



Lawrence Dewan O.P. and Etienne Gilson: Reflections on Christian Philosophy's Continuing Relevance and Challenges

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Introduction

In the history of philosophy, several philosophers have attempted to reach for a more comprehensive and inclusive account of reality through metaphysical speculation. In recent years, this effort has been used in attempting to overcome the individualism of western liberalism. Another way of understanding this more recent effort of metaphysics is as an effort to reconnect the human person with the common good and through this with our final end as human beings. It often has been remarked in some quarters that it is the metaphysics of the medieval Christian tradition that has been philosophy's best example of such an overarching synthesis.¹

However, always accompanying such an assessment is the cautionary note that our metaphysical speculations tend to fall short in providing the definitive personal and social values required for action in our concrete situations. And they carry the further risk of thinkers becoming lost amidst disorienting abstractions.

¹ Leslie Armour, "Escaping Determinate Being: The Political Metaphysics of Jacques Maritain and Charles DeKonick" paper presented at the *Canadian Maritain Association Meeting*, Dominican University College, Ottawa (October 30, 2004). See also Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical Letter Of Pope Leo XIII: *On The Restoration Of Christian Philosophy According To The Mind Of St. Thomas Aquinas, The Angelic Doctor* in St. Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica* Vol.I QQ 1-119 (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1920, 1948, 1981) pp. ix-xviii. This encyclical which appears in full and serves as an introduction to this four volume text of St. Thomas also has special relevance for my ensuing discussion of Fr. Lawrence Dewan's and Etienne Gilson's Christian philosophies. This encyclical, I would argue, serves as one of, if not the most formative authoritative Church instruction for their respective projects.

Lawrence Dewan's Christian Philosophy and His Recurring Tribute To Gilson

It is a useful exercise to closely follow the well known contemporary Thomist, Fr. Lawrence Dewan in one of his last papers, and in perhaps one of his clearest efforts, to tell us through St. Thomas "what it is all about."² If we go quickly to the heart of Fr. Dewan's presentation, we must say simply that we as human beings are ordered to God. And to make the most of this ordering requires supernatural faith. We are in need of both divine revelation and the faith to receive it.

But then what does this have to do with philosophy? Fr. Dewan tells us, again through St. Thomas, that to answer this we must consider the dignity of human beings made in the image of God as agents and sources of events in the world. This situation of ours requires both a general philosophical treatment and a more particular theological treatment. It is here that we find St. Thomas is the exemplary teacher of humanity where he emphasizes the positive qualities of our behaviour as human agents that bring us into this intimate relationship with God's life.³

In this work we are directed and called beyond our human nature; for our human nature is subject to being elevated, to being raised up to higher levels of being. In this work we need to believe something beyond the products of our natural reason in order to come to our true well-being – to salvation.

Fr. Dewan tells us that St. Thomas speaks of Christ's role in elevating human life into an eternal and familial friendship with God. This is given particular treatment in *Summa Theologica* III which Thomas was unable to complete because of his own death.

Interestingly, Fr. Dewan at the end of his paper wants to provide a broader cultural and historical context for this concern for the human virtues and the elevation of the human person towards a divine friendship. And in attempting this he turns to Etienne Gilson, his teacher. Gilson always wants to consider the ideas that underlie our practices. Fr. Dewan tells how Gilson found underlying so many modern ideas "a universal will for annihilation".

Kenneth Schmitz has helped to clarify the precise meaning of this "annihilation" spoken of by Gilson in a much earlier version of Christian philosophy's encounter with modern thought and it's

² Fr. Lawrence Dewan O.P., *Thomas Aquinas, Wisdom, and Human Dignity: Philosophy and Beyond* (Houston, Texas: University of St. Thomas, Aquinas Lecture, October 2013).

³ According to Fr. Dewan, St. Thomas' exemplary achievement as a teacher of humanity is in his artful and skilful balancing of reason and faith, and thus of the philosophical and theological in an unsurpassable manner.

problematic.⁴ Schmitz himself is often engaged with thinkers such as Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida who are considering both “the death of God” and “the death of man”. What is intended by such jarring phrases is not the denial of man’s continued physical existence but rather the intellectual problem of the alleged failure of all prior philosophical attempts to recognize some stable human structure and purpose in human life. It is thus the alleged failures especially of the philosophies of human nature and natural law to establish this structure and purpose that is at issue. Thus, in so many respects, this “... will for annihilation” both reflects and aims at the overthrow of Catholic-Christian philosophy.

For Gilson writing in 1948 in a paper entitled *Intellectuals and Peace*, this will is rooted in the prideful pretence man has taken on himself to replace God as creator and ruler. The only antidote, according to Gilson, was for humankind to re-enter the natural order of divine creation and to return to the wisdom of Christ. In this account of “what it is all about” both Gilson and Fr. Dewan would be in firm agreement.

Gilson’s Contribution to Christian Philosophy and its Continuing Relevance

In Gilson’s own philosophy, we see an account of knowing based upon a common sense experience of sensible individuals some of which include a spiritual reality in their composition.⁵ In this he, like St. Thomas and Fr. Dewan, follows Aristotle for the most part. But Gilson believed Aristotle’s philosophy was transformed by Christian revelation. He saw this transformation having to do with the primacy of existential act and the return of essence to its proper ground in existential act. This for Gilson was the special insight of Christian philosophy best expressed among the medievals in the philosophy of St. Thomas and it became central to Gilson’s own philosophy.⁶ Much

⁴ Kenneth Schmitz, *The Texture of Being* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007) pp. 284-5. The modern problematic I’m referring to can be said simply to be “freedom” – and this “freedom” as a topic must lead one into a reflection on one’s own life and concrete circumstances and the decisions and choices made and to be made. Such reflection cannot be sustained meaningfully unless the practical and personal is seriously confronted. This then is freedom’s inexorable connection with the “concrete” in the modern problematic. ... and it is a very troublesome problematic for most academic thinkers and scholars and their penchant for abstract thought.

⁵ This overview of Gilson’s philosophy is guided by Kenneth Schmitz’s, *What Has Clio to Do with Athena? Etienne Gilson: Historian and Philosopher* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987) pp. 1-24.

⁶ For Gilson and other existential Thomists, the most relevant and readily available text that presents a sustained argument believed to support the existential reading of

of Gilson's own project becomes the development of this insight against the background of its absence in the thought of others which he characterized as various types of essentialism.

It is this distinction between essentialism and existentialism that will aide us in illuminating the differences between Fr. Dewan and Gilson. Kenneth Schmitz has suggested that Gilson's interpretation of modern and contemporary thinkers in terms of this distinction perhaps prevented him from fully appreciating these thinkers' efforts to understand human history's impact on metaphysics. As a consequence, Gilson has not been able to fully engage the problematic of contemporary philosophy as expressed in existentialism and hermeneutics.⁷ And yet to the extent that contemporary philosophy tries to move away from a distorting and disorienting type of abstraction, it has

St. Thomas is in his "On Being and Essence". See St. Thomas Aquinas, "On Being and Essence" in Timothy McDermott, ed., *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings* (Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 90-113. My own summary gloss based upon this text and most relevant for this crucial point in the debate is that -

Form marks out species within a genus and matter marks out individuals within a species. (2) The very form which an intellect is has potentiality for the existence it requires from God and the acquired existence actualizes it. (4) In created intellectual substances, essence is unlimited by matter from below but limited in its existence from above. The human mind receives its individuality in actualizing the body to which it is joined. This individuality does not perish upon decomposition but this very existence (as act) that is individuated by the body remains eternally individuated by being firstly made the form of this body. (5)

Substantial form has no existence of its own apart from the material upon which it supervenes so that the existence of the self-sufficient thing awaits composition of the two into something essentially one – an essence. (6)

Of equal importance in this text and highly relevant to this argument, is St. Thomas' distinction between real being and logic and how the logical entertainment of form gives us nothing concrete until there is the presence of existence, and how the logical concepts of our analysis of things are ultimately defied by the simplicity of this divine source of the existence in real things, to which the entire discourse is dedicated.

Logic gives us nothing essentially one (that is itself, that is its own and no other) and joining logically results in nothing to which the concept of genus or species can be strictly (concretely) applied. Clearly then, the essence is realized concretely in substances both composite and simple and in their incidental properties. It is also clear how logical concepts of generality arise in all except the first supremely simple Being whose simplicity defies categorization and definition and in whom may this discourse have its end and fulfillment. Amen! (6)

⁷ See Kenneth Schmitz's, *The Texture of Being* for an updated treatment both sympathetic and critical of Gilson's doctrine of being, See especially his papers "Enriching the Copula", "Created Receptivity and the Philosophy of the Concrete", and "The Solidarity of Personalism and the Metaphysics of Existential Act". In so many respects Schmitz has shown convincingly, in my view, the continuing relevance and significance of Gilson for contemporary thought especially for those thinkers who are trying to engage this thought out of a Christian background and formation.

much in common with Gilson's critique of essentialistic thinking that is forgetful and devaluing of the act of existence.

It is this commitment and orientation towards the concrete in Gilson's philosophy that can help us to see and appreciate the relevance of his concern for the question of existential act for contemporary thought and its problematic. Schmitz argues that this central feature of Gilson's thought can help give the genuinely historical concerns of modern philosophy the only metaphysics able to ground this concern in the worth it knows to be its own.

Fr. Dewan's Criticism and the Gilsonian Rejoinder

When Fr. Dewan criticizes Gilson it is always directed at Gilson's metaphysics and to his ontology in particular.⁸ According to Fr. Dewan, Gilson gives us two senses of being's act of existence – its act of substance and its act of existence. Gilson understands the cause of a substance to be different from the cause of its act of existence. Fr. Dewan has charged that such a distinction is a troublesome fiction for metaphysics. For Fr. Dewan, it is *form* that has primacy in metaphysics and there is an intimate kinship between form and the act of existence.⁹ But Gilson always pushes any metaphysical enquiry to ask what makes the individual subject to be a being? For him a thing is a real power, an energy, an act having two aspects: 1) the thing by itself and 2) the things actions.

⁸ In this excursus into deep ontology, I remain closer to Gilson's position than that of Fr. Dewan's; and yet I believe Fr. Dewan's position warrants a careful treatment, and I hope to show some basis for an interpretation of complementarity rather than conflict. Much of what follows is based upon Fr. Dewan's paper "Thomas Aquinas, Creation, and Two Historians" in *Laval Theologique et Philosophique*, Vol. 50, (1994) pp. 363-387. See also Fr. Dewan's *Form And Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

⁹ Fr. Dewan illustrates this intimacy between form and the act of existence in the example of the ordering of the letters T, C, A which in becoming ordered as "CAT", i.e. taking the form of "CAT", supposedly becomes almost identical with the existence of the word "CAT", i.e. almost identical with its act of existence. (See Fr. Dewan's discussion of this illustration in his paper "Form and Esse in Caused Things" in his *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006) pp. 188-204.) This argument is helpful for clarifying the meaning of his point, but I do not believe it to be supportive of what he wants to argue here regarding the role of the act of existence. One simply cannot say that the form is truly identical with the act of existence because of the problem of "CAT" then supposedly having to be identical with the word "ACT" in some manner, which simply is not the fact of the matter, but rather "ACT" being another formation of the letters T, C, A also has its own distinctive act of existence. So if we must retain the real distinction between existence and essence, being and form, it seems likely that Gilson's (and Maritain's) attribution of some degree of primacy to the act of existence over that of form may also have some sense to it metaphysically and ontologically and in truth is definitely more than a "troublesome fiction". This further has consequences for the relationship of "practice and theory" as well as "being and truth".

Aristotle, in Gilson's view, leaves the individual substance unknown in its depths. He always wants to ask what sort of being is it that reality is by virtue of its act? He believed strongly that avoidance of this deep question led to a forgetfulness of being, forgetfulness that a thing be real. This forgetfulness, according to Gilson, begins with both Plato and Aristotle.¹⁰ For Gilson, with such forgetfulness permeating western philosophy the "is" becomes reduced to "what" and so "is" recedes into the background and is forgotten.

Fr. Dewan, in contrast, has argued that the *whatness* of the thing is its very being. What then is most real in substance is that whereby it is in act. And it is *form* that is the act whereby substance is what it is. Existence for Fr. Dewan, if not reducible to, is always subordinate in some way to *form*. We thus know the form through the being to which it gives rise and we know the being through its definition.

But Gilson would persist in asking does not the form remain the same in all its individual instantiations? If so, what then of individuality? If being means "that a thing is" then individuals are and forms are not; if it means "what a thing is" then forms are and individuals are not.¹¹

¹⁰ Gilson resonated with aspects of Heidegger's critique of Western philosophy's forgetfulness of being. Lawrence Shook recounts in his biography of Gilson (Etienne Gilson (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984) p. 227) how Gilson was moved to tears by a Heidegger lecture which he attended at Harvard. This anecdotal note may provide a hermeneutical key for grasping the significance of this issue between Fr. Dewan and Gilson over the *primacy of form* (essence) versus the *primacy of existential act* (*esse*) in our sense of *being*. Gilson having begun his philosophical career with the study of Descartes before discovering the philosophical riches of the medievals and of St. Thomas in particular, had a pronounced sensitivity to and interest in the modern problematic and its efforts to reconcile the moderns' turn to the knowing subject with the ancients' concern for being as object. Heidegger, in Gilson's view was trying to recall something in philosophy's beginning that has been forgotten or eclipsed because of a preoccupation with, and dominance of something else. Because of certain leadings in Plato, philosophy has been concerned with the "*seeing of reason*" made possible by the "*light of truth*" ultimately best secured by theory for us as thinking beings. At its worst, this line of development has consummated in a type of one sided monological and objectifying philosophical thought and thus requires a strategic post-modern reaction to this development in philosophy. This conception of philosophy in its preoccupation with essences, it is argued, is too often forgetful of our existential situation and it is this distortion that leads to such a profound error in orientation and balance. It is an error because this "*light of truth*" presupposes and actually depends upon the "*openings or occasions*" of existence. There is no actual light without, what we might call the existential opening for its occurrence. We of course are speaking metaphorically but the relevance of the insight, I would strongly argue, can be tested in any careful phenomenological reflection upon our actual practice and experience. (See Martin Heidegger's essay "The End of Philosophy and The Task of Thinking" in David Krell ed., Martin Heidegger Basic Writings. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) pp. 373-392; See also Reiner Schurmann. *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles To Anarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) pp. 235-245 on the "practical *a priori*" in Heidegger.

¹¹ This dense summary of Gilson's position is based upon his treatment of the topic in his *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2002) see especially pp. 137-174; also see Gilson's classic discussion of the topic

Aristotle's concern according to Gilson, seems to be focused on individuation, that is – how form is predicated over many, and not so much on individuality, that is – how many individual beings are the same by virtue of their participation in the one essence or species. An adequate ontology has to distinguish between individuation and individuality, and thus even more deeply than a reflection on essence this requires that existence and our existential situation be brought into the discussion of actual being as much more than a “troublesome fiction”. This again, as Gilson repeatedly points out, is because as a subject of existence, I am not identical with my act of existing nor am I the source of my own existence.

Fr. Dewan carefully tries to avoid identifying being with essence, and so his ontology cannot be easily characterized as essentialist in any strict sense. However, to the extent Fr. Dewan supposes the many without explaining their actual existence, there remains a tendency towards essentialism to the degree he does not consider the cause of their existence seriously.¹² According to Fr. Dewan, things exist under

Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949) see especially his section on Aristotle pp. 40-51; 154-167.

¹² In elaborating upon the existential dimension of this problem of the one and the many in a way that remains relevant to our everyday experience, we have followed closely the arguments developed by Gerard Smith, who in our view has ably developed Gilson's Christian existentialism, in his *The Philosophy Of Being* (New York: MacMillan, 1961) especially his Chapter 4, pp. 56-79. If we are intent upon conducting a philosophical discussion of deeper metaphysical and ontological scope we must be prepared to consider how what we are saying applies inescapably to our own actual situations and lets say as discussion or seminar participants. The first fact is that there are several of us. There is a plurality of philosophers who each exist as human existents. To be an existent is to be one existent yet there are many existents – Leslie, Frank, Hugh, and Maxime. We all as individuals have the fact we are existents in common yet this commonness is not such as to cause Leslie, Frank, Hugh, and Maxime to be one. The status of being an existent clearly involves the enjoyment of one's identity. This is the unity of being and yet no one of us as existent so fully enjoys the status to the exclusion of the others' enjoyment. Thus Leslie, Frank, Hugh, and Maxime are a multiplicity. In this sense, being has the status of one and many as existents and we must confront the question why are there any existents at all? Frank or Maxime might argue that this is a fool's question – why should the fact of our situation of multiplicity and unity as beings raise such a question? But such a protest means one does not appreciate the significance of our situation metaphysically – that the status of being an existent is not the prerogative of the lot of us. There is nothing in the status of being “Frank” or “Maxime”, as an existent, that demands logically there be Leslie, Frank, Hugh, and Maxime. To say we have no need to explain there being more than one because to be an existent is simply to be more than one is to say in effect that the many is one. This is to assume a monistic ontology metaphysically. Yet we agree do we not, that our actual experience shows us that there are many of us? And so we must ask why are there many of us? If Frank were the only existent the question doesn't arise – he is the One or he is not, and if not, he would not be present to raise the question and if he was present he'd be content with being the One for to be an existent is to be himself. But we know this is not the situation for there is Leslie, Maxime, and Hugh who in our status as existents do not explain our multiplicity. Why are there many of us as existents? We see now that to be an existent there is no need that there be many of us. To be Leslie as existent there is no

the causal work of intelligent form and at times he has argued that any further enquiry into the matter as Gilson urges can be dismissed as unnecessarily troublesome and unjustified.

The central issue dividing Fr. Dewan and Gilson in their respective ontologies is just this question – why do many things exist rather than not? This for Gilson is the pivotal question for Christian philosophy that becomes the basis for speculations upon the whole order of things in the community of existents.¹³

An existentialist ontology assumes this knowledge of many existents is the only valid starting point for knowledge. Our knowledge then begins with the sensible, the singular, the actual, and the contingent. It is this knowledge that grounds our knowledge of essence, the intelligible, the universal, the possible, and the necessary. An existential ontology in Gilson's terms begins with the knowledge of being in this sense and it must find in that knowledge the explanation for knowing the other factors of being.

In contrast Fr. Dewan's ontology begins with the knowledge of essences and tries to introduce into this knowledge the knowledge of existence. He may be correct in saying that knowledge of being whose essence it is to exist is knowledge that such a being exists. However, because the connection between knowledge and being

need that there be Hugh, Frank, and Maxime. Yet there are many of us, why? The formal answer is that there are many existents - Leslie, Frank, Hugh, and Maxime because they are caused to be many existents by a cause that is able to do so. We now see that there are Leslie, Frank, Hugh, and Maxime and the reason cannot be because to be any one of us is to be many nor can it be that to be many existents is to be any one of us. Trying to explain the one and the many either way one's mind goes blank because the status of being an existent gets lost either way. The intelligibility of being a real existent requires we avoid thinking the one as many or the many as one and instead consider the many as caused.

As there is nothing in the status of number that demands it be actually odd or even, so too there is nothing in the status of being an existent that demands it be caused or uncaused. All that is required is that it exists. Causality is not the reason there is an existent. It is not necessarily a principle of being; it is only a principle of an existent that shows itself to be caused. Causality is a principle of caused being and that a being be caused must be shown just as the oddness or evenness of a number must be shown in this or that actual number. Thus Maxime's status of being an existent is also enjoyed individually by Leslie, Frank, and Hugh, no one of which is the other. This multiplicity of existents demands a cause as many. Because Leslie, Frank, Hugh, and Maxime all share in the status of being an existent, the intelligibility of this sharing or sameness as existents requires that one of us be the cause of the others, or that we must all be caused by another existent. This dependency in the contingency of our existence cannot go on to infinity so there must be a necessary being as the grounding cause of all of us dependent existents. There is plurality in Leslie, Frank, Hugh, and Maxime sharing in existence as existents because there is One above many as the cause of many. (Norris Clarke makes the same important point in his *Explorations In Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994), p. 94.).

¹³ For a cogent and penetrating discussion of the conflict between essentialism and existentialism, and the centrality of this question "why do many things exist rather than not?" for the tradition of Christian philosophy see Gerard Smith's, *Natural Theology* (New York: The MacMillan Co. 1951) pp. 11-35.

as the act of existence is not given the attention it warrants, what Fr. Dewan is able to establish, at least according to the Gilsonian view, is that such beings whose essence it is to exist can only be thought to exist.

Fr. Dewan has argued through Thomas that existence and individuation stand and fall together. Thomas' texts do not show that existence is the cause of individuation but that rather when a thing has *esse* it has it in something other than the quiddity itself.¹⁴ There is a subject which has *esse* and the essential nature. The idea in St. Thomas is not that *esse* as such is intrinsically individual and the cause of individuation. Fr. Dewan insists that it is God, not *esse* that is the cause of *esse* and this he argues in specific reference to the human soul. So here, perhaps finally, we come to the precise point of difference between these two Christian philosophers; and it is in their respective approaches to the understanding of God.

We can imagine Gilson's key point in responding to Fr. Dewan's insistence "that it is God, not *esse*, that is the cause of *esse*(in things)" would be that we must remember that ultimately God's intellect is his very essence and thus is identical with God's very existence and the knowledge God has of it.¹⁵ An idea in God is his own *esse*; and so it is indeed the divine *esse* that is the cause of *esse* (in things).

Conclusion

In upholding the continuing importance of Gilson's existential ontology, I have frequently recounted an experience from actual practice

¹⁴ See Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "The Individual as a Mode of Being" in *Form And Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006) pp. 237-238. At this point, it needs to be acknowledged that Fr. Dewan's Thomistic scholarship is simply formidable in its scope and precision. The issue in large part can be cast as one of scholarship - just what is the correct reading of Thomas's texts? I simply am not competent to wade into this aspect of the argument, but I will suggest that there is also the question of the philosophical merit of Gilson's position in itself, irrespective of whether Thomas meant what Gilson says he meant. And there is also the even more perplexing question of whether complex texts such as those we have of Aristotle and Thomas, can have in their depths, meanings and significance that the author himself may not have been fully aware of? Leo Sweeney, in his *Christian Philosophy: Greek, Medieval, Contemporary Reflections* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), see especially Ch. 19, gives a relatively exhaustive examination of the textual evidence of Thomas' position regarding existence and essence in the doctrine of being. In my reading of Sweeney, I conclude that the issue remains a complex matter of scholarly exegesis, and so retains a sufficient element of ambiguity for one to conclude that at a minimum Gilson's position is not a troublesome fiction and remains of continuing relevance for Christian philosophy and philosophy more generally.

¹⁵ This imaginatively constructed response is based upon arguments found in Etienne Gilson's, "Being and Essences" in his *Christian Philosophy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1993) pp. 101-119.

to which most people can relate. Often health and/or social service professionals can meet to discuss the “form” of a person where they speak about the person’s “case and file” in the absence of the person. But there is a profound difference that is experienced when the actual person is included in such discussions. It is in such situations where we can sense and know “being” as first the very “act of existence” in the sense of giving “form” its direct reality as well as in the further sense of grounding it in reality. There is simply an important distinction and difference that is revealed, we might say phenomenologically, in such situations. It is not regarding the degree of “intelligible adhesion” of belief in the existence of the thing but instead it is the encounter with, and thus distinction of the direct presence of the person (or thing) in the sensible world. This is not a demonstration involving inference; it is a direct intuitive evidence.¹⁶

¹⁶ Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston: Center For Thomistic Studies, 2003) pp. 45-48; see also my *Dialectical Practice and the Ontology of the Human Person* (New York: Vantage Press, 2010). This existential argument has important theological implications, in my view, for at least understanding the deep interconnection of the ontological and historical in any proper understanding of the Christian mystery. Apart from an awareness of certain real events in the past, the notion of Jesus’ resurrection as an historical reality remains only supposition and not real knowledge. The image of events surrounding the resurrection and the awareness of it belonging to our present consciousness do not in themselves bear the mark of the past. If we can and do link them with the historical past, it is because we are also aware of an experience from the past resembling these present images. This means that this act of individual and collective Christian memory needs to be explained. In our ordinary knowledge of change, we can reflect upon our dependence on memory to help us in our account. The impression of change as movement, for instance, involves a complex relation between sensation, perception, and memory. For example, a melodic phrase in our common experience of music is not the hearing of notes one by one without relation to one another, rather all notes in some sense are at the same time – simultaneously present to consciousness, and yet there is an awareness of their succession and consequent temporal relations. Memory is involved for the past notes continuity with the present phrase. There is in the origins of this experience no elaborate process of logical inference required. Here in our ordinary experience of change, is a good sign of the existence of what we might call intuitive memory or intuition in memory. There are then common instances of intuitive memory. But we must ask what are the conditions for such intuitive memory – of there *being* some basis for an intuitive knowledge of Jesus’ actual historical resurrection? One condition relevant for present knowledge of Jesus’ resurrection is the presence in consciousness of factors resembling the historical events surrounding the resurrection. There is in some sense a revival in our present of the historical events of the resurrection in conjunction with our consciousness of the Church’s similar and resembling images, signs, and symbols that can only be explained through an intuition of the *being* of these events through this collective or communal memory of the Church. What is crucial here is that factors causally determining the Church’s present signs and imagery are the actual historical events themselves that surround Jesus’ resurrection. This is not in its origins an inference from effect to cause but rather an intuitive awareness of the continuing presence of Jesus’ historical resurrection providing the basis for what we are calling resemblance or similarity in this present awareness called memory. The complex phenomena of our ordinary memory are inexplicable without some fundamental intuition of the past because of a direct communication of the past in our present caused by

And yet over time, as I have attempted to better understand the issue of our individual and collective motivations to pursue the good, I also recognize the need for “form” (as intelligibility) and for the recognition of the Supreme Being which can be understood as the “form of forms”, the author of intelligibility itself. Gilson also refers to this in his stress on the importance of purpose in human practice. We must have some ultimate sense of purpose that we are directed to in theory or all our lesser purposes eventually fall into disarray. There is the recurring need for a renewal of purpose in human affairs, individually and collectively.

This speaks clearly to the perennial need for philosophy on both the individual and corporate levels, and in particular for Christian philosophy. It also witnesses to the centrality of the doctrine of being for this philosophy, and perhaps for two fundamental ways of approach to being or the question of being – by way of substantial form and by way of the act of existence; the way of reflection and the way of practical action.

As for the question which has primacy – it depends upon one’s disposition and circumstances which, in my humble view, circles back around to one’s existential situation does it not?

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actual past events. It is then the actual and historical resurrection of Christ, which serves as the causal determinant of the present signs and images resembling it – such signs and images being persons as members, sacred texts, sacraments, and symbols of the Christian Church, or more accurately being the body of the Church itself as sacrament and sign. Also, without the notion of substance, memory alone becomes the source of my Christian identity rather than its consequent. But memory is not of events in the past but of the events in your or my past, and in the past of other persons with whom we are in relationship within the tradition. My personal identity is conceived as a continuing substance or subject of agency that is revealed phenomenologically by memory but in its actual identity is the ontological source and principle of actuality for the possibility of personal memory and not its result. We can say then on the basis of this deeper account that there is an intuitive awareness of the historical resurrection of Jesus that is the cause of our present signs and symbols of remembrance as Church. There is the knowledge of this resemblance and similarity based upon the intuition of causal efficacy in remembrance. There is an intuitive awareness for the Church and its members of the historical event of Jesus’ resurrection as cause of our knowledge of it in and through present memory. This account also assumes that from the very beginning of Christianity there was always a primary external or objective authority existing alongside the subjective authority of individual consciousnesses and consciences that in this matter of faith can serve only as secondary sources at best. This primary and foremost authority has always had an historical dimension in the person and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ and subsequently in the order of the Church’s deposit of faith, apostolic succession, and teaching authority. (See D. B. Hawkins, *The Criticism of Experience* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1945) see especially pp.97-106 for an incisive realist treatment of memory in terms of Gilson’s ontology and that I am arguing here has great relevance for the theological doctrine of sacramental presence.)