a new order of existing things from within the fabric of our human history, a divine and human actor or, in other words, a divine and human subject moves through an apprehended ordering of steps, moves, and shifts in a way which points to how, incrementally, a new, similar order can also exist for us as human beings: also belonging to us with respect to how we happen to exist and live as human subjects. We do this act and we do some other act but, now presently, from within the context of a new dispensation and order of existing things.

Simply put, as we move into the order of Christian theology and belief, Christ initially enters into the fabric of our human history by taking on our human nature and character. Hence, in the wake of entering into a physical form of incarnation, Christ as God can now begin to act *as a human being*

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<sup>31</sup>See Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, trans. Else Lasch (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 37.



within our human history while still continuing to exist fully *as God*.<sup>32</sup> On the basis of these conditions, the same divine, human person enters, participates, or engages in a saving type of self-sacrifice and death (which, as acts, point to how our trials, failures, and difficulties can be turned into potencies which are conducive for later realizations of being and goodness that would otherwise not be possible as, now, these potencies are being transformed in ways which point to how they can exist, for us, as means that lend themselves to eliciting (from us) a number of participative acts which exist as contrition, remorse, expiation, forgiveness, and healing). All things which lessen and corrupt us and which threaten to destroy us and everything which God has made become, instead, a means for building, renewing, and elevating the things which God has made in a manner which violates no existing principle nor the being of any divinely created, incarnate law which would exist within the being of existing contingent things where now, and with degrees of unexpectedness and surprise, within the context of a greater order or a greater alignment of existing things, greater more wonderful things can now be brought into being than would otherwise be the case within an order of things that already currently exists and which God has created and permitted for reasons that only God grasps, wills, knows, and understands.<sup>33</sup> It has been said for instance, by way of argument and in terms of evidence and proof that, without the Sack of Rome which had occurred earlier in Rome in May 1527, Pope Clement VII would not have commissioned the painting of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* as an expressive act of repentance, sorrow, and atonement.<sup>34</sup> However, in time, what had begun as a portrayal of suffering, death, and hopelessness was to undergo a kind of inner transformation as it became a carrier of other meanings which presaged and which point to an ultimate kind of victory which always belongs to the life and ministry of the Church and so pointing to the sad fate of those who reject the goodness and the authority of the Church's mission, purpose, and office.

With respect to the nature and character of this divine understanding and how our thought about it constructs a context for our understanding the nature and character of God's willing and governance, four points merit our reflection and consideration as we move, by way of a kind of deductive synthesis, through premisses towards conclusions which already and inchoately exist within the premisses that we are using as our primary first principles.

First, the absolute simplicity of divine understanding precludes the possibility of any plurality that could exist with respect to God as the divine act of understanding. Or, in other words, the pure actuality of God's understanding necessitates no more than one act of understanding which specifies the unity of God's divine understanding. The oneness points to a lack of division or to a unique kind of

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<sup>32</sup>Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, pp. 204-205. As Weinandy explains it, in the Incarnation, God remains fully God. There is no diminution in God's divine nature. But, in and through this same Incarnation, by assuming a humanity that is not itself changed as a humanity, as a nature, God lives and acts *as a man*. Christ's humanity lacks in nothing (to the degree that it is human). It is a humanity which does not differ from the humanity of any other human being. God is fully man in the incarnate Christ. Whenever Christ thinks, says, or does in his earthly life, he always acts *as a man* and not as God despite his always being in a prior way a divine person, God's Son. Hence, for instance, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he did this act not as God but *as a man*. If this were not so, Jesus would be "acting as God *in a man*" and to say this violates the meaning and significance of the Incarnation which does not speak about God acting *in a man* but of God acting *as a man*.

<sup>33</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992), p. 718.

<sup>34</sup>Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation: A Personal View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 116.

compactness, density, or unity which alone belongs to the clout of God's divine understanding where, immediately and actively, one form grasps an infinite number of forms with respect to what is being grasped, understood, and known.<sup>35</sup> The absence of any need for any additional acts of understanding necessarily underscores and emphasizes the unrestrictedness of God's divine understanding since, as noted, the one act has an unrestricted range and depth, being endowed with infinite power and might (if, as we have been noting, no real difference exists between the understanding and the willing).<sup>36</sup> Its term has an unrestricted, infinite meaning and scope which includes the meaning of all things in terms of both their actuality and also, distinctively, their possibility.<sup>37</sup> The possibility of things exists also as an infinite number of options and, of course, it has a greater infinity than the kind of infinity which allegedly belongs to the actuality of existing things (if, reasonably, we can compare these two kinds of infinity with each other where, allegedly, one would be larger or greater than the other). What is actual always exists as a subset of that which could be possible.

Hence, as a quotation that, illustratively, we can cite, we can say about God that “the Lord knoweth the thoughts of men,”<sup>38</sup> whether these exist as suppositions, considerations, ideas, or judgments. Since the absolute simplicity of divine understanding in its one act precludes, in a radically absolute sense, the reality of any possible kind of real distinction that could possibly exist between act and term in the being of divine understanding (the two being not separate things nor separate realities),<sup>39</sup> any distinction which would want to speak about any difference between act and term in divine understanding would have again to be a distinction which, radically, can only possess a conceptual, a notional, or an analogical kind of meaning and significance.<sup>40</sup> As we have been noting, the unrestricted

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<sup>35</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 11, a. 1; q. 15, a. 2. Later, in q. 19, a. 5, when Aquinas discusses whether any cause can be assigned to God's willing, he argues that God's understanding of a cause does not cause Him then to understand an effect. God's understanding is not discursive but exists fully in one act where effects are understood in their causes in one act of understanding which grasps both in terms of how they relate to each other. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 22, a. 3, ad 3: “God...sees everything simultaneously at one glance.”

<sup>36</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 43, 1-5. See also the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 55, a. 3 where Aquinas argues that the more powerful a given intellect, the more it understands through fewer acts. As Lonergan speaks about the term or the object of divine understanding in a way which summarizes Aquinas's understanding of it (*De Deo trino, II: Pars systematica*, p. 183, as cited by Serroul, p. 119), he notes that “an infinite act of understanding attains every being, an infinite act of affirming attains every truth, and an infinite act of loving attains every good.” Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 5 ff.; q. 34, a. 3; q. 19, a. 3, as suggested and cited by Serroul. And so, in his self-knowledge, God “grasps the full range of all possible events, situations, things, and activities.” Cf. Wright, “Divine Knowledge,” 453, citing the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, aa. 5-6.

<sup>37</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 12. In this regard, in the *De Potentia*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 11 and also to some extent in q. 3, a. 5, ad 2, Aquinas distinguishes between incomplete and complete ideas. Incomplete ideas refer to possible ideas. They are grasped and entertained but not put into effect. But, complete ideas are actual ideas. They are the ideas of actually existing things since they refer to apprehensions of meaning which have been put into effect.

<sup>38</sup>Psalms 94:11, cited by Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 14.

<sup>39</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 27, a. 1, ad 2. See also Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 203.

<sup>40</sup>See Lonergan, *Verbum*, pp. 197-198. With respect to the two notions of operation spoken

experience of meaning that is enjoyed by divine understanding is to be equated with the very being of who is God and how God engages and exists in Himself in His own actual act of understanding.<sup>41</sup> Reiteratively, God's being or existence is to be equated with His unrestricted understanding.<sup>42</sup> Hence, and again reiteratively: "all things are naked and open to His eyes."<sup>43</sup> As understanding itself (where understanding as a purely active principle exists in its own right as an act of being), God can be known to exist (according to a commonly used Latin designation) as *ipsum intelligere* since, in and through God as understanding, God exists in His own being,<sup>44</sup> in terms of having His own reality. In other words: God as subject (as understander) and God as object (as the understood) are both completely and perfectly one.<sup>45</sup> Or, in the usage of employing more traditional language, God's substance or God's essence (as something which is strictly or simply intellectual, immaterial, or formal) is always to be

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about by Aquinas, while an analogy based on operation as *processio operationis* is not applicable in a theology of God which tries to speak about inner relations within God since a *processio operationis* refers to an act or an operation which perfects its agent or subject and God's being lacks any kind of imperfection or potentiality, in order to speak about the Christian Trinity and how God the Son and God the Holy Spirit can be related to God the Father, an analogy for understanding these relations obviously presents itself if we should allude to Aquinas's second notion of operation which speaks about the kind of proceeding which occurs in a *processio operati* and which is applicable to the understanding of how an act of conceptualization differs from an act of understanding purely as an act of understanding. Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2, ad 7; *Verbum*, pp. 198-199; p. 206. With respect to this second notion of operation, instead of an effect which is the perfection of an agent or subject, we have an effect or consequence which exists as the emergence of one thing from another thing. An act simultaneously or immediately comes from another act as is the case, for instance, when, in human understanding, an act of conceptualization proceeds or emanates from a prior act of understanding in an unpremeditated, simultaneous way. A term which exists also as an act or an operation exists as the effect of another operation and, to the degree thus that an act of understanding occurs in a more perfect way, or to the degree that a term as an act proceeds or emanates more perfectly from a prior act (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 27, a. 1, ad 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 11, 1-6; *Verbum*, p. 207), to the same degree, an act cannot be too easily disjoined from its proper effect, object, or term which exists as another act or realization. Admittedly, a distinction can always be made between an act and a term, or an act as an operator and an act as a term, but the context is a union between two kinds of acts or operations which is all the closer and more intimate in acts of understanding which transcend the limitations of acts of understanding which belong to us as human beings. As Aquinas had argued:

...the intellect by the very act of understanding is made one with the object understood. Thus, as the divine intelligence is the very *supreme perfection* of God, the divine Word is of necessity perfectly one with the source whence He proceeds, without any kind of diversity. Italics mine.

The infinity or the unrestrictedness of divine understanding explains why act and term are perfectly joined in a way which blurs a clear distinction between the two and which also suggests that Trinitarian processions will not be properly understood if we persist in speaking about them in terms of cause and effect. The "infinite as knowable or intelligible is not distinct from the act of understanding whereby it is being understood." Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 16, a. 5, ad 2; Lonergan, *De Deo trino, II: Pars systematica*, p. 200, as cited by Serroul, p. 121. See also the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 34, a. 2, ad 4 which argues that a distinction can only be made on the basis of relation. As Aquinas had

identified with God's being or God's existence,<sup>46</sup> or, in other words, with God's being as an act of understanding.<sup>47</sup> Again, reiteratively, what is understood is the same as God's act of understanding and being which, in turn, is the same as God's mind or intellect.<sup>48</sup> Most crucially however, God is to be properly identified not so much in terms of form but as, ontologically, a pure generative act of understanding which subsists and exists on its own in a manner which does not require or suppose that it could be related to anything else. How effects relate to a cause differs from how a cause relates to an effect and if we speak about God's self-subsistence, we must speak about a self-subsistence which is utterly absolute. It cannot be relative in any way since, as other things emerge and relate to God and as they depend for Him for their own being and existence,<sup>49</sup> in no way does God depend on them for anything which could be possibly desired or needed.<sup>50</sup>

argued in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 11, 11, the simplicity or the lack of compositeness in divine understanding is such that the proceeding or conceptualizing of God's Word as a term of understanding is to be identified with God's existence as an unrestricted act of understanding. God's Word is "not only a perfect likeness of the divine essence" but, in its intellectual mode of existence, a perfect coincidence or unity exists between God's intellectual being and God's natural being (which is quite unlike our human experience of understanding that is not able to identify a created act of understanding with our created acts of existence). Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, eds. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 661.

41 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 47, 5; "God's being is God's understanding," my translation; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 3, a. 4; q. 14, a. 4: "The act of God's intellect is His substance." Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 54, aa. 1-2.

42 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 5.

43 Hebrews 4:13, as quoted by Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 5.

44 *De Malo*, q. 16, a. 3; Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 100.

45 Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 194. As Lonergan explains it, no other being is more perfectly conscious. No other being is more fully conscious or present to itself. Cf. p. 198. The perfection which exists in God's perfect self-understanding communicates or evinces the perfection of God's being.

46 *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 22, 1; 2, 52, 8-9; *Quaestiones de quodlibet*, 12, q. 5, a. 5, cited by *An Aquinas Reader*, ed. Mary T. Clark (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1972), pp. 72-73; *Compendium theologiae*, 1, cc. 10-11; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 3, aa. 4-5; q. 6, a. 3; q. 8, a. 1; q. 12, a. 6, ad 1; q. 13, a. 11; q. 14, a. 4; 1a2ae, q. 109, a. 6. See Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, pp. 121-122, for a metaphysical explanation on how Aquinas can proceed to the pure actuality of God from the received actuality of creatures. As Aquinas argues in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 22, 6, nothing which exists as a distinct thing can be equated with its act of existence (its own act of being or its own act of existence) since causes exist prior to effects. One comes after the other in a sequence which can be only transcended if we can talk about something which, in fact, exists whose nature is existence itself as a causality or act of being or existence which brings everything else into the condition of being and existence. Cf. *De ente et essentia*, 4, 7.

47 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 18, a. 3.

48 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 2; a. 4; q. 34, a. 1, ad 3. As Lonergan summarizes it in *Verbum*, p. 201: "There is no distinction between his essence and his existence or his intellect or his understanding."

49 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 18, 2; 2, 18, 4.

50 *De Anima*, a. 6, ad 2; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 3, a. 7; q. 6, a. 2, ad 1; q. 13, a. 7; q. 28, a.

In this context thus and as a second consideration, through an analogical inference which moves from ourselves toward God: the meaning of a simple form or essence as this exists with respect to God is so perfectly joined to the factuality, the actuality, and the reality of its existence that, as a consequence, we can possibly say and propose that the intelligibility which normally belongs to the meaning of a form or an essence is rightly subsumed or it participates in something which is both greater and different than itself when we begin to think in terms of the question of being as this refers to the reality of being or to the reality of a thing's existence (being or existence here as act of being or as a substantial, imparting act of existence which acts on other things to change the status of these other things).<sup>51</sup> Reason, understanding, intelligibility exist as more wonderful, awesome things or they can exist as more wonderful, awesome things if they also exist as things which are true or real to the degree that they belong to an actuality and an order of transcendence which transcends the transcendence which already belongs to the transcendence of intelligibility and understanding although, admittedly, in referring to the transcendence of existence and being, we are referring to a transcendence that we cannot so easily conceptualize or think about if, as our point of departure, we attend to how, as human beings, our acts of understanding exist as receptions of meaning and intelligibility.

To explain our point: in their actuation, they – our acts of understanding - succeed or they function by abstracting or by separating and subtracting a formal or an intelligible component or element from components or elements which have belonged to material conditions that we have been experiencing through our different acts of human sensing. If experiences of transcendence exist for us, at times, through our different acts of human sensing and the wonder which exists in this sensing, and if too, in seeking to understand the whatness and the why of different things, an experience of transcendence is also given to us which belongs to our experience of reason and intelligibility, nothing prevents us from also experiencing or attending to another but third kind of transcendence that we can inchoately know and sense if, now, our point of departure is a different kind of wonder and a different asking of questions where now, within the curiosity and notice of our expanding wonder and concern, we find that we are experiencing our cognitive limitations in a more radical way; we are sensing our cognitive inadequacy and yet a kind of potency in terms of an inadequacy which belongs to us in our questions as, now, we begin to ask about why anything exists at all for us either to sense, question, or understand (whether we should be referring to the data of our outer, external, extroverted experience of different things, or to the kind of given which exists within us within the introverted data of our inquiry, understanding, and judgment).

In a given case thus, we might rationally know that, yes, something exists. It does not exist as an illusion or as a mirage. Here is the evidence which points us, in our sensing and understanding, toward the truth of its factuality or toward the materiality or the givenness of its true, real existence. But, like it or not, we might never know about why, in fact, it exists in the first place (or why it happens to exist in the way that it does exist). How to explain existence as something which is entirely different and

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1, ad 3; q. 45, a. 3, ad 1.

<sup>51</sup>In *4 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 49, q. 3, a. 2 sol., cited by Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 131, n. 151. “What is ultimate and most perfect in anything is its operation.” The meaning of an act, operation, or activity is such that it transcends the meaning of any form or essence and so when a formal meaning is equated with a meaning which is the doing inherent in any act, operation, or activity, the meaning which is intrinsic to the meaning of an act or operation supplants and elevates the meaning which typically belongs to the generic meaning of a form or essence.

distinct? The existence of a thing is not the reason or the intelligibility of a thing. How to cope then with the givenness of our own being and existence? Alas, no answer, no understanding, appears to be ultimately sufficient or satisfactory since, if an adequate kind of understanding were to exist, it would seem to exist in a way that we cannot entirely fathom, grasp, or comprehend. To know that something exists is not to know ultimately why it exists. And so, reiteratively, as we experience ourselves and the contingency of both our beingness and our cognition, we are confronted by a general truth or principle which says about us (and others) that, again, “whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the receiver.”<sup>52</sup> Yes, we can grow in our knowledge of self. We are urged to engage in various forms of self-reflection which can add to the extent and degree of our self-understanding. Why do we do this and why do we do that? Why do we think this way or in this other way? However, to understand the factuality, the givenness, or the materiality of our both our existence and our understanding points to another form of inquiry which is not directed toward a greater understanding which would belong to a knowledge of orders and structures which would seem to exist within ourselves and within the being of other existing things. Reiteratively, the nature or the quiddity of a thing, as its reason or intelligibility, differs from the existence or the being of a given thing. Meaning is not being even if it is evocative and suggestive of the reality of being although, not so with God, if we think about God and how God exists in a way which radically differs from how everything else exists within our world. Nothing prevents us from equating God's form with God's being in terms of its act of being or the actuality of its existence.

To be a bit more specific and to speak in a way which is less misleading or possibly less incorrect as we try to speak about these difficult things, if form or intelligibility refer to the same thing, if appositely form and intelligibility exist as the same thing, then the being and the reality of a thing's existence (and so too the being and the reality of God's existence) is not to be equated with the experience and the being of intelligibility as this refers to any given thing (or to God) in terms that would be explicable for us in terms of an inhabiting form or a conceptualized essence (or, in other words, according to the principle of intelligibility as this would refer to or as this can be applied to God as the term of an unrestricted act of self-understanding). The reality of God's being, from the point of view of our conditioned cognitive perspective, is to be associated with something which surpasses or which transcends our sense and experience of intelligibility as, inherently, the term of an act of understanding knows about this or that explanatory reason and cause or this other explanatory reason or cause (or the order of an intelligible structure of parts or elements); hence, that which exists as the givenness or as the existence or presence of intelligibility as this would seem to exist within the being of things that we are currently experiencing, understanding, and knowing in the context of our currently existing world. Beyond our experience of understanding however, something else could be touching us in our awareness and consciousness of things. Something exists which is somehow other and different though we do not understand it: a something which does not deny or act against the rationality of our understanding and the apprehension which exists in our understanding. It does not contradict how our understanding exists or why our understanding exists as a distinct type of existing thing and how our understanding fits into a larger, general scheme of things that would encompass the being of all other existing things.

To reiterate the wording of a new question that comes to us and which we can ask of ourselves (sometimes rarely or sometimes frequently): why does anything exist at all? Why something, instead

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<sup>52</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 75, a. 5.

of nothing?<sup>53</sup> Why does understanding exist in the first place (despite what we might already understand and know about it) or why, ultimately, do we exist as sensing, understanding subjects although, admittedly, in terms of form or as intending a formal reply or response, we are asking a question for which an acceptable answer does not exist if, now, the desired, intellectual object is something which transcends our human acts of understanding. We find that we have no answer if we associate or define meaning in terms that are restricted to some kind of apprehensible, cognitive form where here, in all possible apprehensions of form, a type of answer exists which responds to questions that would ask about the what and why of different things where, possibly here, we are assuming that the whatness of things encompasses or that it corresponds to “the whole of [existing] reality,”<sup>54</sup> the whole of existing things as these things exist within our currently existing world. Simply put however, and as we find within a kind of dialectic which exists within our different acts of human questioning and experience and how one kind of question and answer, in its insufficiency, points to the good of asking other kinds of questions and answers, the reality of existing things is not to be equated or it is not to be correlated with the kind of knowledge and knowing which only knows about the intelligibility and the meaning of different things in terms of their inhering, structured orders of meaning and form. Much more is needed: a more which refers not to degrees or expansions of understood meaning but to some other kind of apprehension and the kind of familiarity which would exist if we should try to refer to this different kind of apprehension as a species of apprehension that does not belong to the kinds of apprehension which belong to the kind of understanding which typically exists within the arts and practice of philosophy and science.

In other words thus (as we further belabor our point), on the basis of a real distinction which exists among questions and an order which exists among our asking of different questions, a real distinction always exists between the principle and cause of form as meaning and intelligibility and the principle and cause of act as the act of a thing's being or as the act of a thing's existence; hence, in a way which must point to the mysteriousness and the strangeness of act as an instigated, instigating act of being or as the instigated, instigating act of a thing's real existence. Its incomprehensibility or its strangeness becomes increasingly obvious to us whenever we should begin to think about act in terms of being and existence and not about act in terms of some kind of form, meaning, and significance which exists for us, subjectively, as an actuation of our received understanding: as if here an act exists as some kind of property, predicate, quality, or attribute when we are tempted to take the principle of act and then convert it into some type of meaning or form (act of being becoming act of meaning). While, yes, on the one hand, it is not incorrect to speak about God in terms of reason and intelligibility if, indeed truly, God exists as an unrestricted act of understanding and if the term of this understanding is God as God exists in Himself in His unrestricted intelligibility, on the other hand however: if in fact, as Aquinas argues and notes, a first real distinction exists between the principle of form and the principle of act (the meaning of a thing is not necessarily the existence of a given thing: its truth or its reality), and if a second real distinction also exists between how our conditioned acts of being and existence exist within our contingently existing world and how God exists as the origin and source of all acts of being and existence, then, necessarily, the mysteriousness which belongs to the acts of being which we enjoy and know about from within our world of conditioned things (through the limited kind of inquiry which belongs to our affirmative acts of reflective understanding) – this same mysteriousness is surpassed and

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<sup>53</sup>Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 318, citing Leibniz.

<sup>54</sup>Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), p. 67; pp. 162-164, quoting Aquinas.

it is transcended by a greater or a more puzzling, pervasive kind of mysteriousness which alone belongs to God as the source and origin of all existence in terms of the strangeness and the bite of God's own existence from which the existence of all other things comes.

For added emphasis and for purposes of attending to the good which exists in our self-reflection, compare here the mysteriousness or the inexplicability of our own personal being and reality (our individual, personal existence) with the mysteriousness and the inexplicability of something which could be other and greater than ourselves (something which we can try to conceive of as something which would be greater than ourselves but which we cannot imagine or adequately grasp and understand). Our thinking and words soon fail us. If our being or if the being of other things exists always as some kind of effect or product, how are we to think about origins and the principle of causality in a way which acknowledges that these do not exist as some kind of effect? At some point, as we have been indicating, we exhaust our understanding of things when we find that, inevitably, nothing more can be said in terms of the why and the what of different things. Our thinking and concepts rapidly lose the coherence which, ideally, they should have as they now fall into a form of inappropriateness and a form of irrelevance when, for us now, within our experience of things and self in our world, an experience and a sense of unrestrictedness becomes or falls into our experience in a datum that we can enjoy and yet not properly ever understand and know about through our possible understanding of it: through how, allegedly, we can apprehend some kind of inner form or some kind of intelligible, inner structure that seems to exist within the being of things (within also the apprehension and the grasping of our inquiring understanding; hence also, within the identity which exists within us or which exists between us as subjects of a given act of understanding and that which exists as the term of our understanding as we try to move from ourselves and from the givens to our sensing experience through our acts of inquiry and questioning toward something which would be other than ourselves and which could be greater than ourselves with respect to the kind of being which we happen to have as a union of body and soul and the kind of consciousness which we happen to have within our acts of being, understanding, and willing). Growth in the extent of our understanding or, in other words, growth in our experience of self-transcendence leads us and, at the same time, it also promotes us toward or into an order of transcendence as, now, this greater transcendence exists in its own right as an active, directive principle or, in other words, toward an experience of understanding which shades and moves into experiences of mystery and transcendence that are not to be identified with defects, omissions, or privations of any kind if, here, we should think about the many problems and difficulties which exist for us when, within the course of our lives, we encounter irrational conditions and circumstances and the strange kind of unreality which exists whenever irrationality emerges as an absence or as a deprivation of reason which, as a vacuum and void, conditions forms of behavior, misgovernment, and maladjustment that act upon us with respect to how we might think or respond to any given situation as a situation is encountered within the context of our existing world. If irrational conditions can be countered by introducing orders of meaning, intelligibility, and form, can these conditions, can some of these conditions be countered, changed, or corrected in a better way if their being and context is brought into a species or a kind of transcendence that is transcendent of anything which exists in terms of meaning, form, or intelligibility? Do we become more free, do we encounter



options that we had not had possible if we think about the question of being and the novelty of being and less about questions that ask about the aptness or the relevance of form, meaning, or intelligibility?

In conclusion then, God's unrestricted meaningfulness or God's unrestricted intelligibility accordingly presents itself to us not only as a special kind of meaning but also as a special kind of existence since it exists or it can be defined as an act or as an operation which exists as the pure actuality of being. Nothing other more fully exists because, in its being, it exists as itself the cause of being. In God, reiteratively, nothing potential exists (whether we think in terms of knowing or in terms of willing). No other being possesses more reality or more existence as the pure act of being. Reiteratively, no other being exists more fully in a condition of act.<sup>55</sup> And so, as a consequence, no other being possesses more power (or more omnipotence), or is more able to do things or bring other things into being and act that would otherwise not emerge and exist.<sup>56</sup> For instance, no other being is able to exercise the mercy and forbearance that God alone exercises and implements and which no created being is able to exercise and implement.<sup>57</sup> As unrestrictedly the act of being or the act of existence, again reiteratively, we speak about God's infinity: God as infinite being or infinite existence or God as the infinite act of being or the infinite act of existence. No other being exists as a more perfect principle of activity, as a more perfect efficient cause, since the power of a being (in terms of what it can do and effect) grows to the degree that its basis is an existence which is itself more fully and completely within a condition of act.<sup>58</sup> The more fully something exists in act, the more fully it can exist as a principle of activity from which all else comes and proceeds.<sup>59</sup> To understand the singular infinity of God's power is to notice how it is grounded in a uniquely existing infinite act of understanding and willing which defines God and which exists as God who understands, knows, and does all things to the degree that, within things, intelligibility and goodness exists. Again reiteratively or in another way of speaking, God's power and God's wisdom both refer to the same reality.<sup>60</sup> "God's wisdom covers the whole range of God's power."<sup>61</sup> God's power is not greater than God's wisdom.<sup>62</sup> It does not extend beyond it. Only of God, for instance, can it be said that He is really and truly wise.<sup>63</sup>

Hence, if we are to understand the meaning and the being of every other kind of thing, we must work for an understanding that works from the unlimited meaning and being which belongs only to God alone or which exists as God alone as both the source of activity and its primary subject. All other meanings and all other beings and whether we refer to possibly existing beings or really existing beings – these all exist only to the degree that they receive their meaning and being from a divinely functioning actuality or a divinely functioning operation which exists as itself the measure of unrestricted meaning and being as this exists in the life of God or as it exists as the life of God. God's natural being, as a being which belongs to a thing as it exists within a given order of nature (as *esse*

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<sup>55</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 25, a. 1.

<sup>56</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 3a, q. 13, a. 1.

<sup>57</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 25, a. 3, ad 3.

<sup>58</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 25, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>59</sup>Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 134, n. 64.

<sup>60</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 25, a. 5, ad 1.

<sup>61</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 25, a. 5, my translation.

<sup>62</sup>Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 651-653.

<sup>63</sup>*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 1, 3, 64; Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P., "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Biblical Wisdom Tradition," *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 593.

*naturale*) does not differ from God's intelligible being (as *esse intelligibile*) if, as we have been noting, God's being or *ens* is the same as God's act of understanding.<sup>64</sup> In a context which is defined by the simplicity of God's act of understanding, God's personhood or subjectivity cannot to be properly distinguished from the objectivity of any of his properties or attributes.<sup>65</sup> Every divine attribute exists in a way which fully includes every other attribute<sup>66</sup> although, if we are to distance ourselves from temptations that would want to have us speak about God in terms of some kind of form or essence, we best protect ourselves from misleading ways of thinking and understanding if we should take God's intelligibility or essence and then try to understand it from within a context which emphasizes how God exists more primarily as act or as the subject of being and existence: conferring or creating the being of all things (whether these are merely possible or, on the other hand, truly real and actual). Something which can possibly exist exists with an intelligibility which, in itself, truly exists (it exists as an intelligibility) although however, as an ideality, this same thing which possibly exists might not ever emerge or exist with an existence that can be said to be true or real since the reality of a form is not exhaustive of the being of really existing things. Mysteriously, God exists in a way which is transcendent of how we are to think and experience the meaning of intelligibility and how we experience intelligibility within ourselves within our different acts of human understanding.

Thirdly now, if God is the pure act or activity of being or existence where God uniquely exists as being *per se* and not as being *by participation* (God's form or essence being its existence as the act of being or as the act of existence), it follows from this that being or existence exists as a common or as a most general effect and that, as the basis or the foundation of all other effects, it exists as the proper effect of God's being or actuality. God's proper effect, as coming from God as the supreme universal cause of all things, is *per se* the condition of being or the condition of instantiation and existence.<sup>67</sup> Hence, not only can God communicate being in a way which brings other beings into existence in a manner which creates time<sup>68</sup> but, at the same time too, in an ongoing constant way which exists within and outside of time,<sup>69</sup> as pure act, God also sustains the ongoing life of beings once they have been brought into their own condition of being and existence.<sup>70</sup> In God as the pure operative act of being or existence, no other attribute is of greater importance or value since, of all attributes, being or existence is most fundamental. It is the ground and presupposition of every other kind of predication. Without it, it would be impossible for anyone to think about anything, sense anything, or say anything about anything.

From an emphasis which accordingly attends to God more in terms of act of being instead of an act of understanding and intelligibility, for all these reasons, existence or being can be more easily regarded and it should be regarded as, in fact, the "most perfect of all things."<sup>71</sup> Most simply put: "being [or

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64 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 47, 5. See also Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 203.

65 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 3, a. 7; q. 13, a. 5; a. 12. In traditional metaphysical language, substance is not to be distinguished from accident nor accident from substance.

66 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 20, a. 3.

67 *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 6, 3, 1209; *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 2. See also *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 65, a. 3; 1a2ae, q. 66, a. 5, ad 4.

68 *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 17.

69 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 104, a. 1, ad 4.

70 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 8, a. 1; q. 9, a. 2. See also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 94, 9.

71 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. See also *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9: "being is the actuality of every act and because of this it is the perfection of every perfection," as cited by Jean-

existence] is the actuality of all things and also of the forms themselves.”<sup>72</sup> As an act which can be received, it is “that which makes every form or nature actual.”<sup>73</sup> Nothing exists without its sharing in the being or the existence which only belongs to God in an unrestricted way who, as spirit and as the very act and cause of being, is able to exist as an act of understanding and being immediately and most intimately within the being of all created things<sup>74</sup> because of the unrestrictedness which properly belongs to the all pervasive quality of God’s spirit that is able to exist in all things as a principle of order and being which can join all things into a relation which works for the coming to be of every thing which can and does exist.<sup>75</sup> And so, as a consequence of all this, all other things exist only to the degree that, in some way, they continually participate or live within God’s pure act of being or existence,<sup>76</sup> God’s pure act of being being the same thing as God’s essence (as we have been often

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Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Volume 2 Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p. 68, n. 37.

<sup>72</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3, my translation.

<sup>73</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 3, a. 4; 1, p. 17; q. 5, a. 1; cf. q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>74</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 8, a. 1; q. 8, a. 3, ad 1; *Lectura Super Ioannem* 1, lect. 5, n. 134, cited by Torrell, *Aquinas, Vol. 2*, p. 70, n. 46. While, in the realm of created things, a created thing makes itself present to other created things by acts which differ from their essence as a union of form and matter, in God’s self-manifestation, as an uncreated thing, God manifests Himself within the life of created things not by means of any act which mediates God’s presence to another and which differs from who God is in terms of His form or essence. With God, no act mediates who God is as a being since God’s essence and God’s actuality (or God’s operation) cannot be properly distinguished from each other. God’s act of being directly and immediately relates Himself to everything else which exists. As Aquinas so clearly states his position in the *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 9, ad 4 (as quoted and translated by Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 135, n. 67):

God however does not act through a mediating action which is understood as proceeding from God and terminating in a creature. But his action is his substance, and whatever is in it is altogether outside the genus of created being through which the creature is referred to God.

In creating, in a most immanent way, God reveals Himself as wholly transcendent. Cf. D. Braine, *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 23, p. 24, and p. 349, as cited by Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 138, n. 71.

<sup>75</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 8, a. 1, ad 2 & 3; a. 2; a. 3. If it can be reasonably argued that angels move from one place to another in an instantaneous way, simply or “merely by thinking,” since angels exist only as purely intellectual beings, in the same way, through the unrestrictedness of divine understanding, God exists immediately within all things. The immediacy of God’s presence is best understood if we attend to how, in thought and understanding, we can be immediately related to a wide variety of things that are separated by space and time from each other and from the being of a potential knower. As Francis Selman, *Aspects of Aquinas* (Dublin: Veritas, 2005), quotes Shakespeare, p. 90, Sonnet 44, as a point of illustration:

For nimble thought can jump both sea and land,  
As soon as think the place where he would be.

<sup>76</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 28, 3; *Quaestiones de quodlibet*, 12, q. 5, a. 5, cited by *Aquinas*

noting).<sup>77</sup> “No creature exists as its own existence; no creature is its own existence.”<sup>78</sup> The possession of being, as a reality which has been communicated and given (and which exists as a created act), is to be always distinguished from the pure, uncreated act of being itself which exists as God and which immediately exists within all things as the principle and source and cause of all subsequent, later acts of being.<sup>79</sup> As the pure act or activity of being or existence,<sup>80</sup> God always functions and exists as the source of all being<sup>81</sup> because only He possesses a power of self-determination which is to be equated with the “whole power of being [or the whole power of existence].”<sup>82</sup>

In the same vein too and if we attempt to explain how the potency of our understanding can be turned into the the actuality of our understanding, all things understand (to the degree that they understand), only to the degree that they receive or participate in the uncreated light which exists as the uncreated activity of God’s divine understanding as pure act, God being the cause of both truth and being in having both the most truth and the most being.<sup>83</sup> Hence, God is to be identified with truth or reality as it exists in itself<sup>84</sup> since, as we have been noting, God’s existence as a disembodied, disincarnate form which is to be equated with an unrestricted act of understanding precludes the possibility or need for any kind of existence which must exist or rely in anything else.<sup>85</sup> Since, in addition too, knowing, as an experience and as an activity, is principally found in a knower, and since loving, as an experience and activity, principally exists in a lover, for this reason, we can properly argue about God and the being of things that “things exist more truly in God than God exists in things.”<sup>86</sup> An intimacy and an immediacy exists in God which does not belong to ourselves if God is perennially closer to us than we are to Him. In other words: our intimacy is not God's intimacy.

Hence, as we work with more traditional language in our citation of this or that concept, in God's understanding and being, God exists as a totally self-subsistent being, as pure act or pure being (as *esse tantum*), or as being itself (as *ipsum esse subsistens*). Unlike every other being (beings which belong to the created order of things by virtue of a participation in the act of God’s being), God is not known and God cannot be properly known through the principle of any form, nature, or quiddity that can be understood and then applied as some kind of classification or genus which includes God<sup>87</sup> but only

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*Reader*, pp. 72-73; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 4, a. 3; q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>77</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 8, a. 3.

<sup>78</sup>*Quaestiones de quodlibet*, 2, q. 2, a. 1, my translation.

<sup>79</sup>*Commentary on Boethius’s Goodness of Substances*, 1, 2, cited by *Aquinas Reader*, p. 51; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 8, a. 3. See also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 52, 2; and D. Braine, *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God*, p. 20, as cited by Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, p. 135, n. 67.

<sup>80</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 43, 6; *Quaestiones de quodlibet*, 2, q. 2, a. 1.

<sup>81</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 44, a. 1.

<sup>82</sup>*Super Librum De causis*, prop. 9; pp. 70-72; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 28, 2. Cf. *De Ente et Essentia*, 4, 7.

<sup>83</sup>*On Separated Substances*, c. 3, cited by *Aquinas Reader*, p. 71.

<sup>84</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 16, a. 5.

<sup>85</sup>*In 1 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 2; *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 5.

<sup>86</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 8, a. 3, ad 3, my translation.

<sup>87</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 14, 2-3; 1, 25, 5; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 3, a. 5; q. 12, a. 1, ad 3. See also *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 3, as cited by Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, p. 80, n. 50; also Torrell, *Aquinas Volume 2*, pp. 34-39. Hence, as Aquinas argues in the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 13, a. 11, the divine name that was revealed to Moses in the Old Testament, God as “He Who Is” or as “He

through the principle of act in terms of how God exists as His own being or existence who can then confer being or existence on other things. God and creation do not possess the same intelligibility; they do not belong to the same order of reality.<sup>88</sup> While God is not completely unknown, He can only be known by us as a known unknown.<sup>89</sup> Or, to say it in another way, God is not *something* (an essence) which happens to be fully in a condition of act: God is not a being nor a thing that is like other beings or things; God is not a substance.<sup>90</sup> God is not a supreme being nor a supreme thing but, instead, God exists as act “pure and simple.”<sup>91</sup> God exists as an extrinsic, transcendent act which is unlike any act which can be done by a created being. Instead of merely *having* existence, reiteratively, God *is* existence.<sup>92</sup> As we have been noting, being *by participation* is always to be sharply distinguished from simple being (being *per se*), or being *by nature or essence* which only belongs to God as a being whose essence is simply to be or to exist (in contrast to the essence of every other being whose essence is not to be but to receive or to participate in the act of being or in the act of existence in some kind of limited way).<sup>93</sup> From a divine perspective, and as we have been noting all along, who or what God is in terms of form or essence necessarily implies the actuality or factuality of his existence. From this perspective, God’s existence is self-evident (it would exist as a kind of tautology: true by definition) although the contrary is the case for us, from the context of our human perspective, since God’s essence or nature is such that it cannot be fully understood by us through our own created acts of understanding in a way which immediately leads to an affirmation of truth that touches on the reality of a thing’s existence.<sup>94</sup> Hence, in contrast with us and any form of created, participatory understanding which moves toward an imperfect knowledge of all of being through some form of analogical

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Who Exists” (*Qui est*) applies most properly to God better than any other name since it does not refer to any form but to existence itself (*ipsum esse*): as the act or being of existence. Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 22, 10; Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 62-63.

88Michael A. Hoonhout, “Grounding Providence in the Theology of the Creator: The Exemplarity of Thomas Aquinas,” *Heythrop Journal: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 43 no. 1 (January 2002): 5, n. 19, citing the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 13, a. 7.

89Torrell, *Aquinas Vol. 2*, p. 38, citing in n. 35 the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 39, 1 which admits that an inquiry that adds negations leads to a real knowledge of God, a knowledge of God who is distinct from every other kind of being and who, as a being, “remains unknown.” From our viewpoint, God exists as a known unknown. Cf. *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1, as cited by Torrell, p. 42, n. 47.

90*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 25, 9-10; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 3, a. 5, ad 1.

91Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Change?: the Word's becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, Massachusetts: St. Bede's Publications, 1985), p. 78; p. 80.

92Wright, “Divine Knowledge,” 451. Hence, as Wright argues, God’s existence is not merely factual since it is “supreme activity, knowing, loving, freely creating.”

93Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 149.

94*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1: "A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as 'Man is an animal,' for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; [...] Therefore I say that this proposition, 'God exists,' of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence as will be hereafter shown (Q[3], A[4]). Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature---namely, by effects."

supposition and analysis, the uncreated, simple understanding of God knows all things through a self-understanding that is to be equated with the form or the essence of who God is (despite what we do not know about the form or the essence of how God exists: who He happens to be).<sup>95</sup>

Fourthly, since what is understood in God's act of understanding is the same as God's act of understanding and since God's being is God's act of understanding, God's understanding is engaged essentially in self-understanding or self-knowledge,<sup>96</sup> there being nothing else to understand or know, although God's self-knowledge possesses a form of self-knowledge which contains a knowledge of all other things: whatever God has brought into being and whatever He can also bring into being.<sup>97</sup> To recall how God's knowing exists as God's willing, "God knows Himself with the same knowledge with which he knows what he makes."<sup>98</sup> Hence, "God comprehends in Himself the whole perfection of being"<sup>99</sup> in a manner which reveals the perfection or the absoluteness of God's self-understanding since, in contrast with ourselves, only God understands himself perfectly and absolutely.<sup>100</sup> "The things that are of God no man knoweth, but the spirit of God."<sup>101</sup> From God's perfect self-understanding comes God's perfect self-movement from which can be deduced a perfect type of causality.<sup>102</sup> If the primary object is God's self-understanding (who and what God is and what he is able to do), the secondary object refers to all that God knows in terms of the ideas or forms of possible beings which can be brought into existence.<sup>103</sup> Everything is known through its proper form although these different

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<sup>95</sup>*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 11, 2615.

<sup>96</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 48; *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 12, 11, 2613; 2617; 2620; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 2.

<sup>97</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 5, ad 2; ad 3; a. 9; a. 13. See also *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 34, a. 1, ad 3; Lonergan, *Verbum*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>98</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 1, a. 4, as cited by Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 54, n. 61.

<sup>99</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 11, a. 3.

<sup>100</sup>*In 1 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 22, q. 1, a. 1, as cited by Torrell, *Aquinas Vol. 2*, p. 27, n. 8; *Lectura super Ioannem* 1, 18, lect. 11, nn. 208-21, as cited also by Torrell, *Aquinas Vol. 2*, p. 51, n. 69. Hence, as Aquinas argues in the *In 1 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 22, q. 1, a. 1, God's perfect self-understanding explains why there can be the perfect generation of a Word whose perfection is coequal with the kind of perfection that is enjoyed by God's perfect act of self-understanding which is to be correlated with the fact of God's existence. The Son's nature as Word is identical with the Father's nature as Speaker even as God the Father is to be understood here as the point of origin or principle of generation. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 93, a. 6. As Lonergan gives a meaning for generation (*Triune God: Systematics*, p. 191): "taken strictly, generation is usually defined as the origin of something alive from a conjoined living principle, with a resulting likeness in nature."

<sup>101</sup>Corinthians 2:11 as quoted by Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 2.

<sup>102</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 18, a. 3, ad 1.

<sup>103</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 49; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 1. See also q. 4, a. 2; q. 14, a. 5; q. 19, a. 6, ad 2. Cf. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 633: "the primary object of the divine intellect is 'the universal principle and active power of all being,' that is, 'Being itself' (*ipsum esse*); its secondary object is everything to which the divine power extends." See also the *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 4 where Aquinas argues that, as an understanding of something moves toward some kind of inner word or conclusion, it does not always express all that has been understood in a prior act of understanding. As Aquinas explains in the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 2, God knows all the many

proper forms all derive from God's own self-understanding whose form functions as a first form, as the exemplary form or model for all things which all things, by their actions, try to imitate in some way to the degree that each thing comes from God.<sup>104</sup> God's self-understanding and self-knowledge is such that it includes understanding and knowing all which exists that is other or which is outside of God.<sup>105</sup> As an example that we can refer to, as human beings, we participate in God. We participate in God's eternal law through our acts of understanding and, as acts of understanding, these acts of understanding imitate, reflect, and participate in the understanding which alone belongs to God's uncreated intellect and which derives from God's uncreated intellect.<sup>106</sup> In and through God's being as understanding and also as willing, God determines the forms which all things *ad extra* should have.

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ideas of actual and possible things. His divine wisdom "comprehends absolutely all that God's power can do." Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 25, a. 5, as cited by Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 673. God knows the ideas of things which He can bring into existence because His understanding directly grasps a meaning or significance which specifies an order of relations which, in turn, specifies a universal good of order that understands and knows how all things relate to each other and how all things can and should be related to each other. An understanding and knowledge of all parts is contained within a simple understanding that understands and knows a whole. In this way, we can say that a multitude of things *virtually exists* within the knowledge which God has of himself. Cf. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 633. The ideas or species of things are not known in themselves through themselves but through a divine self-understanding which directly grasps the meaning of its own nature or form through which everything else is understood in terms of how all things are related to each other and to God in an order that touches and encompasses all things. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 5; q. 15, a. 2; q. 15, a. 2, ad 2 & ad 3. "God by one understands many things." Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 2. No aspect is not understood in all its concreteness and particularity. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 6.

In *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 20-21, J. Michael Stebbins explains how Aquinas is able to reconcile the "simplicity of divine understanding with the multiplicity of what divine understanding understands." He argues that Aquinas employs an analogy that is grounded in how human beings understand things in a properly human way. With respect, for instance, to how the human soul is understood, the following long quotation is taken from Lonergan's analysis in *Verbum*, pp. 202-203:

With regard to our knowledge, distinguish (1) the thing with its virtualities, (2) the act of understanding with its primary and its secondary objects, (3) the expression of both primary and secondary objects in inner words. For example, the human soul formally is an intellectual soul, subsistent, immortal; it is not formally a sensitive soul nor a vegetative soul; but virtually it does possess the perfection without the imperfection of sensitive and vegetative souls. When, however, we understand the human soul, we understand as primary object an intellectual soul and as secondary object the sensitive and the vegetative soul; both objects are understood formally and actually, but the secondary object is understood in the primary and in virtue of understanding the primary. Further, once understanding of

To understand the comprehensiveness of this self-understanding, an apt analogy is the fact that, as any form which is understood in knowing brings an assemblage of different things into an intelligible unity, in the same way, in God's self-understanding, God understands how He is the source of all meaning as both a principle of order and as the principle of order. In apprehending an idea, in apprehending an idea which is the idea of a whole and so here the idea of a universal order (*idea ordinis universi*),<sup>107</sup> all constituent parts are grasped and understood. Hence, it can be properly argued that "it is not repugnant of the simplicity of the divine mind that it understands many things."<sup>108</sup> It is also not repugnant to the divine understanding that it understands the most minor things which have their own roles to play in the order of meaning which God knows and intends.<sup>109</sup> Everything is immediately and directly understood to the degree that it possesses any kind of meaning. Since the first object of every intellect

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the human soul has developed, there are not two acts of understanding but one, which primarily is of intellectual soul and secondarily, in the perfection of intellectual soul, is of the sensitive and vegetative souls. Finally our one act of understanding expresses itself in many inner words, in which are defined intellectual, sensitive, and vegetative souls and the relations between them.

104 *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 21, 2; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 44, a. 3. As William E. Murnion argues in his "Intellectual Honesty in Aquinas and Lonergan," (paper presented at the Third International Lonergan Workshop, Erbacher Hof, Mainz, Germany, January 2-7, 2007), p. 9, citing the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 44, a. 3; q. 93, a. 1; q. 93, aa. 4-8, and 1a2ae Prologue, the interrelation between God as exemplary form and first cause of all things and us as human beings who are made in God's likeness and image, serves as a "pivot between creation and redemption." As God's wisdom providentially orders all things in the universe to their end, in the created order of things, the human mind comes lastly. It emerges at a later stage in the order of creation and everything that has been created up to that point serves toward the emergence and the actuation of our human understanding. However, in the order of redemption, we begin with our human understanding whose form or nature reflects the form or nature of divine understanding, God's image existing in a human being only with respect to the existence of the human mind. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 93, a. 6; Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 611. No better analogy exists for moving toward an understanding of God's nature and existence as an unrestricted act of understanding. As Aquinas argues in the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 93, a. 4, man is most like God and closest to God by way and by means of his intellectual nature (even if it is a created intellectual nature and even as it operates in a limited, created way). The self-understanding and self-reflection that a human being engages in, and which a human being is able to do, best moves a person toward an understanding of God, God's existence as an unrestricted act of understanding, and this happens because of an analogical insight or analogical act of understanding which realizes that divine understanding is constituted by *self-understanding*. If human self-understanding presents itself as the hardest, highest, and most sophisticated form of understanding that it is possible for us as human beings to engage in and to possess, this self-understanding implies that, as a result, divine understanding is to be understood essentially as something that is constituted by divine self-understanding. Quoting Rhonheimer's translation of relevant text taken from the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 93, a. 4 (*Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 238): "the intelligent creature imitates God *above all* in respect to the self-knowing and loving of God Himself." Human knowledge of self best leads to knowledge of God. In human understanding, a natural desire already exists for knowing and loving God although this desire can be only imperfectly realized by created acts of human understanding which operate within a created order of things although this same understanding can be perfectly realized through a later



*qua* intellect is being or truth in all its completeness (in other words, being or truth as a species of universal) and the second object is but some particular, special truth, in the same way and in its simplicity, the divine understanding immediately moves from its knowledge of self to its knowledge of other things which the same intellect knows.<sup>110</sup> A logical priority belongs to God's self-understanding since, in speaking of things which are transcendent of space and time, we cannot speak about the relevance of a kind of priority which would exist in terms that are denominative of categories which belong the kind of order which exists within determinations of space and time.

In conclusion, the reality of God's transcendence precludes our possibly having any kind of knowledge that is to be associated with the kind of good which exists whenever we refer to the truth of real

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reception which occurs in grace (the gift of God's grace) and in a life of glory which (after death) brings all things to their proper completion. Cf. Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 254, n. 12; p. 264.

Created understanding moves toward God's uncreated understanding in an incremental manner because of the incremental character of our human understanding. The human understanding which has been created by divine understanding is respected by this same understanding (and it is never violated) as revealed divine laws succeed one another in an order of redemption which draws the restrictedness of our created understanding into a beatific communion with the unrestrictedness of God's divine self-understanding. In the image of God as this exists in our human nature and understanding, the revelation of an uncreated trinity in God in turn reveals an analogous but created differentiation in the processions of our human understanding. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 93, a. 6. As a result of self-understanding and from possible growths in our human self-understanding, a new way or opening is accordingly created for radical changes in our self-understanding which, in their way, best lead us toward full union with God. Union with God becomes far more likely through an interaction which occurs between growth in our self-understanding and knowledge and growth in our belief in the reality of a sacred Trinity.

105Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 467.

106*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 16, a. 1; 1a2ae, q. 93, a. 1, ad 3. As Aquinas notes in these texts, God's mind is the measure of all things and so, as the measure of all things, God exists as the measure of our human intellects in terms of its nature and in the actuality of its operations (its truth or reality). The form or nature of the human intellect exists within the divine mind as part of an all encompassing general understanding of things which refers to the reality of God's eternal law in a law which exists as the term of God's self-understanding. However, as is noted in 1a2ae, q. 93, a. 1, ad 3, the human intellect encounters truth or possesses reality to the degree that it also shares in or to the degree that it participates in the understanding which belongs to God's intellect. Aquinas's term is *imitatur*, imitates. As Rhonheimer expresses the general principle which he attributes to Aquinas and which we need to advert to (p. 245): "things 'are' exactly in the measure to which they 'imitate' the divine intellect." And so it follows, and as Rhonheimer argues:

Participation in the eternal law constitutes [both] the being and the operations of the creature. Every participation in the eternal law is both an existential and an operative participation in the dispositions of the divine wisdom.

Every creature, in its own way, is ordered (Rhonheimer, p. 246). It is ordered to a particular

distinctions. Our point of departure has been the reality of God's absolute simplicity and so, from within this context, we have been barred from moving toward affirmations that are able to talk about real distinctions as this would seem to exist within the life and being of God. Absolute simplicity, as a both a postulation and a conclusion, jars with the possible presence of any real differences or real distinctions that could be possibly found. On the other hand however, verbal differences or verbal distinctions can be said to exist. But, these only refer to linguistic differences as, in this time or other or in this other context, this word as a sensible expression is used to express this meaning or this truth and not some other word which could refer to the same thing. "Automobile" and "car" refer to the same thing as different words express the same meaning or they affirm or assert the same truth when something is said about the being of "x" in a way which says that it is as a car or, equivalently, an automobile.

However, when we refer to our mental or our conceptual distinctions which exist as the fruit of our thinking and understanding, our understanding about the meaning of divine things is something that can possibly grow and expand if we can grow in our knowledge of God in a way which depends, to some extent, on the extent of our attentiveness and our inventiveness. We think about the extent and the depth of our curiosity. What questions are we really asking? How can we be open to new acts of understanding that can be possibly given to us (whether we refer to direct acts of understanding, to inverse acts of understanding, or to analogical acts of understanding)? The fruitfulness of our understanding, as this is combined with the limitations of our understanding – together these lead us toward conclusions that derive from our speculative acts of understanding in a way which creates a larger, fuller human world. We begin, hopefully, with a point of departure that is especially fruitful and suggestive as it can possibly lead us toward an alignment and a combination of many qualities that are known to cohere with each other if they can be grounded in something which exists as an absolute in God.

If we begin then with God as understanding (this is the traditional, preferred Thomist approach if our acts of willing exist in function of our acts of understanding), the more we know about how our understanding exists within ourselves, the more that we should be able to think, to understand, and to say certain things about God. More consequences should follow in terms of what we will begin to

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end by an ordering that accounts for a creaturely participation in the being of God's eternal law.

107 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 2.

108 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 2.

109 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 70. See also *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 22, a. 2, ad 1.

110 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 20, a. 1. In sharp contrast with our human understanding which requires reasoning as a precondition for the later reception of understanding and which works toward its self-understanding from an understanding of other things, and in contrast with angelic understanding which always simply receives its acts of understanding from a more perfect form of understanding and whose understanding of things always begins with the self-understanding which it has received, divine understanding begins from a form of self-understanding which is not received in any way. It exists as a form of self-understanding which is totally lacking in any form of potentiality and so it exists as a species of understanding that is always fully actual or complete. Never did it not exist and never will it not exist. Divine self-understanding cannot be improved upon in any way. It cannot be developed or grow from within itself since, as entirely actual and complete, it is an understanding which is final or exhaustive. It understands and knows all things whether these things exist or whether they exist in only a possible kind of way.

think about. Our acts of conceptualization bring the apprehensions which exists in our acts of understanding to an explicit form of awareness in our consciousness of self and world. Similarly however, if we choose to begin with God as willing and doing (which is said to exist as a later Scotist approach), the more that we know about the willing and doing which exists in ourselves or as ourselves, the more this willing should expand and become a kind of larger thing that can be identified with the reality of God's divine willing and being. If we should be thorough in what we are attempting and trying to do in our thinking and understanding, the understanding that we do, as our initial point of departure, should shift into our human acts of willing or it emerges as a part of our acts of willing as also, from the viewpoint of a second, alternative point of departure, our willing shifts into our understanding as it emerges in a way which points to how it exists as a part of our understanding. The dialectical unity which exists within ourselves (or, in fact, the problematic type of unity which exists within ourselves when we refer to our acts of understanding and willing exist together) – this unity is transcended and it can be surpassed if we can begin to think about the perfect type of oneness and unity which alone exists as the God of understanding and willing. Our efforts to move toward an understanding and knowledge of divine things reacts back on ourselves and it should return to us as it encourages and possibly leads us toward a better understanding of ourselves and possibly, too, a better form of willing and doing that should also come from us in how we go on to exist as believing, feeling, loving, human subjects.

A verification that we experience within ourselves accordingly points us to the truth of a traditional teaching which comes to us from the Church and which says that every little advance in our understanding of divine things (however partial and fragmentary is this understanding) is, yet, of enormous significance and possible value for us as human beings as we try to find our way within the context of our currently existing world.<sup>111</sup> We can be unexpectedly changed in some potentially radical, unknown ways even if we should only begin by trying to live within an orientation which is simply given to asking questions about who or what exists as the reality of God's existence. How we think about God increasingly reflects how we can begin to think and know ourselves and all the many things which God has made as also, at about the same time, how we think about ourselves reflects or reveals how we can begin to think and speak about God and the existence of higher things. Each assists the other. Our imperfect self-understanding and knowledge admittedly always exists as an incomplete type of thing. The same can be said too about our loving and willing: the loving and willing which belongs to the life of our human desires, passions, and appetites. Our understanding and willing both exist as realities that are both partially potential and partially actual. Both exist as gifts or endowments and yet both exist as tasks or as responsibilities. Our knowledge of God (and also our love of God) are never complete in the context of our present life and yet these exist within us as perfectible realities which, as known and as felt, move and summon us toward challenges which address us in terms of how our knowledge of God and our love of God can keep growing within us, at

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<sup>111</sup>First Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution concerning the Catholic Faith*, 4, 1796, on the “role of reason in teaching supernatural truth.” Quoting this text (the translation which is given): “reason illustrated by faith, when it zealously, piously, and soberly seeks, attains with the help of God some understanding of the mysteries, and that *a most profitable one*, not only from the analogy of those things which it knows naturally, but also from the analogy of those things which it knows naturally, but also from the connection of the mysteries among themselves and with the last end of God,” as cited by Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari from the Thirtieth Edition of Henry Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2007), p. 447. Italics mine.

least within the context of our current life. We can possibly begin to see the advantage of trying to move more circumspectly and yet more fully toward a knowledge and a love of divine things: a greater knowledge of God and a greater love for God, using the wits and interests that God has given to us. The more differentiated our understanding of human things, the more differentiated will be our understanding of divine things.