

Saint Bonaventure and the Entrance of God
Into Theology
by Emmanuel Falque

translated from French by Brian Lapsa and Sarah Horton
Revised by William C. Hackett

Properly original, the new version of this essay intends both to nourish debate and differentiate points of view. In its new articulation, the book justifies work that has been carried out since. It justifies the sense of Franciscan rootedness that has never been denied and at the same time opens to the discovery of another reading of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas. The preface specially composed for this American edition, the opening debate with famous medievalist Etienne Gilson, and above all the afterword entitled "Saint Thomas Aquinas and the entrance of God into Philosophy" make it a radically new book.

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and
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Afterword: Saint Thomas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy

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This document contains my translations of the Preface, Opening, and Afterword to Emmanuel Falque's Saint Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology. Please note that the final editions of these pieces may differ slightly from the versions below. All citations should come from the actual book, not from these documents. The book can be found at <https://www.franciscanpublications.com/products/saint-bonaventure-and-the-entrance-of-god-into-theology?variant=9158149636156>

Author's Preface to the American Edition

“We must begin by the beginning” – *Incohandum est ab exordio*. This formula of St. Bonaventure, placed as an epigraph to the present work, certainly and first states the necessity of ascending to an identified origin, of not confounding causality and paternity, or of discovering a source for the entirety of the created. The fact remains that what has philosophical (the beginning) and theological (the origin) sense first possesses a methodological signification. *St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology* was indeed, in my own journey, that by which it was necessary to “begin.” It is thus not nothing for an author, as likewise for the future of the books he has written, to make a return to his own works. Certain works, when one returns to them and they are one's own, indeed make visible the path travelled, the turns taken, and the decisions yet to come. Such is the case for the book that you are going to read. One never knows, in reality, where thought leads. One follows it rather than preceding it, and to believe that everything was foreseen in advance, and that the attempts succeeded each other as if a single logic sufficed to preside over everything, is to have never experienced a work, be it literary, artistic, or philosophical.

Certainly, certain authors stick to a single idea and do nothing but exploit it. And that is already a great deal. One cannot but admire the constancy with which the beginning is sometimes given identically at the end, albeit deployed mainly in premises that had not then been suspected. Others, if not rarer then at least more difficult to pin down, do not cease to change, or rather to use detours by which they let themselves be transformed. Did not the painter Picasso have periods (blue, rose, cubism, surrealism) that make his genius rather than marking an inconstancy in the project undertaken? Or again, does one not find an immense distance between the first and last Platonic dialogues, even though everything already seemed to be in position there, in embryo, at the heart of the first thoughts? “Beginning by a beginning” aimed at as the moment *ab initio* of the introductory works is not the same as turning *in fine* toward the works that were drawn from them. The prelude bears in embryo the symphony that is yet to be played but also announces certain themes that will make one leave it.

A certain number of works have thus appeared since, certainly in medieval philosophy (*St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology; God, the Flesh, and the Other: From Irenaeus to Duns Scotus*) but also in phenomenology (*Loving Struggle*), in philosophy of religion (*The Guide of Gethsemane; The Metamorphosis of Finitude; The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*), and even in the guise of a methodological breakthrough (*Crossing the Rubicon; Parcours d'embûches*). One enters by the porch (St. Bonaventure) only by measuring it against the edifice (philosophy of religion, phenomenology, etc.). Or rather, this entrance gives a sense to the ensemble and makes visible its unity, for the initial intuition was never denied in spite of certain turns taken in the thought. I was and remain of Bonaventurian inspiration, even though a certain Thomistic inflection has since taught me another manner of

relating oneself to God or to the created. From the “Trinitarian monadology” or from the “interpretation of the *Canticle of Creation*” (St. Bonaventure) to the “subsistent relation” or to the “five ways for ascending to God” (Thomas Aquinas), there is not such a distance as one could sometimes think. St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas bring forth two aims that are, if not “complementary” (Gilson), at least original but not in competition, for saying God and for thinking him. Their contemporaneity in the 13th century is not an obstacle to their comparison but rather marks the *kairos* by which a renewal is born, teaching us today also what it is to philosophize otherwise.

The choice of St. Bonaventure the Franciscan, and of the *Breviloquium* as a veritable “summa of theology” in the manner of Thomas Aquinas, is not here a mere chance born of the university, nor is it only the response to a passage that is required for obtaining a diploma. I have since pronounced this avowal in the work concerning my own journey (*Parcours d’embûches*) in response to a colloquium held in Paris on my work where I was questioned (*Une analytique du passage*). There is, and there was, in my past youth, at a semi-adolescent age when everything was being decided (seventeen years old), a spiritual experience in Assisi at St. Francis’s bedside, which has made it so that Franciscanism will never for me be only to be studied, but also to be lived and even to be practiced. The “ontology of poverty” with which the present work deals does not amount only to “giving the gift” in a phenomenology that is certainly engaged, but to inscribing in God himself, and in our own thought, the Trinitarian possibility of a givenness that makes it so that God is experienced rather than conceptualized and that he is felt and sensed rather than only being thought. One will therefore read this book as a “confession,” in the manner of St. Augustine in other places and other times. The itinerary certainly will not cease to be transformed, but the point of departure is the same one by which we should start: St. Bonaventure and the Franciscan root that will not cease to accompany me.

Certainly, one will admit, I also have changed. Or rather, turns were taken that, far from forgetting my past, give it a certain value according to a winding and turbulent road. This work bears the mark of my beginnings and of my rootedness in a “phenomenology of givenness” that had not yet been questioned then. And yet, everything was already in place in embryo, or awaiting deployment. For the recognition that *Denys the Areopagite is in no instance Bonaventure*, and that, therefore, the “saturated phenomenon” or the “phenomenology of the extraordinary” (J.-L. Marion) is to be distinguished from the “limited phenomenon” and from the “phenomenology of the ordinary” (my perspective), is probably one of the central theses of the book that you are going to read. Neither philosophy nor theology are referred exclusively to the apophatism of language or of God himself. There is also a form of cataphatism or of God’s hypercognizability that makes it so that the Word, in his kenosis, made himself known to us (*pro nobis*) to the point of becoming hyper-known by us (*a nobis*). Christianity is not about “distance” only but also about “proximity” – an aim that Franciscanism, as likewise the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, in reality do not cease to deploy. The incarnated summons the limit, and it is by inhabiting our created Being (*être*) that we abide as that very thing that God wanted us to be and that we remain. Certainly the “overcoming into the ineffable” states God’s glory and transcendence (Denys), but with the counterpoint of a “divine condescension” that inhabits our immanence and stands in the “flesh” of a transformed and waiting humanity (Bonaventure). We will not see in this two opposed ways but rather two different and complementary manners of envisioning phenomenology on the one hand (the saturated / the limited) and theology on the other (glory / kenosis).

The “confrontation with Étienne Gilson” inserted as an opening to this book, and even more the “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy” added as an afterword, show the present work in its full relief, making visible both the possible turn and the rootedness in the beginning. For, as with any stage of a work, this book is inscribed in a history, in that Bonaventure is not for me a forgotten point of departure but rather a foundation that one could not deny. Moreover, the “phenomenological practice of medieval philosophy,” amply justified in the introduction to the work that followed (*God, the Flesh, and the Other*) has definitively conceptualized, from the point of view of the method, the exercise that here was practiced for the first time. Far from remaining confined to their mere “historicity,” the texts of the Fathers and the medievals also refer to an “experience” that we must today find again phenomenologically. It is by meeting each other, and by mutually enriching each other, that medieval historians and phenomenologists will come, if not to understand each other, at least to recognize that the texts need both to be scientifically established and analyzed (medievalists) and to be actualized and rooted in the experience that they attempt to describe and to show (phenomenology).

We will therefore read here, to follow the title, a *St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology*. The interrogation is born, as we will see, from Martin Heidegger and from his call for a God before whom one can also “fall to one’s knees, play instruments, pray, sing, and dance” (sic.). But there is also a *St. Bonaventure and the Ontology of the Sensible* – for the originality of the Franciscan concerns not only givenness and the Trinity but also creation and corporeality. This sequel, never-written and yet announced, has found in the sixth chapter of *God, the Flesh, and the Other* [“The Conversion of the Flesh (Bonaventure)”], if not its summary, at least its outlines. I will therefore refer the reader to it, as he can there read the prolongation that is demanded: the “language of the flesh” on the one hand (Bonaventure the Brother Minor or the Franciscan) and the “flesh of language” on the other (Thomas Aquinas the Preacher Brother or the Dominican). Moreover, one will find, therefore, as an afterword to the present work, and as a “loving struggle” this time, what we have since called a *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy* (and no longer into theology), because man’s “limit” (philosophy) is also that by which God comes to reveal himself (theology).

Letting “God enter into theology” (Bonaventure, *the present work*), bringing forth from this a possible “ontology of the sensible” (*God, the Flesh, and the Other*, ch. 6), and ensuring that God does not enter “into theology alone” but also “into philosophy” (Thomas Aquinas, *afterword*) structures the entirety of an approach made less of oppositions than of transformations, less of exclusions than of confrontations. Neither so-called “natural” theology nor the term “Being” (*être*) attributed to God are necessarily to be condemned today, provided that they can also be phenomenologically reread and justified. An entire section of contemporary phenomenology has plunged into the aforementioned “overcoming of metaphysics” and the “critique of ontotheology.” Probably the overcoming has now been overcome – and our later works have constantly shown this. “*Crossing the Rubicon*” is not leaping from one bank to the other but crossing the river and letting oneself be transformed by the crossing and by what one has met. The “other discourse” (of charity, of prayer, of liturgy, or of the Incarnation) that contemporary phenomenology has so much called for perhaps no longer goes without saying, or at least deserves to be questioned. Through privileging the “rupture” over the “overlapping,” the “leap” over the “tiling,” one forgets what is *common* to man and God, thereby falling into an angelism in good taste that can certainly draw us toward the heights but can also make us fall from our grandeur: “man is neither an angel nor a beast,” Pascal reminds us, “and unfortunately he who wishes to act the angel acts the beast” (*Pensées*, L.678/B.358).

Boston, September 5, 2016

Saint Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology (American edition)
 (Opening to be inserted between my new preface [remove Jean Jolivet's preface] and the
 introductory matter [Letter from Martin Heidegger to a doctoral candidate])

Opening:
 Confrontation with Étienne Gilson¹

It is an outrageous gamble, even an act of temerity, to dare compare, as an opening to the translation of the present work, Étienne Gilson's masterwork on Saint Bonaventure [*The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure* (1924)] and the attempt that I present here [*St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology* (2000)]. We will, however, dare the duel, at least because the two books confront each other across a distance of nearly three-quarters of a century [1924 / 2000], from the same French publisher [Vrin], and in the same collection [Études de philosophie médiévale], itself founded by Étienne Gilson. One will, in addition, be all the more assured of the possible confrontation in that my later work of medieval philosophy [*God, the Flesh, and the Other: From Irenaeus to Duns Scotus*] establishes, this time definitively, the method employed – the “phenomenological practice of medieval philosophy” (Introduction) – and finishes what here is still only announced: an ontology of the sensible designated as a “conversion of the flesh” (ch. 6).² Furthermore, my “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy,” which is presented as an afterword to the present translation and is, to my eyes, one of the most important texts [“Theological Limits and Phenomenological Finitude”], shows to what extent in my “confrontation with Étienne Gilson” one finds a community of thought and entirely differentiated paths. Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas remain the two great common masters by whom all medievalists must pass, albeit according to divergent perspectives that the work which follows and the afterword that is added to it suffice to show.³

We are thus “like dwarves sitting on the shoulders of giants,” as Bernard of Chartres aptly emphasized.⁴ We might as well, therefore, endeavor to lean on them, if not to see farther than they do, at least to see otherwise than they do. What applies here to my relation to the tradition in general applies all the more to this narrow bond that binds me to that French grandmaster of medieval philosophy who was Étienne Gilson and to the lineage that he engendered. *His* “Bonaventure” and *mine* certainly bear no resemblance to each other, and yet

¹ One will find here, as an opening to the American translation of *Saint Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology*, a revised version of a text initially published in *Études franciscaines*, volume 2, January-March 2009, pp. 7-20: “Autour de saint Bonaventure: un essai de confrontation avec Etienne Gilson.”

² Cf. *God, the Flesh and the Other: From Irenaeus to Duns Scotus*, trans. William Christian Hackett, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2015, chapter 6, pp. 167-201: “The Conversion of the Flesh” (Bonaventure). For what concerns the specificity of Franciscan thought in general, I refer to my dialogue E. Falque and L. Solignac, “Penser en franciscain,” in *Études franciscaines*, October-December 2014 (n° 7), pp. 297-325; as well as to the preface of the new French edition of St. Bonaventure's *Short Treatise* in a single volume, “*Breviloquium*,” Paris, Editions franciscaines, 2016.

³ On this point, see my response to Laure Solignac in *Parcours d'embûches: S'expliquer*, Paris, Editions franciscaines, 2016, § 28, pp. 236-246: “Fidélité bonaventurienne et thomasienne.” This work serves as a response to the international colloquium that was organized in France on my work (July 5-7 2014) and published under the title *Une analytique du passage: Rencontres et confrontations avec Emmanuel Falque*, Cl. Brunier-Coulin (ed.) Paris, Editions franciscaines, 2016 (720 pages).

⁴ Bernard of Chartres, cited by John of Salisbury, *Metalogicus* (1159), trans. J. B. Hall, Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols Publishers, 2013, 3.4, p. 257. “Dicebat Bernard Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos, gigantium humeris incidentes.”

they both open onto a “career” [1924 for Gilson and 2000 for me] the future of which will show how much these beginnings counted. The “disagreements (*différends*)” create “differences (*différences*),” but it is by measuring them that the originality of each thinker and the possibility of positioning oneself emerge. Although the work you are going to read is in no way directed against the celebrated French medievalist, nor is it even addressed to him as if to decide between us, one will nevertheless see born here a new method regarding medieval philosophy, more phenomenological than metaphysical, descriptive rather than explanatory, moving boundaries rather than remaining confined to disciplinary delimitations. What is essential is not to be in opposition but to trace one’s own way by which one accesses the received heritage otherwise. Recognizing one’s debt is not paying a bill from which one would like to exempt oneself but is entering into the “recognition”⁵ of one who knows all the better what he owes for having also traveled the path by which he liberated himself from it.

We must indeed admit it. The eras are different, and that is why the aims are also. At the time of writing his *St. Bonaventure*, in 1924, Étienne Gilson had in reality but a single goal: breaking with a narrow rationalism that confined medieval philosophy to an abstract and strict Thomism. The Seraphic Doctor served, then, as it were, as a counterpoint to the Angelic Doctor but was always seen through him – Thomas Aquinas or the sense of the word “nature” (*natura*) serving, for example, as a prism for a reading of St. Bonaventure, who hardly ever uses it, always preferring to it, in my view, the word “creature” (*creatura*): “with St. Bonaventure,” as the work’s ending emphasizes, “[the mystical element of the doctrine] for the first time achieved full expression. [...] This undoubtedly is its gravest fault in the eyes of many of our contemporaries. Philosophy must treat of nature; mysticism can treat only of grace, and is, therefore, the business of none but the theologian. But we should be clear, to begin with, as to the meaning of the word ‘nature.’”⁶ The major problem of the “status of philosophy” is therefore the essential object of Gilson’s work, as it would be, moreover, up through the debate about Christian philosophy. St. Bonaventure, and the book that is devoted to him, would thus serve Étienne Gilson as a fulcrum for criticizing and rejecting all attempts at a “separated philosophy”: “While the Aristotelians saw the evil effect upon Christian truth of a definite metaphysical error and accepted battle upon the ground of pure philosophy, the Augustinians chose to remain upon the field of Christian wisdom and block the advance of Averroism by denying the very principle of a separated philosophy.”⁷ Whether the figure of St. Bonaventure is that of a philosopher or of a theologian, whether the ambition of a *critique of natural philosophy* is or is not appropriate to him, and whether the question of *the existence of God* is really the one to be posed (to him): such are the three lines that will here serve as a spearhead for this *a posteriori* confrontation with the work of Étienne Gilson. Thus the Seraphic Doctor will appear, at least and also for today, as a philosopher and a theologian “of the body and the world,” questioned mystically and phenomenologically rather than being explained metaphysically and in a still-scholastic manner.

1. *St. Bonaventure, philosopher or theologian?*

The opposition here established between a Bonaventurian Augustinianism and a Thomistic Aristotelianism certainly remains too radical. One can even add that the sequence of Bonaventurian studies has had no other task but the nuancing of this statement, up to positing

⁵ [The French *reconnaissance* can mean both “recognition” and “gratitude,” and both senses of the word apply here. – Trans.]

⁶ E. Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure* (1924), trans. Dom Iltyd Trethowan and Frank J. Sheed, Paterson, New Jersey, St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965, p. 445-446 [henceforth SBPH].

⁷ Gilson, SBPH, 25. [Translation modified. – Trans.]

the hypothesis of an “Augustinizing Aristotelian” Bonaventure (Van Steenberg), a thesis, moreover, taken up and discussed by a certain Joseph Ratzinger, today Benedict XVI, in his *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*.⁸ It remains, however, that what Étienne Gilson would later name “Christian philosophy” is not, or is no longer entirely, the “separated philosophy” justly “rejected” in his work on *St. Bonaventure*. The “revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason” [definition of “Christian philosophy” in *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*⁹] simultaneously states the indispensable subalternation of philosophy to theology, inherited from St. Bonaventure (against Latin Averroism’s temptation to separation), and the autonomy of reason, directly linked this time to Thomas Aquinas (against Augustinian illuminism). There does not exist, as is often believed, a Gilson of mysticism on the one hand [Bonaventure (1924), Augustine (1929), Bernard of Clairvaux (1934)] and a Gilson of philosophy on the other [Thomism (1921), Christianity and philosophy (1936), Introduction to Christian philosophy (1960), etc.]. “Christian philosophy” remains *mystical* in its attachment to Bonaventure and claims to be entirely *philosophical* in its descent from Thomas Aquinas. The work on St. Bonaventure thus largely exceeds the question of Bonaventure alone, and Étienne Gilson knows this and emphasizes it precisely in the introduction to his *St. Bonaventure*: “It was not a question of this or that philosophic doctrine, but the very notion of philosophy that was at issue: and the battle then joined was so important that its result was to be decisive for the future of modern thought.”¹⁰

But there is more, and better, in the reinterpretation for today of Gilson’s *St. Bonaventure*, according to a remark that this time leads directly to my own Bonaventurian work presented here [*St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology*]. In 1974, indeed, that is, at a distance of exactly half a century from the publication of *St. Bonaventure and Philosophy* (1924) and a few years before his death (1978), Étienne Gilson admitted, at a colloquium celebrating the seventh centenary of St. Bonaventure’s death, that “this attempt to define St. Bonaventure as a *philosopher* is no less grave a deformation of his thought [...]. The true *supernatural theology*, to Bonaventure’s mind, is that of the *Brief Discourse (Breviloquium)* and the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*. It is in these writings, free of their own form, that doctrine bears its true Bonaventurian face.”¹¹ One could not have been clearer, in a turn that was at the very least surprising but was already the sign of a change of era. The true fidelity to Bonaventure (in 1974) was not to attempt all the time, and by a *tour de force*, to define him above all as a philosopher (as in 1924); and his principal aim was not only and negatively the “critique of natural philosophy” (ch. 2 of *St. Bonaventure and Philosophy* [1924]), but also and positively the “exposition of supernatural theology,” but in terms that I, for my part, think could be philosophical. The present work, entitled *St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology* (2000) [and completed by Chapter 6 of *God, the Flesh, and the Other* (2008)] attempts therefore, as it were, to take Étienne Gilson literally and to push him to his limits, be it in order to better take leave of him. If there is an “entrance of God into theology” it is because the Trinitarian and Christian God “does not” enter “directly into philosophy,” or rather, as I have written, because “he first enters into it as if not entering into it, or at the very

⁸ J. Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (1959), trans. Zachary Hayes, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1971, § 15, p. 120-134: “The Modern Controversy Concerning Bonaventure’s Anti-Aristotelianism.”

⁹ E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (1932), trans. A. H. C. Downes, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936, p. 37.

¹⁰ SBPH, 25.

¹¹ E. Gilson, *S. Bonaventura, 1274-1974*, Collegio S. Bonaventura, Grottaferrata, Roma, 1974, Vol. I, pp. 2-5. [My translation. – Trans.]

least not as we would want to force him to enter into it.”¹² If the question of “the entrance of God” certainly and explicitly refers to the Heideggerian debate on the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics (the supposedly necessary “entrance of God into philosophy when he enters into theology”), it is no less an extension of Gilson’s interrogation of the necessity of centering, or not, all studies of St. Bonaventure on philosophy alone: “that to which the historians many times have indeed applied the critical term ‘illusion of separated philosophy,’” as I will demonstrate by already distancing myself somewhat from Étienne Gilson, “has wrongly turned them from the properly *positive* aim of the Seraphic Doctor: the truth of an ‘anchored theology’ (in Scripture).”¹³

One will, therefore, have understood this: our work extends and at the same time takes leave of that of Étienne Gilson. The matter is the same (St. Bonaventure), the ambition also (not separating philosophy from theology), but the manner remains different (no longer isolating the philosophical, but rooting it in the theological). To the debate about “separated philosophy” (Gilson) is therefore here opposed the debate about “anchored theology” (Falque) – otherwise named in the act of what I have since called “Crossing the Rubicon.”¹⁴ But in both cases, as in all cases, it will *first* be a question of “doing philosophy” and of speaking “as a philosopher,” provided that the difference between philosophy and theology consists, in my view, less in a *distance in contents* (one can treat theological themes philosophically [the Trinity as gift, resurrection as birth, the Eucharist as body, etc.]) than in a *difference in points of departure* (the point of view of man and the point of view of God) and *in accomplishment* (the possible and the actual).¹⁵

2. *A critique of natural philosophy?*

The chapter devoted to the “critique of natural philosophy” by St. Bonaventure remains famous, and it remains one of the most commented-on chapters of Étienne Gilson’s work (ch. 2). In the era of the book’s publication, in a context that we have difficulty imagining today, it was first a question, according to a critic in 1924 (G. Théry) of “restoring to St. Bonaventure his true features and making him, from a merely endearing figure, into a historical one.”¹⁶ St. Bonaventure did not only have to “be a philosopher” and to enter into the “snare of Thomism,” as it was ordinarily put in that era, but it was also necessary to show and respect his theological and mystical dimension. Saying, with Étienne Gilson, that St. Bonaventure’s philosophy was not “a hesitant Thomism that [...] never came to completion” and that it was no longer fitting to “perpetually judg[e] it from the point of view of a philosophy which is not his” (introduction to *St. Bonaventure and Philosophy*)¹⁷ was therefore conferring on the Seraphic Doctor an autonomy and a rightful place that he had never before received. In view of the era, therefore, the attempt was audacious and freed, as it were, Franciscan thought from its Thomistic vise. St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas organize their doctrines “from

¹² *Infra* [*Saint Bonaventure et l’entrée de Dieu en théologie*], Introduction, p. 24 (pagination from the French edition, Vrin [to be revised in the American edition]). [Confirm that the phrasing is the same here as in the body of the book.]

¹³ *Infra*, 39. [Confirm that the phrasing is the same here as in the body of the book.]

¹⁴ *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology*, trans. Ruben Shank, New York, Fordham University Press, 2016.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, chapter 5, pp. 121-136: “Tiling and Conversion.”

¹⁶ G. Théry, *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (RSPT), Recension, 1924, p. 551. [My translation. – Trans.]

¹⁷ Gilson, SBPH, 8.

different starting points,” as the work’s celebrated finale emphasizes, and “never envisage the same problems in the same aspect.”¹⁸

A question is posed, nevertheless, and it is one that I myself have even already addressed to the celebrated Bonaventurian in the present work, at least in order to radicalize its aim [ch. II]. In view of the firstly “theological and mystical” intention of the Franciscan Doctor, can we, and must we, still and always take the aforementioned “critique of natural philosophy” as the point of departure for a study on St. Bonaventure? Accepting this beginning is on the one hand negatively defining the Seraphic Doctor (in critique) and on the other hand making natural theology a question, even his question (in its very formulation). Certainly we must be grateful to Étienne Gilson for having brought out the importance of the debate on the status of (natural) philosophy in the conflict that opposed Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas within the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* (1270-1274). But this refusal of the Dominican position by the Franciscan relies, in reality, on a thought that is proper to him. The theological questions of the “content of Scripture” (Gilson, p. 83),¹⁹ of the “infused light” (p. 85), or of Christ’s Incarnation (p. 85) arise precisely in order to call into question “natural philosophy” or the hypothesis of a “knowledge of things that men can acquire by means of reason alone” (p. 81). The fact remains that in 1924 it was still necessary to fear being accused of being a theologian when one was a philosopher, certain critics (J. Bittremieux) even reproaching him for having too much favored theology in his *St. Bonaventure*: “At first glance, Monsieur Gilson can sometimes seem to deviate somewhat from his subject and to enter too often into the domain of theology.”²⁰ In short, the boundaries having been established on the basis of a given concept of “natural philosophy” that was in no way Bonaventurian, Étienne Gilson himself projected unawares the Thomistic light onto the Bonaventurian aim, as the debate then consisted, for the French medievalist, in showing how Bonaventure was *not* Thomas Aquinas, but always *starting from* Thomas Aquinas. The aforementioned “philosophy” (natural or not) remained the common basis of debate, without any calling into question of the boundaries or any possible evaluation of the “counterblow” of theology on philosophy, to the point of transforming philosophy itself.²¹

My own approach is thus distinct from Étienne Gilson’s project (necessary, of course, in his era) in that it does not keep theology at a distance and never speaks of it as of a content supposedly separated from philosophy, in a distinction still nearly nonexistent at the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th. The treatment, for example, that the medievalist reserves for the Trinity is in this sense, in my view, one of the most exemplary. Certainly we must emphasize with the exegete that the pure philosopher ignores the true reality of God since “he thinks he is reasoning about a mere unity whereas in fact he is reasoning about a trinity” (p. 97).²² But what does such a trinity of persons signify, properly speaking, in Bonaventure, without directly treating of the distinction of the appropriations of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? There Gilson says nothing, at the risk, of course, of passing for a theologian – or of having crossed, unawares, the “Rubicon.”

I will therefore endeavor, in my own project and according to my own perspective, to take Bonaventure and the Trinity at their word. I will refuse, in this sense, to speak “of” God with

¹⁸ Gilson, SBPH, 449.

¹⁹ [Translation modified. – Trans.]

²⁰ J. Bittremieux, *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 1924 (Recension), p. 585. [My translation. – Trans.]

²¹ This hypothesis of the “*choc en retour*” (*backlash* or *counterblow*) of theology on philosophy is found in *Crossing the Rubicon*, op. cit., p. 149-150: “The Counterblow.”

²² [Translation modified. – Trans.]

regard to Bonaventure, as Étienne Gilson never ceases to do. The Seraphic Doctor, as soon as he has the leisure to do so, indeed cites by name the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, rather than the essence of a concept of God. Moreover, the very term “principle” (*principium*) at the beginning of the *Breviloquium* (Brev. I, 1) does not state the metaphysical principality of an idea, as is sometimes wrongly believed, but the theological primacy of a person, the Father in his fontality: “the name of principle (*ratio principii*) pertains to God principally for what concerns the person of the Father” (I Sent. d. 29, a. 1, q. 1 ; concl.).²³ The “true metaphysician,” as a famous passage of the *Hexaemeron* indicates (I, 13), does not consider God under the name “of principle, of means, and of ultimate end” (which is simply the work of the “metaphysician”), but under the name “of exemplar of all things,” as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (the work of the “true metaphysician”).²⁴ One does not, therefore, speak “of” God and even “of” the Trinity in Bonaventure, at the risk again of making him a concept, but one thinks only “from” or “on the basis of” the Trinity, that is to say by the influence (*influentia*) of the differentiated action of the persons in man.²⁵

We must therefore recognize this, and even make it the principal track of this work after Étienne Gilson’s belated admission concerning St. Bonaventure (1974): the definition of Bonaventure as a “philosopher” gravely deforms his thought. Is this to say, however, that there is no study of Bonaventurian thought save a theological one? Certainly not. For if the corpus is theological, its examination can and must also be philosophical. Treating, for example, and just as I have attempted to do in the present work, of the diffusion of the Father in terms of givenness (the power of giving himself unto giving the gift) is showing that certain of philosophy’s contemporary inquiries (the question of givenness) find in theology their strongest and most exemplary modes of thought. But what is true of the “gift” (debate with J.-L. Marion) can also be extended, and has already been extended in my own work, to the no less essential phenomenological and Bonaventurian questions of the “Incarnation” (debate with M. Merleau-Ponty), of “perichoresis” as a form of *khôra* (debate with J. Derrida), or of “creation” as facticity (debate with J.-Y. Lacoste).²⁶ One will therefore not limit this early Bonaventurian work only to the era when it was written (2000), but one will see in it the seeds of what would later and newly be engendered, from the point of view of method [*Crossing the Rubicon*] as also of content [*God, the Flesh and the Other*] and of debate [*Loving Struggle*]. I have said this from the preface to the present work onward. St. Bonaventure remains *for me* “the” source, as does Denys the Areopagite for Jean-Luc Marion in his youthful works (*The Idol and the Distance*), but in an entirely distinct way. The ways thus give themselves as entirely different, but also as complementary – like two possible manners of conceiving of appearing, the sense of Christianity, and the relation to the tradition: the “saturated phenomenon” on the one hand (J.-L. Marion) and the “limited phenomenon” on the other (my own perspective).²⁷

²³ Cited and commented on *infra*, p. 83. [My translation. – Trans.] (Check to make sure translation accords with the translation in the body of the book.)

²⁴ Cited and commented on *infra*, p. 57-58. [My translation. – Trans.] (Check to make sure translation accords with the translation in the body of the book.)

²⁵ *Infra*, p. 32-33: “Écriture et théologie : l’unique source trinitaire.”

²⁶ Cf. *Le combat amoureux: Disputes phénoménologiques et théologiques* [*Loving Struggle* (translation forthcoming)], Paris, Herman, 2014 : ch. 1 (Derrida), ch. 2 (Merleau-Ponty), ch. 4 (Marion), ch. 7 (Lacoste).

²⁷ The distinction between the saturated phenomenon and the limited phenomenon is fully established in the afterword to the present work: “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy: Theological Limit and Phenomenological Finitude”: “Deficiency as Limit.” One will find the explanation of this in terms of philosophy in *Le combat amoureux*, op. cit. ch. 6: “Phénoménologie de l’extraordinaire” (J.-L. Marion), by way of philosophy of religion in *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, § 5, pp. 19-20: “Christian Specificity and the Ordinarity of the Flesh,” and put into methodological perspective in *Crossing the Rubicon*, § 19 (3), pp. 145-147: “The Limited Phenomenon.” For a view of the totality, if not of the controversy then at least of the new

3. God's existence in question(s)?

The feedback mechanism from Thomistic philosophy onto Bonaventurian philosophy, even as he nevertheless wants to defend himself against it (the case of natural philosophy), is thus repeated according to the same process for what concerns “the evidence for God’s existence” (Gilson, ch. 3). Certainly, it fell exclusively to Étienne Gilson to show the distance in matter between St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas. “[O]ur experience of God’s existence is the very condition of the inference by which we claim to establish that God exists,” the medievalist justly emphasizes (p. 114). Proving God, or rather accessing God according to “ways” is therefore not for Bonaventure an exercise of reason for finding God at the end (*in fine*) but a mode for discovering that he is already there at the beginning (*ab initio*).

But here again a question is posed, and it is one that I have not failed to raise here in “my” *St. Bonaventure*. If God is not to be proved, is that only because he is “unprovable,” that is to say beyond our concepts in his Trinity – in the Dionysian manner, for example? The response is just as clear as it is trenchant, and it implicitly, here and already, takes its distance relative to what a certainly “Gilsonian” but also “Marionian” interpretation of St. Bonaventure would be. God is not to be proved not because he exceeds the order of proofs (Denys, the Syrian monk) but because he is everywhere and always already proved (Bonaventure, the Franciscan): “yet God is always and everywhere (*semper et ubique*), and absolutely always and everywhere (*et totus semper et ubique*),” as we read in the *Commentary on the Sentences* (I *Sent.* d. 8, p. I, a. 1, q. 2, concl.). “For this reason, one cannot think that he is not. This is the reason that Anselm gives in his book against the fool.”²⁸ Étienne Gilson certainly also exploits, justly, this reference to Anselm to say and to see that, for St. Bonaventure as for the Abbot of Bec, “the divine being (*être*), considered in itself, is absolutely evident” (p. 115, emphasis added).²⁹ But we must, in my view, once more radicalize this approach (p. 66 [of my own work]) and show that the fidelity to Anselm is in fact a false fidelity. It is not “the divine being considered in itself” that is according to Bonaventure absolutely evident (Gilson), but his Trinitarian manifestation *for us* (Falque). It is not at all a question here of “proofs” or of “ways” for saying God, but only of “theophanies” of a personal and identified God.

If Bonaventure is thus faithful to St. Anselm’s *Proslogion* with regard to God’s absolute evidence via his grandeur, he nevertheless remains entirely unfaithful to him with regard to the manner of showing God. “Grandeur” (*majus*) no longer designates only *God* in his concept, but the Father’s power of diffusion in an explicit and, to say the least, differentiated Trinity: “this diffusion is so extreme that He who produces gives all that he can,” as the *Hexaemeron* remarkably indicates (Hex. 11, 11). And the destiny of this givenness is no longer man exceeded by so much grandeur, but the Son himself in whom we are contained (Col 1:16-17), and who is alone able to receive it: “it is possible to think of something greater than any creature, and the creature itself can think of something greater than itself. But in the Son, production is *as* in the Father (*sicut in Patre*). Consequently, if nothing can be thought

position, I refer to *Parcours d’embuches: S’expliquer* (response to *Une analytique du passage*), op. cit. ch. 3, pp. 85-105: “La finitude en question.”

²⁸ Cited and commented on *infra*, 66. [My translation. – Trans.] (Check to make sure translation accords with the translation in the body of the book.)

²⁹ [Translation modified. – Trans.]

that is greater than the Father (*si ergo Patre nihil maius cogitari potest*), the same is true of the Son (*ergo nec Filio*).³⁰

One will, therefore, have understood. The true stake of the so-called “proofs” or “absence of proofs” of the existence of God in Bonaventure is not his possible risk of ontologism, but the Trinitarian reinterpretation of the aforementioned ontological argument, such that it becomes, this time, entirely theological (equality of the Father and the Son that accounts for the Father’s power of givenness and the Son’s capacity for reception). Is this to say that it is here only a question of theology? We cannot and dare not believe this. For thinking the Father in the present work as “absolute givenness” unto “giving the gift of himself” (ontology of poverty [§ 10]) and making the Son the “Trinitarian manifesto of the grandeur of God’s expression [§ 11]) is not enclosing oneself in the sole sphere of the theological but opening, and opening oneself, *by* theology itself to the philosophical thought of “givenness” (by the Father), of “manifestation” (by the Son), and of “Being to oneself (*être à soi*) as Being to God (*être à Dieu*)” (by the Spirit) – so many contemporary categories of philosophy to also renew on the basis of the corpus of theology.³¹

Certainly Étienne Gilson can with reason display “ways” for going to God in Bonaventure, and this by relying on the *Commentary on the Sentences* (p. 110-115). But the term “*viae*” does not appear in Bonaventure, except to set forth “mystical degrees” for elevating ourselves towards the divine (*Itinerarium*), and not “proofs” or “arguments” for justifying its existence (Thomas Aquinas). Moreover, when he is free from all preliminary obligations (in the *Breviloquium* or the *Short Treatise* that I, for my part, have analyzed), the Seraphic Doctor is purely and simply silent on the question of proofs of God’s existence, which is *precisely* a proof, if there is one, that God is truly known by us when he gives himself to us, in an entirely Franciscan “divine hypercognizability” that we should oppose, it seems to me, to the Dionysian schema of the unknowability of God [§ 5].³²

For, and we must insist on this, making Bonaventure too immediately the disciple of Denys is once again reading Bonaventure through Thomas Aquinas. To say that Bonaventurian analogy is not an “analogy of Being” (Thomas Aquinas) but an “analogy of faith” (Barth) does not suffice. What marks the gap is not the possibility of bringing the world back to God, since the Seraphic Doctor also carries this out by his interpretation of the *Canticle of Creation*, but the suppression of, or rather the Son’s journey through, in his Incarnation, the space that separates man and God. Certainly a mystical theologian, Bonaventure does not leave God in the “distance” of his ineffability. On the contrary, and as a good Franciscan, he consecrates the divine in a hyper-proximity of man to God of which our own grandeur for its part struggles to conceive, dazzled as it is not only by God’s height or his splendor (the God Most High), but by so much smallness or humility (the God Most Low): “the depth of God made man, that is, the humility,” as Bonaventure remarkably emphasizes in the *Hexaameron*, “is so great that reason fails.”³³

³⁰ Cited and commented on *infra*, 152. [My translation. – Trans.] (Check to make sure translation accords with the translation in the body of the book.) For an interpretation of the so-called “ontological” argument of St. Anselm, I refer to my contribution “L’argument théophanique” in Abbaye Bec Helloin (éd.), *Saint Anselme. Un penseur et un saint pour notre temps. Actes du colloque à l’occasion du IX^{ème} centenaire de l’anniversaire de sa mort* (12 septembre 2009), Bec-Helloin, Les Ateliers du Bec, 2009, pp. 63-118.

³¹ *Infra*, ch. 6, pp. 135-162: “De l’ontologie de la pauvreté au manifeste trinitaire.”

³² *Infra*, pp. 71-74: “L’hypercognoscibilité divine.”

³³ Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days (Collationes in Hexaameron)*, trans. José de Vinck, Paterson, New Jersey, St. Anthony’s Guild, 1970, VIII, 5, p. 124. [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

4. A theology of the body and the world

We must ultimately compare Étienne Gilson's *St. Bonaventure to God, the Flesh, and the Other* [ch. 6: "The Conversion of the Flesh (Bonaventure)"] to measure the gap that yet separates me from the celebrated medievalist – if not concerning matter, at least concerning manner. We will be grateful, certainly, to the professor at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris) for having exhibited Bonaventure's themes of the "*book of the world*" [ch. 7: "Universal Analogy"] and also of the "*stigmata*" [ch. 1.2: "The Franciscan"]. It remains that the "book" is still and always written in metaphysical terms for the medievalist ("analogy"), whereas in my view it could not be formulated otherwise than in mystical or hermeneutical terms ("interpretation" of the world). Moreover, the stigmata of Brother Francis, certainly defined philosophically as an essential root of the Franciscan experience (the marks of the nails on the body), are however waiting, again in my view, for their mystical implication in order to say what their possible philosophical and theological translation is (the theme of the "conversion of the senses," which is surprisingly absent, or nearly so, from Gilson's work).³⁴

Let us beware, however. Saying, as I have emphasized, that "God is always and everywhere, and absolutely always and everywhere" and that "for this reason, one cannot think that he is not" (I *Sent.* d. 8, p. I, a. 1, q. 2, concl.), does not suffice for reading and discovering God's presence in the world on the basis only of the redefinition of divine exemplarism, and this in the manner of a number of post-Gilsonian Bonaventurians (Bissen, Mouiren, Berubé, Bougerol, etc.). The perspective here is not first metaphysical, without denying its validity (analogy). It is first hermeneutical (interpretation) – in which the "use of metaphor" probably indicates one of St. Bonaventure's greatest originalities, which Paul Ricœur perhaps should have, or could have, developed.³⁵ "Universal analogy" (*sic.*) certainly sees that "the visible universe is a book of which particular beings (*êtres*) are the words" (*The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, p. 195). But the act of reading is always oriented, metaphysically in Gilson, towards the object or the text that is to be read ["by nature every creature is the image and likeness of the Creator" and "the image or the vestige is a substantial property of every creature" (p. 195)³⁶], rather than towards the hermeneutical attitude of the reading subject. The detour, or rather the return, towards the *Collations on the Six Days* (XIII, 12) rather than towards the *Commentary of the Sentences* (II *Sent.* d. 16) would, however, have conferred an entirely other sense on the analysis, in a probably more finished stage of Bonaventurian thought: "when man had fallen, since he had lost knowledge," as the Seraphic Doctor emphasizes in a famous text of the *Hexaemeron*, "there was no longer any one to lead creatures back to God. Hence this book (*iste liber*), that is, the world (*scilicet mundus*) became as dead and deleted. This is why another book (*alius liber*) was necessary, by which man would be enlightened for interpreting the metaphors of things (*ut acciperet metaphoras rerum*). This book is that of Scripture (*autem liber est Scripturae*)."³⁷

Without again taking up here an exegesis that I have, moreover, already performed,³⁸ let us indicate only that everything here is a matter of "reading" or of "reception" (*accipere*) of the

³⁴ Cf. *God, the Flesh, and the Other* [GFO], op. cit. (Northwestern University Press, 2015), ch. 6, pp. 167-201: "The Conversion of the Flesh (Bonaventure)" [Language of Flesh and Flesh of Language / From Symbol to the Spiritual Senses / The Limit Experience of the Stigmata].

³⁵ *Infra*, § 12, p. 165-184: "L'usage de la métaphore".

³⁶ [Translation modified. – Trans.]

³⁷ Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days*, XIII, 12, pp. 190-191. [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque's quotation from the French. – Trans.]

³⁸ GFO, pp. 182-184: "Reading the Book."

book of the world by the believing subject, rather than of the “substantial property of every creature” (Gilson, p. 195), concerning which it did, however, fall to the medievalist to show the gap between it and the “vestige” in St. Augustine. As Adam no longer knew how to “read” the presence of God in the world (*liber mundi*) because his own sight was obscured by sin, God gave him this gift of the book of Scripture (*liber Scripturae*) as a bridge to the book of the world that was “*as dead and deleted.*” What is objectively to be read (the world or Scripture) matters less, in my view, than the personal acuity of the believing and reading subject (in clarity or in obscurity). The vast, but just, panegyric of a “universal analogy” of all creatures to God [Gilson] here gives way, therefore, to a “hermeneutic of facticial life” because for St. Bonaventure, living in the Middle Ages turns out to be first, and mystically, being in the world (*être au monde*) and in God (*à Dieu*), and not solely resembling him in an immediately given metaphysical structure (a supposedly “non-Thomistic” sense of the human composite [p. 315]).

We will, in this sense, certainly be grateful to the medievalist for emphasizing to what extent the initial intuition of Brother Francis came justly to be conceptualized by the Seraphic Doctor: “What St. Francis had simply felt and lived, St. Bonaventure was to *think*” (p. 60). The fact remains that the carnal experience of Brother Francis (ch. I: life and its milieu [the “quasi-auditory” hearing of Saint Damian’s crucifix, the nudity at Assisi, being marked with the stigmata on Mount Alverna, etc.]) could have further enriched the totality of the conceptualization (ch. 12.1: “The Illumination of the Intellect [The Senses and the Imagination]). That “St. Bonaventure binds the soul more closely to the matter than St. Augustine had done” (information of corporeal matter after the information of spiritual matter) incontestably states the philosophical originality of the Franciscan Doctor (p. 321), but not his properly theological and spiritual aim, in that the philosophical attempt necessarily had, however, to lead there. The exterior senses, as we have therefore also shown [*God, the Flesh, and the Other* (ch. 6)], lead toward the interior senses to in reality constitute a veritable “divine sensorium.” We will not, therefore, be satisfied to describe the philosophical mode of sensation (analogy and conformity), but we will radicalize it unto giving it sense in a theological experience of the “divine touch,” because also it humanizes us at the same time as it deifies us: “When man possesses the spiritual senses (*sensus spirituales*),” as St. Bonaventure explains with originality in the *Breviloquium*, “he *sees* (*videtur*) the supreme beauty of Christ under the aspect of his Splendor (*Splendoris*), he *hears* (*auditur*) the sovereign harmony under the aspect of the Word (*Verbi*), he *tastes* (*gustatur*) the sovereign sweetness under the aspect of Wisdom (*Sapientiae*) [...], he *smells* (*odoratur*) the sovereign scent under the aspect of the Word inspired in the heart (*Verbi inspirati in corde*), and he *embraces* (*astringitur*) the sovereign sweetness under the aspect of the incarnate Word (*Verbi incarnati*)....”³⁹ “Seeing” God in Christ or in one’s brother, “tasting” him in his wisdom or in the Eucharist, “hearing” him in his harmony or in his Word, “touching” him in his Incarnation or in prayer, and “feeling” him in the aspiration of the heart or by the scent of incense are thus so many manners of placing one’s senses, and therefore “the entire human being” (*totum hominem*), in the service of God’s apparition to the senses.

The stigmata, in this sense, and far from any valorization of suffering, are not content to state a certain mode of the “substantial unity of the body and the soul” [Gilson, ch. 11: “The Human Soul”]. They signify, on the contrary or rather to a greater extent, the mode of expression of a corporeality that is able to represent God even in our own flesh converted to

³⁹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* V (The Grace of the Holy Spirit), Paris, Éditions franciscaines, 1967, VI, 6, pp. 73-75. Cited and commented on in GFO, pp. 187-189: “A Divine Sensorium.” [Translation following Hackett, *GFO*. Emphasis added by Falque. – Trans.]

him: “This itinerary (*itinerarium*) to be followed is nothing but the ardent love of the crucified (*ardentissimum amorem Crucifixi*), [...]” as the prologue of the *Itinerarium* famously indicates. “This love so impregnates the soul of St. Francis that it finishes by showing through his *flesh* (*in carne patuit*), when he carried about in his *body* (*in corpore suo deportavit*) the sacred stigmata of the Passion.”⁴⁰ The “touching” disciple is here “touched,” and in this quasi-phenomenological chiasmus, the possible mode of an intercorporeality from man to God is said.⁴¹

Conclusion: an exit from the alternative

One will, therefore, have understood. This plea for Bonaventure, and the demand for a still more theological reading of the Seraphic Doctor, be it in order to bring out his firstly philosophical consistency, is not contrary to the masterwork of Étienne Gilson – far from it. The intention is different – more metaphysical and neo-Scholastic on the one hand (1924), more mystical and phenomenological on the other (2000) – but the content remains the same: an originality proper to St. Bonaventure, independent from or beyond his vis-à-vis with St. Thomas Aquinas. Moreover, my last attempt [*God, the Flesh, and the Other*] relies precisely, and explicitly, on the celebrated medievalist to found its position, to radicalize its aim, and perhaps also to accomplish what he himself only dared to outline: “Experience reveals,” as the exegete indeed confides in a crucial text on “Les recherches historico-critiques et l’avenir de la scolastique” [“Historical-Critical Research and the Future of Scholasticism”] (reprinted in *Études médiévales*, Vrin, 1983), “that the more we re-integrate historical studies with their *theological* syntheses, the more the *philosophies* of the Middle Ages appear original.”⁴² Medieval studies, at least in France, have since spent several decades endeavoring to dispense with such a position. It was necessary to show a Middle Ages that was purely philosophical against those who had made it theological, sometimes under dogmatic influences (think in particular of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris* referring on the one hand to Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas and invoking on the other hand his wish for a possible “Christian philosophy”).⁴³ These times, in my view, have passed, or at the very least been consummated. It is no longer the moment of the quarrel between philosophy and theology, at least in that the former no longer belongs to the philosophers alone (in its extension as in its vulgarization) and that the latter is no longer the jurisdiction of theologians alone (we can no longer count, for example, the philosophers, and in particular the phenomenologists, who today do theological work by practicing philosophy first and explicitly [M. Henry, J.-L. Marion, J.-L. Chrétien, J.-Y. Lacoste, etc.]).

Must we then confine ourselves, in medieval philosophy also, to Bonaventure alone, for fear of losing our turf, and therefore never leave an alternative that we must, however, overcome [Bonaventure / Thomas Aquinas]? The question is posed here, for myself included, several centuries after Étienne Gilson. We know that it would be necessary in reality to wait for the 50’s, or at the very least for the publication of *L’Être et l’essence* [*Being and Essence*] (1948), for the reference to Thomism to no longer be only historical in the medievalist’s view (as in *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* [1921]), but also philosophical, even dogmatic.

⁴⁰ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Prologue, 2-3 (V, 295), Paris, Vrin, 1960, p. 21 [translation modified]. Cited and commented on in GFO, pp. 197-199: “The Stigmata of Brother Francis.” [Translation following Hackett, *GFO*. Emphasis added by Falque. – Trans.]

⁴¹ GFO, pp. 195-197: “The Disciple Touching and Touched.” [Translation following Hackett, *GFO*. Emphasis on “theological” added by Falque. – Trans.]

⁴² Cited and commented on in GFO, Introduction, pp. 15-17. [Translation following Hackett, *GFO*. – Trans.]

⁴³ On this point, see the clear and precise introduction of Th-D. Humbrecht, in E. Gilson, *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne*, Vrin (Reprise), 2007, p. 7-26 (in particular p. 19 for the reference to Leo XIII).

Christian philosophy will thus later become an “art of being Thomists” (*The Philosopher and Theology*, p. 172) once Thomas Aquinas becomes *the* reference beside, and even beyond, all previous references (Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, etc.).

Without entering into the reasons for such a turn, perhaps it is thus the destiny of any Bonaventurian to later discover that he is at the same time a Thomist – whence the afterword to the present work [“St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy”], which, far from constituting a simple addition, also brings forth another manner of seeing, or also of thinking. For my part, the insistence, in other essays as well (*The Guide to Gethsemane*, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, or *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*), on “finitude” as modern man’s horizon to be assumed and converted in Christianity leads more toward a philosophy of the limit (Thomas Aquinas) than to a philosophy of pure givenness (Bonaventure).⁴⁴ Where the path was first divine and then human or taken in God (the “creative Trinity” in St. Bonaventure), it is now discovered as human first, be it in order to then be assumed by God and converted by him (man *in via*, in distinction to man *in patria* in Thomas Aquinas). The perspectives, here anew, do not oppose each other but “complete each other” (Gilson, p. 449),⁴⁵ or rather “succeed each other” (Falque):⁴⁶ “God cannot be seen in his essence by a mere human being (*ab homine puro*),” as article 11 of question 12 of the first part of the *Summa Theologica* remarkably emphasizes, “except he be separated from *this mortal life*. [...] [O]ur soul, *as long as we live in this life*, has its being (*être*) in corporeal matter, hence naturally it knows only what has a form in matter [...]. Hence it is impossible for the soul of man *in this life* to see the essence of God.”⁴⁷ The limit here, in the Angelic Doctor (and no longer the Seraphic Doctor) this time, is what gives the form that is the condition of the fullness of desire. We will thus remain philosophers *first*, be it in order to then work as philosophers in theology. “Crossing the Rubicon,” radicalizing and transforming the initial position of Étienne Gilson (still mistrustful of the theological drift), and possibly returning next and also towards Thomas Aquinas (towards a philosophy of the limit rather than of revelation) – such is, therefore, what we have been taught by this necessary and *a posteriori* conversation between two works that face each other, less to defy each other than to orient themselves otherwise: *St. Bonaventure and Philosophy* on the one hand (1924) and *St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology* on the other (2000).⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Cf. *The Guide of Gethsemane: Anxiety, Suffering and Death*, trans. George Hughes, New York, Fordham University Press (forthcoming); *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, trans. Hughes, New York, Fordham University Press, 2012; *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, Body and Eucharist*, trans. Hughes, New York, Fordham University Press, 2016. As for a possible and new reinterpretation for today of Thomas Aquinas, see my contribution as an afterword to the present work: “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy: Theological Limit and Phenomenological Finitude.”

⁴⁵ [Translation modified. – Trans.]

⁴⁶ *Crossing the Rubicon*, chapter 5, pp. 121-136: “Tiling and Conversion” [Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure].

⁴⁷ *S. th. Ia*, q. 12, a. 11: “Whether anyone in this life can see the essence of God?” trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

⁴⁸ Completed, of course, by *God, the Flesh, and the Other*, Northwestern University Press, 2014 (and in particular by ch. 6, devoted to St. Bonaventure: “The Conversion of the Flesh”).

Afterword: St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy

Theological Limit and Phenomenological Finitude¹

One will probably be surprised to find an afterword on St. Thomas Aquinas as a conclusion to a work on St. Bonaventure. The book that you just read through shows this over and over. A real gap is visible between the one and the other: hypercognizibility and analogy, search for the “how” and quest for “why,” monadology and exit into the created, paternity and principiality, givenness and substance, poverty and perfection, manifestation and existence, trinity and concept, identity and connaturality, etc. And yet I have said, and we should reaffirm it, the Seraphic Doctor and the Angelic Doctor celebrate the same “poem to creation,” whether by the canticle of creation (St. Francis, St. Bonaventure), or by the ways of arriving at it (St. Dominic, St. Thomas). Their difference lies not, therefore, in content first, but rather in approach. The opening to the present work has fully shown this [“Confrontation with Étienne Gilson”]. I *myself* have *also* followed the path that goes from Bonaventure to Thomas Aquinas. And yet it is in no way a question of leaving the one (the Seraphic Doctor) to turn towards the other (the Angelic Doctor). Rather, we should hold onto them both, be it non-simultaneously and according to differentiated modes.²

I have said this from the preface to the present work onward. There is, or we have read here, a *St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology*. Far from being confined only to the debate with metaphysics (Gilson), or from wanting to exit from it (Heidegger), *my* St. Bonaventure attempted to “describe” rather than to “explain,” to show *how* the mystical is said in the phenomenological, or also to what extent this God, hyper-known to us (manifestation), is also said through metaphors made to express him rather than in order to conceptualize him (interpretation). But perhaps there is now also what it is fitting to call a *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy* (and no longer only into theology). I have, moreover, emphasized this, but in a debate with and concerning St. Augustine this time: “God comes ‘into philosophy’ only when he enters *also and at the same time* ‘into theology.’ Here the hypothesis of onto-theo-logy collapses of itself: not only in the sense that it is historically inaccessible (except in Thomas of Erfurt, the pseudo-Duns Scotus on whom the young Martin Heidegger worked), but because it remains in principle impossible within the insoluble *tension of metaphysics and theology*.”³ We will therefore maintain here the hypothesis of a double entrance, or rather of a single double-wing door: *the entrance of God into theology* on the one hand (St. Bonaventure) and *the entrance of God into philosophy* on the other (St. Thomas Aquinas). But in both cases, as in all cases, it is still a question of the “same God” who enters, whether it is a question of his coming into us by concepts (natural theology) or by revelation alone (revealed theology).

We will certainly hold onto *theo*-logy, but without failing at the same time to aim at its counterpoint in *theo*-logy. There is no reason why God would have given us “reason,” which

¹ This text initially appeared in the *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, Colloque du Centenaire, July-Sept. 2008, vol. 92 n° 3, pp. 527-556 under the complete title “Limite théologique et finitude phénoménologique chez saint Thomas d’Aquin” (text translated and reworked for the occasion).

² Cf. *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank, New York, Fordham University Press, 2016, ch. 5, pp. 121-136: “Tiling and Conversion” [Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure].

³ *God, the Flesh and the Other: From Irenaeus to Duns Scotus*, trans. William Christian Hackett, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2015, p. 26.

is what is proper to man, according to Thomas Aquinas, if he were not to say with that very (natural) reason that which at least in part concerns himself. Everything would then occur as if the creative act amounted to denying himself, preferring to turn away from the most precious thing he had given and refusing it all access to him into the bargain, as if he wanted, as it were, to get rid of it, or at the very least to mistrust it. Suspicion with regard to so-called “natural” reason has perhaps had its day, including within the framework of phenomenology. Not that we should this time boldly return to metaphysics against phenomenology, according to a backlash that would be quite inappropriate – but only because *his* nature gives itself to *my* nature and because “there also” he comes to manifest himself fully.

The “phenomenology of the limit” developed here (my perspective, inherited both from Bonaventure [the incarnate] and Thomas Aquinas [the limited]) is, then, certainly distinct from the “phenomenology of the saturated phenomenon” (Jean-Luc Marion’s perspective, inherited from Denys the Areopagite). Let us be careful, however, and I have insisted on this from the *incipit* of the present work onward. It is not a question of opposition but rather of making visible the possibility of a differentiated, *other path*: a “phenomenology from below and of carnal ordinariness” on the one hand and a “phenomenology from above or of the saturation of phenomena” on the other.⁴ One never wins by speaking “against,” for one always remains “entirely against.” Moreover, recognizing one’s debt is not committing parricide but rather acting such that the child grows and that, once an adult also, he will be able to emancipate himself. I will therefore here follow my own way, sure that on this route, and precisely, I must now come across Thomas Aquinas, after having followed Bonaventure along such a good path.⁵

In the manner of Étienne Gilson in his time, (cf. Opening), the effigy of the Angelic Doctor indeed rises up as a tutelary figure for every medievalist who is committed not only to the plural tradition of a differentiated Middle Ages (a current largely asserted in France precisely against Étienne Gilson) but who dares to stand facing the greatest ones, against whom he cannot avoid measuring himself. In this debate, or, better, this “loving struggle,” I will not interrogate, or will no longer interrogate here, the question of the aforementioned ontotheology, of the status of beingness (*étantité*), or of the sense of alterity, having, moreover, already treated of it⁶ – but rather that of “finitude” or of the “limit” that is assigned to it. There is indeed an originality of Thomas Aquinas in relation to Martin Heidegger himself, which brings them closer just as much as it separates them: the “limit” (or finitude) is not only stated in a Christian system, it is, in a sense, wanted and desired by God. Paradoxically, the distinction of the created and the uncreated does not come, for Aquinas, to make the believer leave his humanity in order to insert him into divinity, but on the contrary it teaches him to stand within and even to sink ever further into the human, for it is there that the divine first stands. God “wants” the limit and “wants us” in the limit. This is the great teaching of Thomas Aquinas, not against Bonaventure (the limit in corporeality) but otherwise than him (the limit in the created). In them both, one takes “ways” (*viae*), but in two divergent senses: a steep climb or verticality on the one hand (Bonaventure) and a winding path or horizontality on the other (Thomas Aquinas). Whereas for the former it is a question of

⁴ Cf. *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, trans. George Hughes, New York, Fordham University Press, 2012, § 5, pp. 19-20: “Christian Specificity and the Ordinariness of the Flesh”.

⁵ Concerning the whole of this journey, see my work that is quasi-autobiographical, or that at the very least retraces an intellectual itinerary in debate: *Parcours d’embûches: S’expliquer*, Paris, Editions franciscaines, 2016 (response to the collection *L’analytique du passage: Dialogue et confrontations avec Emmanuel Falque* (dir. Cl. Brunier-Coulin), Paris, Ed. franciscaines, 2016 (730p.)).

⁶ Cf. *God, the Flesh, and the Other*, ch. 1 (Augustine), ch. 2 (Scotus Erigena), ch. 8 (Thomas Aquinas) respectively.

raising oneself by degrees up to the *apex affectus* by which we unite ourselves to God (*Itinerarium*), one needs, for the second, to walk along another path, only pulling oneself up to God in order to access the possibility of recognizing oneself as a created human, and therefore of needing the uncreated divine to differentiate oneself (*S. th. Ia, q. 2*).⁷

That man *is not* God: such is the aim, and the principal originality, of Thomas Aquinas – not because the human would regret not being the divine, as if he had fallen from an identification that never existed, but because he does not have to be the divine since he is created. In this sense, the contemporary avowal of finitude as the blocked horizon of existence (phenomenology) could not be indifferent to its rootedness in the created as the Being-there⁸ of man, called first to be and to remain human, albeit “in” the Son of Man, through whom God became man (medieval philosophy). Moreover, and to differentiate the traditions without, however, opposing them, the aim in Thomas Aquinas is not only humanization (Latin vision) but also divinization (Greek vision). Or more precisely, it is here divinization (Greek vision) in that it first passes through its pure and simple humanization (Latin vision). It is Thomas Aquinas’s domain, and perhaps what is proper to him, to have known how to unite Latin and Greek in his concept of analogy (proportionality and eminence). The contemporary phenomenologist cannot, then, ignore this and must draw the lesson from it, provided that he endeavors no longer only to dictate to the theologian what he must do, for lack of knowing how to practice it, but that he needs on the contrary to learn and to receive from him a possibility for thinking that he had not envisioned until now: namely, a “conversion” or a “metamorphosis” of concepts that he had first developed, the horizon of “finitude” in particular.⁹

Introduction: Limit and finitude

a. Thomas Aquinas and phenomenology

The multiple interpretations and confrontations of Thomistic thought with phenomenology certainly do not date from today – a proof, if there is one, that the relevance of Thomism has never ceased to haunt phenomenologists themselves. The examples are multiple and even genealogical, such that a veritable tradition, even a lineage, can be established from the rise of phenomenology to Thomas Aquinas. Husserl first, who via Brentano inherited the concept of “*intentio*,” of which recent studies, in analytic philosophy as in phenomenology, have shown the direct link with the *Summa Theologica*.¹⁰ Edith Stein

⁷ This perspective of the limit of the created and the uncreated, which founds the act of the Eucharist understood as a “passage from animality to humanity” (in descent) and not only as a way going from “humanity to divinity,” is largely developed in *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist*, trans. George Hughes, Fordham University Press, 2016, chapter 7, pp. 177-198: “The Passover of Animality” (a limit also envisioned in *Eros*, chapter 6, pp. 133-172: “Embrace and Differentiation”).

⁸ [In accordance with standard convention, whenever *être* or *étant* appear as nouns, “Being” translates the former and “being” the latter, except within quotations from Thomas Aquinas, in which the noun “being” always translates *être*. (*Étant* does not appear as a noun in any of the quotations from Aquinas employed here.) To avoid confusion, whenever the standard English translation of Aquinas reads “being” but neither *être* nor *étant* appears in the French, I modified the translation to eliminate the word “being” and follow the French more closely. – Trans.]

⁹ This is precisely the entire sense of the work *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, trans. Hughes, New York, Fordham University Press, 2012.

¹⁰ Cf. as pioneers, Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe for analytic philosophy [*Intention*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1957] and A. de Muralt for phenomenology [*La métaphysique du phénomène: Les origines médiévales et l’élaboration de la pensée phénoménologique*, Paris, Vrin (Reprise), 1985 (articles from 1958 to 1963)]. And for today, D.

next, who, on the occasion of Husserl's 70th birthday (1929), pronounced an "essay of confrontation between the phenomenology of Husserl and the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas" (sic.), even brutally opposing phenomenological "egocentrism" to Thomistic "theocentrism."¹¹ Or also, and of course, Martin Heidegger taking up the "Thomistic philosophy of the *ens creatum*," wrongly accusing it, moreover, of a reduction of the concept of "creation" to that of "production," and this even as the concept of *actum essendi* in Aquinas could have cast much light on the famous forgetting of Being in the eyes of the philosopher from Freiburg.¹² To which one will finally add, at least in order to remember them, on the one hand the Thomistic debate led by E. Gilson concerning a sense of "Christian philosophy" for today and the Heideggerian accusation that it is a "round square",¹³ and on the other hand Jean-Luc Marion's "joyful retraction" (sic.) to make visible a "God without Being" who would not, however, be "without act of Being," be it simply to save Aquinas from the great shipwreck of the supposed "ontotheologians" of the history of philosophy.¹⁴

It is not, however, or it is no longer, the moment to know who among the ancient or medieval philosophers must be counted among the holders of ontotheology – such a posture in reality only designating a certain Avicennian figure of Duns Scotus [Thomas of Erfurt], falsely erected in 1915 by Martin Heidegger as a paradigm of all metaphysical thought.¹⁵ We will be no more satisfied next, and this in the manner of numerous commentators, to simply juxtapose on the one hand what concerns the *actum essendi* in Aquinas and on the other what concerns "Sein" in the philosopher from Freiburg. The reunion with the former (Being in Thomas) cannot, indeed, so cheaply console us for the denunciation of its forgetting in the latter (Being in Heidegger).¹⁶ We will not, finally, be content to focus Thomas Aquinas's relation to modernity solely on the epistemological field of logic [analytic philosophy], as the

Perler (ed.) [*Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, Boston, Brill, 2001], and J. Benoist [*Les limites de l'intentionnalité*, Paris, Vrin, 2005].

¹¹ E. Stein, "Husserl and Aquinas: A Comparison" (1929), in *Knowledge and Faith*, ed. Walter Redmond, Washington, D.C., Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2000, p. 32.

¹² On the error of identifying "creation" with "production," see M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York, Harper & Row, 1971, p. 29: "The inclination to treat the matter-form structure as *the* constitution of every being receives a yet additional impulse from the fact that on the basis of a religious faith, namely, the biblical faith, the totality of all beings is represented in advance as something *created*, which here means *made*." As for the Heideggerian forgetting of the Thomistic *actum essendi* as a counter to the forgetting of Being, I will refer to J.-B. Lotz, *Martin Heidegger et Thomas d'Aquin* (1975), Paris, PUF, 1988, 2nd treatise, pp. 29-48: "l'être selon Heidegger et Thomas d'Aquin."

¹³ Cf. E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (1932), trans. A. H. C. Downes, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, pp. 49-51 [Metaphysics of Exodus and Christian philosophy]; and M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Pold, rev. ed., New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014, p. 8 [the accusation that Christian philosophy is a "round square"].

¹⁴ J.-L. Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'ontothéologie," in *Revue thomiste*, Jan.-March 1995, note 2, p. 65: "Such was my position, following many others, notably in *God Without Being* [the calling into question of the primacy of Being and the contestation of Thomas Aquinas's fundamental position]. It is clear that I must, and with joy besides, today present a *retractatio* on this point." [My translation. – Trans.]

¹⁵ Cf. A. de Libera, *La philosophie médiévale*, Paris, PUF, "Que sais-je?," n° 1044, 1992 (2nd ed. revised), pp. 72-73: "For a medievalist, this (onto-theo-logical) characterization of the essence of Aristotelian metaphysics in fact applies principally to *one of the Latin interpretations of Avicenna* that was imposed in the School." [My translation. – Trans.] This interpretation was in reality based on Martin Heidegger's *Habilitationsschrift* on a pseudo-Duns Scotus [Thomas of Erfurt], *Duns Scotus' Theory of the Categories and of Meaning* (1915), trans. Harold Robbins, Chicago, DePaul University, 1978.

¹⁶ Such was the attempt, praiseworthy in its time, of numerous commentators: the accusation of forgetting Being did not resist the affirmation of the *actum essendi* in Thomas Aquinas (cf., and according to different aims: E. Stein, J.-B. Lotz, J. Caputo, W. Richardson, B. Rioux, M. Lindblad, etc.). We will not, however, confine ourselves to this, precisely because the debate about Being opens onto the debate about the limit and finitude, which is at least as fundamental and demanding as the former.

examination of the structures of consciousness and of language in the 13th century certainly has its philosophical importance but does not bring out, in my view, what concerns the type of experience and the relation to the world that is involved with it [phenomenology].¹⁷ As a phenomenologist, therefore, and as a medievalist according to a path that today has largely been established, I will attempt, for my part, to say only, but radically, that which is, in my view, “the thing itself” of the whole Thomistic attempt in view of our modernity: namely, a veritable thought of the “limit,” understood here as philosophical finitude, also reread in light of theology.¹⁸

b. *Homo viator*

We must affirm this from the start: the couple, or better yet, the marriage, of the “theological limit” and “phenomenological finitude” does not go without saying. Edith Stein, however, had already, in her era (1929) and some two years after the publication of *Being and Time* (1927), pronounced its sentence, commenting precisely on Aquinas’s thought in light of Husserl’s phenomenology: “At our goal, both what we know *in via* [on our earthly journey] and what we take on faith *in via*, we know in another way. The possible extent of our knowledge *during our pilgrimage on earth* is fixed; we cannot *shift its limits*.”¹⁹ We will, therefore, have to resign ourselves to this: “God is not,” according to Thomas Aquinas, and this from the *prima pars* of the *Summa Theologica* onward (q. 88), “*for us* the first object known” – *Deus non est primum quod a nobis cognoscitur*.²⁰ That which God is “in himself” (*in se*) is a thing, and we can certainly demand to know him even as he remains unknown to us – on which, moreover, Thomas here bases the “natural desire” to know God.²¹ But that which God is “for us” (*pro nobis*), or “starting from us” (*a nobis*), is, however, truer “in our home (*chez nous*)” (*apud*) because that is the place where *we* live and where, indubitably, *we* stand: “In our universe – or rather ‘in our home’ (*apud*) –,” as Aquinas emphasizes concerning the simplicity of God (q. 3), “composite things are better than simple things.”²²

This crucial Thomistic distinction between man “*in via*” and man “*in patria*” must also be counted among those major epistemological ruptures in the history of thought, of which it is unsure that we have taken the full measure, at least in relation to its pertinence for contemporary philosophy. Aquinas is certainly a theologian of transcendence. But he first deploys a “philosophy of immanence,” endeavoring thereby to rejoin the question of “the human per se” – not independently of God (in which he here differs from contemporary

¹⁷ As for the renewal of Thomistic studies by way of his analytic reading, I refer the French reader to R. Pouivet, *Après Wittgenstein, saint Thomas*, Paris, PUF, 1997, p. 5: “Even though Wittgenstein is assuredly not a commentator on Thomas Aquinas, he, better than any other, could assure an access to Aquinas’s philosophy by calling into question a modern conception of spirit and thought that appeared with Descartes.” [with such diverse Anglo-Saxon authors as Anthony Kenny, Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, John Haldane, Fergus Kerr, etc.]. A “declared anti-Cartesianism” [“l’anti-Descartes” (pp. 31-47)] probably marks the distance from the phenomenological interpretation of Thomas Aquinas (supported by Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*).

¹⁸ Cf. [for the justification of the method] my work *God, the Flesh, and the Other*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2015, Introduction, pp. 12-19: “The Sealed Source.”

¹⁹ E. Stein, “Husserl and Aquinas: A Comparison” (1929), op. cit. [*Knowledge and Faith*], p. 13 (emphasis added). [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, S. th. Ia, q. 88, a. 3, resp.: “Whether God is the first object known by the human mind?” trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Christian Classics Ethereal Library. [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

²¹ S. th., Ia q. 12 a. 1: “Whether any created intellect can see the essence of God?”

²² S. th. Ia, q. 3 a. 7, ad. 2: “Whether God is altogether simple?” [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

philosophy), but because it is on the contrary the task of God's creative project itself to inscribe man in a finitude that both *respects the human condition as a creature* and maintains it in its *incompressible distance from the Creator*: "For everything that is finite by its nature is *limited* according to the nature of some limited genus (*omne quod secundum suam naturam finitum est, ad generis alicuius rationem determinatur*)," as the *Summa Contra Gentiles* insists, by way of a leitmotif. This is why "it is therefore evident that the consideration of creatures has its part to play in building the Christian faith."²³

The hypothesis, also maintained [*The Metamorphosis of Finitude*], of the human "per se" as the point of departure of a metaphysics first rooted in finitude, be it to then be metamorphosed into God, thus finds its most radical confirmation in the Thomist consideration of the "mere human being" (*ab homine puro*), taken and rooted "here below" in its properly "mortal" life. Neither against God nor absent from him, the human "per se" will indeed serve in St. Thomas, as in contemporary philosophy, as a point of departure to a theological metaphysics rooted in finitude, even though the Trinity in St. Bonaventure would also call for an "upheaval" of this humanity in God (Trinitarian monadology): "God cannot be seen in his essence by a *mere human being*," as Aquinas remarkably emphasizes from the first beginnings of the *Summa Theologica* [Ia q. 12] onward, "*except he be separated from this mortal life (nisi ab hac vita mortali separetur)*. [...] But our soul, *as long as we live in this life (quandiu in hac vita vivimus)*, has its being in corporeal matter, hence naturally it knows only what has a form in matter, or what can be known by such a form. [...] Hence it is impossible for the soul of man *in this life (secundum hanc vitam viventis)* to see the essence of God. [...] It is not possible, therefore, that the soul *in this mortal life (quandiu hac mortali vita vivitur)* should be raised up to the supreme of intelligible objects, i.e. to the divine essence."²⁴

Man is therefore first pilgrim man (*homo viator*) in Thomas Aquinas as "mortal man" or in his "state of mortality" (*homo mortalis*), though always and of course oriented towards beatitude. If death is neither the condition nor the domain of finitude, as with its later deployment in Martin Heidegger, it nonetheless marks, and as if in counter-relief²⁵ in Thomas Aquinas, the point on the basis of which the consideration of "this life" (*hac vita*) takes on sense "for us" (*pro nobis*), and in particular in our relation to God. Far from denying all relation to the divine – since we know of its existence [Ia q. 2] while nonetheless being ignorant of its essence [Ia q. 3] – the Thomistic *double vision* "of this earth" and "of the fatherland" therefore orders the entirety of his thought and likewise also his relation to a certain mode or form of finitude. Far from aiming at God only within the framework of the beatific vision, and even though that vision will forever remain the goal, the human will take up here below the means to consider his humanity "per se" in order to see in it the God who, for his part, made the choice to dwell in it (kenosis): "[This] should be understood as referring to the vision had in this life (*de visione viae*)," as Thomas clarifies in *De veritate*, "in which a

²³ CG (*Contra Gentiles*), I, 43 n° 4 ["That God is infinite"], trans. Anton C. Pegis, and II, 2 n°6 ["That the consideration of creatures is useful for the instruction of the faith"], trans. James F. Anderson, respectively. [Translation of the first quotation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque's quotation from the French. – Trans.]

²⁴ S. th. Ia, q. 12, a. 11: "Whether anyone in this life can see the essence of God?" (emphasis added).

²⁵ [The locution *en creux* has the figurative meaning of "implicitly" and could be translated thus, but especially as it later stands in opposition to *en plein* ("in full"), I have chosen to render it as "in counter-relief" to preserve the image it offers. Note also that the word later translated as "hollow" is *creux*.]

person sees God through some form or other. [...] Hence [*in via*] we do not know what God is (*quid est*), but only what he is not (*sed quid non est*).²⁶

c. Theological limit and phenomenological finitude

In what does the “theological limit of man,” such as it is positively wanted by God even and including in his creative project, rejoin, then, the “phenomenological finitude of *Dasein*,” as it is noted at the horizon of our world in its pure immanence? – such is the object of the present study, with all the risks that a contemporary rereading of the thought of Thomas Aquinas presents, but that it also necessitates: “One will perhaps say,” Karl Rahner simultaneously accuses himself and justifies himself, starting with the first pages of *The Spirit in the World* (*Geist in Welt*), “But you are giving an interpretation of St. Thomas drawn from modern philosophy?” Far from considering such an assessment as a criticism, the author accepts it as praise. For ultimately, I ask you, can St. Thomas interest me other than in accordance with the questions that disturb my spirit and that philosophy debates today?²⁷ It is necessary, then, to call phenomenologically for the *roots of finitude* in the limit in theology (1st part), in order to then discover, as if *in counter-relief*, its emergence at the beginning of the *Summa Theologica* (2nd part), in order to finally demand philosophically, as well as theologically, a veritable *consistency of the ens finitum* that phenomenology itself would be wrong to forget (3rd part). The “limit in theology” illuminates “finitude in phenomenology,” not only because the former furnishes the latter with its roots but also because it imposes on the world a “consistency” that is yet more radical, once it is wanted by God rather than simply noted by man.

I. The roots of finitude

1. The status viae or the horizon of finitude

None, frankly, could doubt that finitude, that is (to put it briefly), the “consciousness of the blocked horizon of existence,” marks “the figure of modern man” (M. Foucault). One will certainly be able to object, and this with the support of Thomas Aquinas, that this very finitude could not be thought in theology “in an interminable reference to itself.” It remains, however, no less for all that the base, or at the very least the foundation, starting from which our modernity can and must be thought.²⁸ As I have said, everything is therefore a matter of the “point of departure.” What we discover “first” (*primo*) is neither man *in patria* nor the angel, and still less is it God himself, but man *in via*. The “way” (*via*) is from the beginning a “state” in Thomas Aquinas (*status viae*) – that of pilgrim man held within the horizon of his created Being, although oriented and inhabited by beatitude – whereas it principally appears as a “path” in St. Bonaventure (*Itinerarium*). The *status viae* takes precedence, at least with regard to the departure, over the *Itinerarium*, in that the “way” says *the Being of man here below* or “the state of the present life” (*status praesentis vitae*), rather than the too-immediate desire to be rid of it or to leave it: “Since the human intellect in the present state of life

²⁶ *De veritate*, q. 8 a. 1 ad. 8, trans. Robert W. Mulligan. See also the accurate commentary of J.-P. Torell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 2: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, p. 30.

²⁷ K. Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (1957), trans. William Dyck, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 1994 (cited and translated by J. Doré in K. Rahner, *Aimer Jésus*, Paris, Desclée, Coll. Jésus et Jésus-Christ n° 24, Postface, p. 97). [To follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French, this is my translation. – Trans.]

²⁸ M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, translator not listed, New York, Vintage Books, 1994, p. 312-318: “[O]ur culture crossed the threshold beyond which we recognize our modernity when finitude was conceived in an interminable cross-reference with itself. [...] [M]odern man [...] is possible only as a figuration of finitude” (p. 318).

(*secundum statum praesentis vitae*) cannot understand even immaterial created substances,” clarifies the *Summa*, in search of a point of departure for knowledge that is in conformity with our nature, “much less can it understand the essence of the uncreated substance.”²⁹

We must, therefore, accept the detour, or rather never omit to make the return. The path is always “longer” (*longior*) for the spiritual and corporeal creature first called to remain in his creaturely state (man) than for the purely spiritual creature directly contemplating God in an immediacy that, here below, is not accessible to us and does not even deserve to be missed (the angel): “Man according to his nature (*secundum suam naturam*) is not like the angel,” as Aquinas clarifies in his treatise on the angels, but in reality in order to define man. “Man was not intended to secure his ultimate perfection *at once* (*statim*), like the angel. Hence a *longer way* was assigned to man *than to the angel* (*longior via data est quam angelo*) for securing beatitude.”³⁰ Negative theology, to which I will return, comes not from the excess of the known over the knower in the unlimited (Denys), but conversely from the limitation of the known to the knower by a pure and simple respect for the limit (Thomas Aquinas).

2. The Kantian legacy of Thomism

The consideration of the “fatherland” or of “finitude” as a necessary “point of departure” for the long way [that of man] and contrary to the short way [that of the angel], certainly makes one think of the Jesuit Joseph Maréchal’s “*Point de départ de la métaphysique*” [*Point of Departure of Metaphysics*] that consecrated, in his era and with all the acerbic criticisms of which he was the object, the renewal of post-Kantian Thomism. The father, in a sense, of Karl Rahner in his own relation to Thomas Aquinas, he probably allowed him to discover in Thomas the sense of a “metaphysics of finite knowledge” (the subtitle of *The Spirit in the World*).³¹ Let us not err here, however. If finitude as the possible horizon of Thomist thought cannot stray from its relation to Kant, a point on which I rejoin J. Maréchal or K. Rahner, it is not at all a question here of reducing it to a simple epistemological or gnoseological consideration.

More linked to space and time as “a priori forms of intuition” (Heidegger) than to the imagination in its schematism (Rahner) or to the categories of the understanding (Maréchal), the *philosophical* interpretation of Thomas Aquinas will here find its renewal not in the negation of earlier positions but in their radicalization up to the position of man’s Being-there. The “state of being on the way” (*état de voie*) in the Angelic Doctor (*status viae*) does not fix only the bounds of natural knowledge of God [neo-Kantian perspective] but indicates the positive limits of our “Being-there” per se, up to the affirmation of the positivity of the limit itself [Heideggerian perspective]. Moreover, it would be a blunder, this time from the

²⁹ S. th. Ia q. 88 a. 3, resp.: “Whether God is the first object known by the human mind?”

³⁰ S. th. Ia q. 62 a. 5 ad. 1 (trans. modified [relative to the ed. du Cerf]): “Whether the angel obtained beatitude immediately after one act of merit?” [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.] Thomas Aquinas always avoided the false direction of angelism, the trail of which one will find in my work *God, the Flesh, and the Other*, op. cit. ch. 8, pp. 231-253: “Angelic Alterity (Thomas Aquinas).”

³¹ See, respectively, J. Maréchal, *Le point de départ de la métaphysique*, Paris, Felix Alcan, 1926 [in particular the 5th notebook: “une ontologie de la connaissance”]; K. Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (1957), Bloomsbury Academic, 1994 [in particular pt. 2, § 1, pp. 57-64: “The Point of Departure: The Metaphysical Question”]. ([The subtitle of *Spirit in the World* does not appear in the English translation. – Trans.]) As for the relation of the one to the other, one may profitably read L. Roberts, *The Achievement of Karl Rahner*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1967, pp. 13-15. As for the history of the lineage from J. Maréchal to Thomas Aquinas, see the accurate clarification of B. Pottier, “Maréchal et Thomas d’Aquin,” in P. Gilbert, *Au point de départ, Joseph Maréchal entre la critique kantienne et l’ontologie thomiste*, Bruxelles, Lessius, 2000, p. 27-47.

theological point of view, to not relate the “limit” (in theology) to “finitude” (in phenomenology). For, if there is a gap from the one to the other – from “theology” to “phenomenology” – it is not because the former (theology) does not treat of the same objects as the latter (phenomenology) but because what is simply noted by the former (the horizon of finitude in phenomenology) becomes strangely desired and wanted by the latter (creation within the limit in theology). That one cannot and should not remain confined to Martin Heidegger’s existential analytic – which *The Metamorphosis of Finitude* sought to demonstrate – could not therefore, exempt us from passing via it, at the risk, on the contrary, of entirely missing our modernity and, firstly, the necessity of recognizing ourselves as limited Beings.

3. *The theological legacy of finitude*

Paradoxically, Martin Heidegger himself, in a text recently brought to light (the course of 1938-1939 [GA vol. 60]), insists on the necessity of this link between “phenomenological finitude” and “theological limit,” emphasizing in particular the rooting of the former in the latter: “The expression ‘*finitude*’ (*Endlichkeit*) is chosen within the framework of an inevitable *historical comprehension* and of a revocation of the questions that have been posed up to the present. This word is susceptible to numerous misinterpretations [...]. One can relate it to the *Christian representation* of the created character of every being, and one can even become the victim of the trap of dialectic, according to which it is necessary to think that with the position of the ‘*finite*’ an ‘*infinite*’ would also always be thought. Everywhere here one takes the ‘*finite*’ (*Endliche*) in the sense of a *limited* (*Beschränkten*) and, in truth, of a *limitation* of the being (*Beschränkung von Seiendem*); one thinks ‘*finitude*’ in a metaphysical fashion. The finitude of Being signifies, however, something entirely different: the abyssal character (*Abgrunlichkeit*) of the interval to which belongs not a negativity understood as a lack or a limit but as a distinctive mark (*Auszeichnung*).”³²

From this crucial text of the philosopher from Freiburg, we will retain at least three points for my remarks, which the journey through Thomistic philosophy will have as its task, if not to carry out, then at least to evaluate. (a) The concept of finitude (*Endlichkeit*), according to Heidegger himself, finds its roots in “the Christian representation of the created character of every being.” Said otherwise – and this will be a crucial point in my aim – only the position of a transcendence is at least historically able to bring forth a horizon of immanence, even in order to break with it thereafter. *Qua* created or produced, the world will break with the transcendence that engendered it better than if it were simply posited as unable to be derived from some transcendental (the distance between creation as production *ex nihilo* in Thomas and simple change in Aristotle). Christianity indeed constitutes in this sense, and probably in an exemplary fashion in Thomas Aquinas, the “point of departure” for contemporary thought concerning finitude. (b) “Finitude” cannot be identified right from the start with the “finite.” That is, in Heidegger’s view as also in my own, one of the most frequent errors in the entire modern theological corpus, which takes up for itself the concept of finitude: “In order to uncover the finitude of man, it is not enough to adduce at random any one of his many imperfections,” as the philosopher from Freiburg precisely indicates in *Kant and the Problem*

³² M. Heidegger, *Besinnung*, in *G.A.* vol. 66 [course of 1938-1939], Frankfurt-on-Main, Klostermann, 1990, p. 87-88. Cited and translated by A. Gravil, *Philosophie et finitude*, Paris, Cerf, coll. “La nuit surveillée,” 2007, pp. 411-412. [My translation. – Trans.]

of *Metaphysics* (1929) “In this way we state at best only that man is a finite being.”³³ Finitude or “the fallen Being of Dasein,” to say it this time in the terms of *Being and Time*, (1927), “must not be taken as a ‘fall’ from a purer and higher state. Not only do we lack any experience of this ontically, but ontologically, we lack any possibilities or clues for interpreting it.”³⁴ In short, one who says finitude (*Endlichkeit*) does not necessarily say “finite” (*Ende*) either at the beginning [when leaving the finite] or at the end [when deriving the finite from the infinite]. We will interrogate in this sense numerous contemporary phenomenologists. A sort of “Cartesian preemption of the infinite over the finite” indeed marks, in my view, French phenomenology, be it a question of the “face” (Levinas), of the word (*parole*) (Chrétien), of auto-affection (Henry), or of the “saturation of phenomena” (Marion). Thomas anticipates the danger of ontologism, to which I will return, and could well teach phenomenologists themselves not to leave too quickly the “plane of immanence” to which, however, phenomenology itself was initially linked.³⁵ (c) Without any contrary therefore, finitude is therefore in Heidegger’s view a “distinctive mark” (*Auszeichnung*) of the being as such. Probably it is necessary, here again, to retain henceforth the lesson that the creature’s finitude in Thomas Aquinas is not the degradation or the limitation of an infinite or of an unlimited that should belong to it. From the beginning to the end, that is, from its birth to its glorification, and this by passing via death, the creature remains in its creaturely state, that is, within the limit that is consubstantial with its very Being and never thought as negative. Beatification, and even resurrection, to which I will return, is not for Aquinas the rupture of limits but their assumption for a transformation. Including in the beatific vision, the limit remains because the creature never leaves its creaturely state, even though it becomes capable of welcoming the unlimited in itself. Rather than accusing Christianity of having diverted finitude from its vocation of immanence as soon as Christianity gave birth to it, we will show, contrary to this presumption of Heidegger, and with the support of Thomas Aquinas, that immanence itself is never scorned in a Christian system, even though it relies on transcendence as its principle.

It remains, then, to think otherwise, or anew, Thomas Aquinas himself, and this beginning with the opening and the procedure of the *Summa Theologica* itself, that is, in light of the horizon of this duly sought-for finitude. Certainly nothing appears more daring than to claim to read, or to reread otherwise, the beginning of the *Summa* [q. 1-3]. Everything, or almost everything, seems to have been said about a text of which it is often predicted that it will say nothing more, at least about what we know of it in the bulk of its interpretations. It remains that this would be to doubt the force of this Thomistic thought that is still capable of engendering us. The indefatigable fidelity to the letter of Aquinas, to which I will return,

³³ M. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James S. Churchill, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1962, § 39, p. 226: “The Problem of a Possible Determination of the Finitude in Man.” [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

³⁴ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York, Harper & Row, 1962, § 38, p. 220. [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

³⁵ Cf. my remarks addressed to J.-L. Marion dans *Le combat amoureux: Disputes phénoménologiques et théologiques*, Paris, Hermann, 2014, ch. 4 [“Phénoménologie de l’extraordinaire”], pp. 178-183: “théologie naturelle et retour de l’ontologisme” [pp. 50-53]: “The ontologism of revelation, which Thomas Aquinas [justly] blamed, in opposition to Anselm [...], has perhaps not finished producing certain of its transformations. The essential question today, in phenomenology as in theology, is not uniquely that of the “phenomenon of revelation” or of “God” (with or without Being) but rather that of man or of the receiving subject in his capacity to say, or not, the phenomenon or God: either on the basis of the phenomenon itself or of God in his act of self-revelation [the descending ontological way], or on the basis of man and of his conditions of existence (*in via*) that render impossible any direct access to some beyond (*in patria*) [ascending cosmological way(s)]” (cit. pp. 181-182).

sometimes obscures his spirit. Returning to his intention and ridding ourselves of our preconceptions will therefore show, on the contrary, that the respect for the “limit of man” in Aquinas’s theological aim joins with, and reinforces to the highest degree, the “sense of finitude” in the phenomenological aim of Martin Heidegger and of many others after him. The quest for the *full* (the beatific vision *in patria*) always lets appear the sense of the *hollow* (the distance between man and his necessary limit *in via*). Far from falling in a void, the hollow here marks a “horizon” – precisely that of finitude: first in the relation of philosophy to theology (q. 1), then by the status of the ways to access God (q. 2), and finally in the simplicity accorded to God alone and not to the creature (q. 3). The “deficiency of man” understood as limit rather than as sin (q. 1), the redefinition of the “ways for God” as so many “ways for man” (q. 2), and the imperative of the simplicity of God making visible “our own composition” (q. 3) thus constitute so many theses to be (re)discovered in the hollow/counter-relief of the human that also constitutes, for us today, its fullness.

II. Finitude in counter-relief

1. *Philosophy and theology*

I will neither redo nor retrace here the long history of the Thomistic relation of philosophy to theology. Such is not my aim, nor my proposal, nor my ambition. Within the framework of an attempt at the determination of finitude in Thomas Aquinas himself, I will, nonetheless, want to show – and this will be my first point – that the limit of the finite Being, certainly conceived on the basis of the unlimitedness of an infinite Being, does not necessarily need to relate itself to the unlimited to discover itself in the state of pilgrim man. As I have said, what distinguishes the *itinerarium* in Bonaventure from the *homo viator* in Thomas Aquinas lies in a difference of perspectives rather than in an opposition of ways. Whereas for the former, the pilgrim knows that he is going somewhere, along an ascending pathway (the itinerary that goes from sensible apprehension to the *apex affectus*), for the latter he sees himself on the contrary as on the path (*sur le chemin*) (in the limit of the *pro nobis* or the *in via*). The “way” (*via*) or the “itinerary” (*itinerarium*) in Bonaventure is rather a “state” (*status*) in Thomas Aquinas, for which reason one will legitimately seek a determination of finitude in the latter [Thomas] rather than in the former [Bonaventure].

The time of finitude or of the limit as such thus properly marks the time of *philosophy* for Thomas Aquinas, even though it always remains embedded in theology: “In the teaching of philosophy (*in doctrina philosophiae*),” clarifies the *Summa contra Gentiles*, “which considers creatures in themselves (*secundum se*) and leads us from them (*ex eis*) to the knowledge of God, the first consideration is [therefore] about creatures (*prima est consideratio creaturis*); the last, of God (*et ultima de Deo*). But in the teaching of faith (*in doctrina vero fidei*), which considers creatures only in their relation to God (*non nisi in ordine ad Deum*), the consideration of God [therefore] comes first (*primo est consideratio Dei*), that of creatures afterwards (*et postmodum creaturarum*).”³⁶ Everything is thus a matter of the point of departure, and of a difference of views, and not of a distinction of objects: creatures come “first” and God “last” in philosophy, and God comes “first” and creatures “last” in theology. Moreover, it is the very relation to the divine that is envisioned here, with theology always referring directly to its model, whereas philosophy restricts itself to the simple consistency of things as such: “the teaching of the Christian faith deals with creatures so far as

³⁶ CG, II, 4, n° 5.

they reflect a certain likeness of God (*quaedam Dei similitudo*) [...],” clarifies the *Summa contra Gentiles*. “[H]uman philosophy considers them as they are [...].”³⁷

Without falsely opposing an ascending philosophy to descending theology, since the theologian also discovers the effects of grace, as the philosopher discovers the effects of creatures, it is therefore the proper task of the “human approach to philosophy” (*philosophia humana*) to be able to consider creatures “in themselves” (*secundum se*) or “according to their proper mode” (*secundum quod huiusmodi*), and to not envision them “uniquely in relation to God” (*non nisi in ordine Deum*), which, moreover, does not exclude them from being positively thus related. Such a “consideration of the creatures” (*consideratio creaturarum*) henceforth appears as crucial for the entire history of philosophy, in that it turns the Bernardine *consideratio* away from only contemplating God [*Treatise on Consideration*] towards the world itself and the proper thickness that it requires [*Summa Theologica*]. Discovering himself in the state of a man “on” the path (“*sur*” *le chemin*) rather than “en” route (“*en*” *chemin*), and considering creatures as a philosopher (*consideratio creaturarum*), “the mere human being” thus first takes note of his Being-there [*Dasein*] to next discover himself as already open to God. The famous adage of the *Summa Theologica* – “*cum gratia naturam non tollat sed perficiat*” (“grace does not destroy nature but perfects it”)³⁸ – here founds a metaphysics of finitude that we will take at least as a point of departure, waiting also this time for God to indicate the point of arrival.

We will wonder, then: is such a departure by philosophy really necessary? Should we not confine ourselves only to the Bonaventurian perspective in which God enters into philosophy only by not entering into it, entering precisely, and only, into theology? *St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology* (the work) here paradoxically finds its counterpoint in what I now call a *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Entrance of God into Philosophy* (the afterword). It is not that the ways are entirely opposed, as I have said, but that they are complementary, differentiated, and above all committed otherwise.³⁹ For if phenomenology appears, in a sense, to be of Bonaventurian inspiration in the consideration of the absolute rather than of the limit (the face, the word (*parole*), autoaffection, flesh, the saturation of phenomena), it also waits to find again its Thomistic perspective that originally marked its birth certificate (the horizon, the limit, the world, the thickness of the flesh, etc.). In short, if there is a “theological turn in French phenomenology” (D. Janicaud), this amounts less to accusing phenomenologists of some infidelity to phenomenological orthodoxy than to interrogating the unthought decision for a primacy of the absolute (more Bonaventurian) over the necessary maintaining of the point of departure in finitude (more Thomistic).⁴⁰ In order to no longer arbitrarily oppose “Christianity of revelation” on the one hand and “atheism of finitude” on the other, we will therefore maintain that “revelation” and “finitude” together belong to the perspective of Christian theology, depending on whether one gives oneself for point of departure either the “unlimitedness of the Trinity *in patria*” (Bonaventure) or the “limit of our state *in via*” (Thomas). A *positivity of the limit*, impossible to derive from sin and therefore impossible to reduce to a mere *limitation* is also seen in Thomas Aquinas from the opening of the *Summa Theologica* onward: “Whether sacred doctrine is nobler than other sciences?” (Ia q. 1 a. 5).

³⁷ CG, II, 4, n°1.

³⁸ S. th. Ia q. 1 a. 8, ad. 2.

³⁹ Cf. *Crossing the Rubicon*, § 17, pp. 128-131: “On ‘Tiling’ or Overlaying,” [Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure].

⁴⁰ Cf. *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, § 5, pp. 16-19: “The Preemption of the Infinite.”

2. Deficiency as limit

Whether it is indeed a question of “doubt for us” (*dubitatio pro nobis*) in what concerns articles of faith or sacred doctrine’s need to use the philosophical sciences “as of the lesser, and as handmaidens” (*tanquam inferioribus et ancillis*), the Angelic Doctor offers one and the same reason: the “weakness of our intelligence” (*propter debilitatem intellectus nostri*) [ad. 1] or the “weakness of our spirit” (*propter defectum intellectus nostri*)⁴¹ (repeated twice [ad. 1 et ad. 2]). One will here notice the prudence of the translators, who take care to not transcribe *debilitas* as a form of “debility” issued from an understanding corrupted by sin, or *defectio* as a sort of “deficiency,” or even a sort of “defeat,” of a soul that supposedly did not succeed at maintaining itself in its state of perfection. By translating it as “weakness,” the contemporary editors of the *Summa Theologica* here preserve a neutrality that it is precisely the interpreter’s task to question.⁴²

If the “doubt” (*dubitatio*) that can arise regarding the articles of faith “is not [indeed] due to an uncertainty in the things themselves (*incertitudinem rei*), but to the weakness (*debilitatem*) of our intelligence”⁴³ it is not therefore, in my view, because the thing is “doubtful” in itself or because we can simply “err” with regard to it. Taking up Aristotle word for word, and therefore here outside any framework of sin, it is the dazzle of the truth that first makes the articles of faith difficult for us to understand – “like the owl’s eye faced with the sun’s light” [*Metaphysics*, Alpha 1.2 [993b9]]: “Nothing prevents (*nihil prohibet*),” as Aquinas emphasizes, here citing the Stagirite, “what is in itself the more certain (*certius secundum naturam*) from seeming to us the less certain (*esse quoad nos minus certum*)” [ad. 1].⁴⁴ Although failure as “insufficiency” or “error” in the act of knowing certainly appears in the *respondeo* simply to mark the degree of certainty of purely human knowledge [the “certitude from the natural light of human reason [...] can err (*postest errare*) [...]”, “error” or rather the “weakness of our intellect” (*debilitas intellectus nostri*) is not, therefore, of the same nature in the *ad primum* of the same article [q. 1 a. 5], for one who knows how to read or how to perceive it. On the one hand, there is man who can err with respect to the infallible truth of sacred science [*respondeo*], and on the other hand, there is the limit of our intelligence that cannot affirm that it knows certainly, as pilgrim man, the articles of faith [*ad primum*]. Finitude indeed stands there, *in counter-relief*, in our state *in via* (doubt about the articles of faith [a. 5, ad. 1 et ad. 2: limitation of our sight]), while the superiority of sacred doctrine over the other sciences seeks to be said, *in full*, in the aim of man *in patria* ([a. 5 resp.], here supported by the “science of God and the blessed” [a. 2, resp.: dazzle of the light]).

This reading *in counter-relief* of the *Summa Theologica*, which from the inaccessibility of the light recognizes first and positively our own obscurity, in my view accounts precisely for the famous subalternation of philosophy to theology. The gnoseological aim (the debate about natural theology) indeed could not be understood independently of its existential and

⁴¹ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁴² One will note here the gap between the translation of the edition of the “Revue des jeunes” [“debility”] and that of the Éditions du Cerf [“weakness”]. The latter precisely grants more liberty to the commentator in that it draws, at least in a manner one can envision, the nature of the human spirit to the side of the “limit” (weakness) rather than that of “limitation” or even “corruption” (deficiency or debility). Probably all the originality of Thomas Aquinas lies in that he envisioned it thus, making of the state of man *in via* the state of a man limited by his nature (as a corporeal and spiritual being), rather than the state of an inveterate sinner from another condition that he would have to envy (the temptation of angelism or of the creature that is purely spiritual and is stripped of the carnal or of the limit).

⁴³ [Translation modified. – Trans.]

⁴⁴ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

ontological foundation (the limited condition of our human Being-there). Certainly “our spirit is weak,” understood here as “limited” (*defectus intellectus nostri*), and therefore the absolute superiority of sacred doctrine over the philosophical sciences is imposed. But this weakness, or, better, this “limit,” is also what constitutes its force – to the point that the unlimited precisely needs the limit to be said to man: “Besides (*et hoc*),” as Aquinas insists in a concession always turned into a rule, “that sacred doctrine thus uses the other sciences is not due to its own defect or insufficiency, but to the weakness of our spirit, which is more easily led (*facilius manudicitur*) by what is known through natural reason (from which proceed the other sciences) [...]” (a. 5 ad. 2).⁴⁵ One could not, therefore, be clearer. The unlimitedness of revelation does not regret the limit, certainly of reason, but also of the body or of sensation. On the contrary, it wants it and requires it because the limit is more in conformity with our status *in via* and even with our state as creatures in general. Whereas the limit yet results only from the *excess* of the unlimited (the dazzle of the sun’s light for the owl’s eye in the Thomistic reprise of Aristotle and then of Denys [ad. 1]), it this time positively becomes its *auxiliary* to *make visible* what it itself teaches, but by another way – certainly more limited (natural reason), but also more accessible (in direct conformity with our status *in via*): “[Sacred doctrine] can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teachings more manifest (*ad maiorem manifestationem*)” (ad. 2).⁴⁶

The ambition here is clearly displayed. The “limit” or “finitude” is the way that suits our state of being on the way (*status viae*), in that it takes our nature in its “Being-there” and does not dispose of it before having definitively established a foothold in our “here below.” A double “quasi-phenomenological” relation of philosophy to theology thus forms here under the pen of Aquinas, provided that we still dare to spin the metaphor: relation of “finitude” first, in the limit of the reason that does not necessarily, or at least consciously, call for unlimitedness (“the *weakness of our spirit* [...] is more easily led by what is known through natural reason”), and relation of “manifestation” or of phenomenality next, in the role of epiphanic auxiliary that revelation precisely confers on reason (“to make its teachings *more manifest*”). Although everything is given by the unlimitedness of Revelation in the framework of a *Summa Theologica*, “nothing prevents,” therefore, the limit of the body or of the reason from being able in part to say it in its departure (finitude) and even from manifesting it (phenomenalization). The *concession*, I have said– “nothing prevents (*nihil prohibet*)” [ad. 1] or “besides” (*et hoc*) [ad. 2] – in each case becomes a *rule*, once no obstacle is any longer posed to the possibility of saying God and of first saying oneself within the framework of the limit of our creaturely state. Thus the cosmological ways to go towards God (q. 2) are less “positively” modes of access for going to the divine (a. 3) than “negatively” the only possibility or possibilities that remain (the works) once no direct or immediate way appears practicable any longer (a. 1).⁴⁷

3. *The ways for God as ways for man*

⁴⁵ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁴⁶ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁴⁷ This law of the concession being turned into a rule here serves as a principle for a reading in counter-relief of finitude in Thomas Aquinas. Constantly repeated – *nihil prohibet* (q. 1 a. 5 ad. 1; q. 2 a. 2 ad. 1), *et hoc* (q. 1 a. 5 ad. 2), *nihilominus* (q. 7 a. 3 ad. 3)... –, a detailed study of this, put to the test of the text, would probably authorize a renewed reading of Thomas Aquinas in his distance from Denys rather than in his coincidence: a negative theology by the test of the “limit” of man *in via* (proper to Thomas Aquinas) rather than by the excess and dazzle of the “givenness” of God *in patria* (Denys and his current revival in the framework of phenomenology).

I will not retrace here the multiplicity of ways, so well-known that one does not know what more to say about them. The wedding of the “theological limit” and “phenomenological finitude” compels us, however, to celebrate the undying alliance in which they find themselves tied. We know that Thomas’s originality lies less in the ways or in their multiplicity (q. 2 a. 3: “Whether God exists?”) than in the manner of introducing them (q. 2 a. 1: “Whether the existence of God is self-evident?”). As a proof of this, when the Angelic Doctor sets out the ways, in the *Contra Gentiles* for example, he speaks less of “his ways” than of “arguments by which both *philosophers* and *Catholic teachers* have proved that God exists” (CG I, 13, emphasis added); and when he calls for a multiplicity of ways, this list appears neither exhaustive nor even absolutely necessary, at least in that the *Compendium Theologiae*, written at the same time as the *prima pars*, only produces, for its part, a single one of the ways.⁴⁸ The originality, once again, comes from the limit (our state *in via*) and not from exceeding it (the rush towards the *patria*) or from its goal to be reached (the object, God himself). The first necessity for the human is not to immediately rejoin the divine, at the risk of losing in the supposed identification with the Creator that which is the distance from the creature. It amounts rather and on the contrary to accepting the “detour,” for what will reveal itself, *in fine*, as a “return”: passing *first* via man to go to God, be it on the basis of works that he arranged *for us* in order for us to ascend to him.

The adversary aimed at from the opening of Question 2 onward is in reality known – and so famous even in the eyes of Aquinas that it becomes useless to name him. I have, of course, here invoked the *Proslogion* of Anselm of Canterbury and his famous so-called ontological argument, as it is explained by Thomas Aquinas: “But as soon as the signification of the word “God” is understood, it is at once seen that God exists. For by this word is signified that being than which nothing greater can be conceived (*id quo maius significari non potest*)” (q. 2 a. 1 obj. 2).⁴⁹ Despite the transformation of the formula (*significari* and no longer *cogitari* [obj. 2]), its statement in a logical form (identification of the subject and the predicate [resp.]), and the opposition of thought and of reality as existing in itself [ad. 2], the Angelic Doctor’s exposition clearly shows that the argument is understood, and even often taught, but repeating it is not first his aim. The intention is different: not the validity of the argument, but its impossible practicability for us: “Therefore I say that this proposition “God exists,” *of itself* (*in se*) is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject [...]. Now because *we* do not know the essence of God (*sed quia nos non scimus de Deo quid est*), the proposition is not self-evident *for us* (*non est nobis per se nota*); but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known *by us* (*quoad nos*), though less known in their nature – namely, by effects (*scilicet per effectus*)” (a. 1, resp.).⁵⁰

We must resign ourselves, and this in spite of the multiple and false interpretations of the Angelic Doctor that would seek to turn us away from this, and make ourselves believe that he would still be seeking a proof if he took here the concept of God as his principal object. *We* are the real object of the proof, or, better, of the way, more than God himself. Or rather, *we ourselves proving* constitute the exact “argument,” rather than God as such. It matters little, indeed, whether we ascend to God by movement, by efficient causes, by contingency, by degrees of being, or by ends. The multiplication of the ways only shows that the ways matter little. “Do we have the means to prove, and by what means can we prove?” – such is the quasi-transcendental, and surprisingly modern, question that Thomas Aquinas poses here, and

⁴⁸ Consult on this point the judicious remarks of L. Renault, *Dieu et les créatures selon Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris, PUF, 1995, pp. 32-38.

⁴⁹ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁵⁰ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

this against all the reductions to a pure objectivism that do not belong to him. To this interrogation, which therefore determines our belonging to finitude, the response sounds clearly and distinctly for the one who knows how to hear it: immediate access to God, of the type of the Anselmian argument (identification of essence and existence), belongs to the angels rather than to men. Not having the means *in via* to know a proposition that is evident “in itself” (*in se*) concerning God’s existence, we must “for us” (*nobis*) pass via what is better known “by us” or “starting from us” (*quoad nos*). If the “invisible perfections of God are made visible to the intellect by means of his works,”⁵¹ to take up the famous adage, cited by Thomas, from the epistle to the Romans (Rom. 1:20 [a. 2 sed contra]), this exegesis of the world comes in reality less from the cosmos itself than from the necessity, *in what concerns us*, of finding a means adapted to the limited Being that we are in order to ascend to God: “Demonstration can be made in two ways: one is through the cause (*per causam*), and is called ‘a priori,’ and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect (*per effectum*), and is called demonstration ‘a posteriori’; this is to argue from what is only first *in the order of our knowledge* (*per ea quae sunt priora quoad nos*). When an effect is better known *to us* than its cause (*nobis est manifestior quam sua causa*), from the effect we proceed to knowledge of the cause” (Ia q. 2 a. 2, resp., emphasis added).⁵² In short, and the thing itself manifests itself once one knows how to read (it): the knowing subject takes precedence over the known object in the clearing of the ways in Thomas Aquinas, and nothing is more to be feared than the presumption of a direct access to God or the danger of ontologism (knowledge of the Absolute in its very Being). The first affirmation of “existing” in Thomas (*an sit*) is not a declaration of objectivity, as is sometimes wrongly believed: “the first thing we must know of any being is whether it exists” (*primum enim quod oportet intelligi de aliquo est an sit*) [a. 2 sed contra, emphasis added].⁵³ The declaration concerns what is “first to be known” rather than the “existence” of what is known. It does not address the object itself but on the contrary marks the subjective avowal of a finite being that must first pass via its proper limits and those of the world (cosmological ways) in its impossibility of directly accessing God (ontological way). The cosmological ways – the last resort of an angelism that is not only inaccessible but is as perilous as it is undesirable here below – here serve as a bridge for an ontological argument that is certainly *valid* in the beatific vision (knowledge of essence) but *impracticable* in the state of wayfaring man (passage by existence).⁵⁴ Whereas numerous interpreters bet on a *positive excess of essence* relative to the negative narrowness of existence, we will, on the contrary, have to recognize for ourselves (*pro nobis*) a *positive limit of existence* relative to an essence that is forever inaccessible here below. The “owl” that knows (Thomas), rather than the dazzling sun (Denys), accords with man’s limit in Thomas Aquinas, and this well before Duns Scotus, who, on this point, gives only the reprise: “it is not the sun but the owl’s eye that explains why it does not see the sun.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁵² [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁵³ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁵⁴ The somewhat caricatural opposition of “Being” and “gift” should in this sense be nuanced according to the context of its enunciation. St. Thomas imposes the primacy of existing over engendering not of itself [a necessary retraction regarding my *St. Bonaventure and the Entrance of God into Theology*, op. cit., p. 101] but only in virtue of the not immediately accessible character of the gift or of essence for man here below. The danger of “ontologism” should in this sense be pointed out not only with regard to medieval philosophy (Anselm or Bonaventure facing Thomas) but also with regard to contemporary philosophy and phenomenology in particular. Cf. “Phénoménologie de l’extraordinaire (à propos de J.-L. Marion),” in *Le combat amoureux*, op. cit., ch. V, pp. 198-183: “Théologie naturelle et retour de l’ontologisme” (*supra*, note 33).

⁵⁵ Cf. E. Gilson, in a commentary on Duns Scotus, but which applies already here to Thomas Aquinas, *Jean Duns Scot, Introduction à ses positions fondamentales*, Paris, Vrin, 1952, p. 466. On this point, see my work

III. Holding oneself to the limit

Recognizing that the “ways for God” are “ways for man” thus demands of man that he *hold himself first to his limits*, even though God himself has given him by his works, which themselves are also limited, the means to ascend unto his unlimited Being. This is a holding of oneself to the self that, in my view, founds, with the necessary respect for a *de facto* if not *de jure* finitude (q. 2), [1] first the argument of the famous *preambula fidei* (a. 2), [2] next the organicity of the ways in general (a. 3), [3] and finally the possible treatment and resolution of a phenomenology of the inapparent. Three stages, or three steps, that lead us, at least in a first movement, from the *preambula fidei* to the horizon of finitude as such – without ever leaving the horizon of “this” world by which we are first constituted.

1. From the *preambula fidei* to the horizon of finitude

[1] Against any “anthropological reduction” and its false accusation (Balthasar / Rahner),⁵⁶ the “preliminary truths” in reality matter less in their constraining prism of a divine truth that is ceaselessly limited by human prerogatives than in the “path to be traveled” (*ad articulos*) that they demarcate by a simple respect for our *status viae* that compels us to pass via the world to go to God (cosmological ways): “The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, as the Apostle says (Rom. 1:19), are not articles of faith (*non sunt articuli fidei*), but *preliminary truths that lead us to the articles (sed preambula fidei ad articulos)*” (a. 2 ad. 1, emphasis added).⁵⁷ By separating too much the *preambula fidei* from their process of finitude in which they remain always caught, the critics have progressively erected as an in-itself what in reality is true only of our state *in via*. The path towards what is to be demonstrated (*ad articulos*) indeed imposes the preliminary truths of the faith (*preambula fidei*) and not the preliminary truths of the path to be traveled. The existence of God becomes precisely “demonstrable” in Aquinas (*demonstrabile* [a. 2]) not on the basis of the Dionysian radiance of the truth to be demonstrated (Anselmian ontological argument), but by the strangely modern virtue of our own capacities for demonstration supported by the world that is given to us (Thomistic cosmological ways). Finitude lies precisely in the fact that it is necessary to pass via man and via his own limits to go to God. In this lies the fundamental sense of demonstration: less in the objective act of “demonstrating” (*demonstrare*) than in the subjective capacity to demonstrate or to render the thing “demonstrable”: *utrum Deum esse sit demonstrabile?*⁵⁸

For the same reason and in the same article [q. 2 a. 2], in a relation of philosophy to theology that it here remains to question again, “faith presupposes natural knowledge (*fides praesupponit cognitionem naturalem*), even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected (*sicut gratia naturam, et perfectio perfectibile*)” ([*ibid.*] a. 2 ad. 1). The famous adage could not here be understood outside of its context, precisely that of finitude, or at the very least of the limitation of “nature” to “my” nature. The *presupposition of natural knowledge by faith*, or of *nature by grace*, does not mark, as is sometimes repeated at will, an objective in-itself of the world that would precede us or the

God, the Flesh, and the Other, op. cit., ch. 9: “The Singular Other (John Duns Scotus)” (in particular pp. 260-262: “The Limitation of Nature to My Nature”).

⁵⁶ Cf. H. Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2004, ch. 2, pp. 31-50: “The Anthropological Reduction.”

⁵⁷ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁵⁸ Ia, q. 2, a. 2 [title].

hypothesis of a possible Being of God that would only follow the Being-there of man. On the contrary, it consecrates *for us*, as also *for God* in his act of creation and of redemption, this world as the true world because we there gain a foothold by way of a point of departure of our knowledge, once we are rooted in it. The limitation of “nature” to “my” nature is not folded into itself in a critical subjectivism, of which one is often wrongly accused, but on the contrary is an openness to the world on the basis of an I, my own, that respects its creaturely state and its distance from the Creator as it is also wanted and desired by God himself. Once again, the *limit* is not here a *limitation* in the sense of an apophatism that is as crushing in the dazzle of its light as it is nostalgic from being unable to aspire to more. The consideration of the “limit” marks, on the contrary, respect by God himself for my creaturely state *in via* and his ultimate desire that “nature” be also “mine,” in a sharing of properties that makes it so that nothing that is mine in my “here” remains foreign to what is his in his “over there”: “[Demonstration] through the effect (*demonstratio per effectum*),” as the *respondeo* insists in an originality that should be emphasized, [a posteriori demonstration], “is *first* in the order of *our* knowledge (*per ea quae sunt prioria quoad nos*)” (a. 2 resp.).

[2] Whence the true stake of the ways, in their organicity in general: not only, in my view, at their end (J.-L. Marion), but at their beginning (my own hypothesis). If the first of the ways – by movement – appears, according to Thomas, as “the most manifest” (*manifestior*), it is because “it is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion” (Ia q. 2 a. 3, resp.). What matters here is not the end: the “*quod omnes dicunt Deum*” (and this we call God), concerning which one could wonder, rightly or wrongly, if it is not necessary to read in it an indication of ontotheology and of the identification of God’s icon with the idol of his concept.⁵⁹ It is found rather in its beginning: the most manifest (*manifestior*) is the most evident “for us” (*nobis*) because it is first a question “of us” (*quoad nos*). The reading of the ways upside down, or rather right side up (from their beginning), restores their true right: that of anchoring us in the finitude of our own limit rather than making us bend beneath the excess of a glory that always exceeds its concept. There are in reality “ways” to go to God, precisely because we are “on the way,” that is, *in our own existence*. It is known that the “path of the world” or the cosmological ways are not proofs. But that the ways themselves are only a “path for our state of being on the path,” (*état de chemin*) – such is what is found in the necessary rereading for today of the “theological limit” as “phenomenological finitude” in Thomas Aquinas. There are no *viae* in Aquinas (a. 3: the five ways) independent of the *status viae* that precisely constitutes our state here below (a. 2: critique of the ontological argument). Whence the diversity of ways, which indicates less, in my view, this time, the plurality of itineraries than the importance of remaining in what constitutes the Being-there of man as “Being on the way.” Rather than the goal (God himself), the method or the manner of reaching it matters more here (the ways of our world). And in this “method,” precisely, resides man’s Being-there: *meta ê odos* – on the way.

[3] Whence the paradoxically retrospective resolution, precisely for the reading of Thomas Aquinas, of the conflict that invigorates all phenomenology and the hypothetical “phenomenology of the inapparent.” I have said, and even written, that French phenomenology suffers today, like Anselm, from an excess of ontologism that could make us wrongly believe in a direct access to the absolute in the overflow of the event onto the

⁵⁹ J.-L. Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies* (1977), trans. Thomas A. Carlson, New York, Fordham University Press, 2001, p. 10: “In short, the question of the existence of God is posed *less before the proof than at its end*, when it is no longer a question simply of establishing that some concept can be called *God*, nor even that a certain being (*étant*) puts that name into operation, but more radically that that concept or that being (*étant*) *coincides* with God himself [‘that which we call God’]” (emphasis added).

everyday (the face, the word (*parole*), autoaffection, saturation of phenomena, etc.). Dominique Janicaud, in his famous *turn*, had, however, foreseen, “Is there a trait that distinguishes [French phenomenology] decisively from the time of the first reception of Husserl and Heidegger? And is this trait *the rupture with immanent phenomenality?*”⁶⁰ Thomas’s ways show us, in this sense, the way, and for today this time. If phenomenological finitude (the point of departure, even the anchoring in immanence) is at the same time a desire for the theological limit (the project of creation wanted by God himself), we must first pass via our “humanity per se” or via the “mere human being (*ab homine puro*),” to go to God. In the “simplicity” *in full* of God’s existence and of the equivalence of his essence and his existence lies in reality *in counter-relief* the thickness of our own “composition” and of the inadequation, in principle, of our Being to its definition. Nothing is “simple,” therefore, and especially not man. Simplicity is fulfilled by God alone [q. 3: “Of the simplicity of God”], who, *in excess* in his simplicity, makes visible, *in the narrow space* of our composition, the richness of our Being-there: “in our universe” – or, better, “*in our home*” (*quaod apud*) – as I have noted precisely regarding God’s simplicity (q. 3) – “composite things are better than simple things (*nos composita sunt meliora simplicibus*)” (Ia q. 3, a. 7, ad. 2).

2. *Nothing is simple, except God*

Paradoxically, therefore, and I have announced this, the more one advances in the *Summa Theologica* as a determination of God, the more in reality one sinks into the thickness and the limit of man. Certainly, and we must say this from the beginning, negative theology remains that which, first, works at the heart of the treatise on the names of God: “how God is not” (*quomodo non sit* [q. 3-11]), “how he is known by us” (*quomodo a nobis cognoscatur* [q. 12]), and “how he is named” (*quomodo nominetur* [q. 13]). But, still according to the same procedure, the Angelic Doctor, indicating *in full* what God “is not” – body, composite of matter and form, of substratum and essence, of essence and existence, of genus and difference – says in reality *in counter-relief* what “we are.” The method of elimination in reality more makes *us* visible as “composites” than it designates God as “simple” – remaining, moreover, always unknown to us in his essence (q. 3). What is essential in “the simplicity of God” is therefore neither God nor simplicity, any more than what is primordial in the ways lies in the ways, but in the possibility *for us* of having access to them. The appeal to “simplicity” (*simplicitas*) therefore does not aim only at the nature of God, even though it is opposed to the composite. It seeks first and implicitly to formulate what we are, even though it treats more explicitly of what he is. Rather than determining the essence of God, “simple” (*simpliciter*) here marks rather “the radical distinction between the created and the uncreated,” that is, “the fundamental ontological hiatus that Thomas places at the source of all differences.”⁶¹

The “distance” imposed by God relative to his creature indeed states neither his indifference, nor his remoteness, nor even his splendor – quite the contrary. It marks, inversely, the thickness of the human and the positivity of its limit in its disproportion to the divine: *Deus non est mensura proportionata alicui* – “God is not a measure proportionate to anything,” as Question 3 insists, as if nothing mattered more in God’s “simplicity” than remaining *for our part* more within “composition.” By letting God be God, man always becomes more a man. Such is the paradox of “proportionality in difference” that always aims at the aforementioned

⁶⁰ D. Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology” (1991), trans. Bernard G. Prusak, in *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2000, p. 17 (emphasis added).

⁶¹ Cf. L. Renault, *Dieu et les créatures selon Thomas d’Aquin*, op. cit., p. 38.

analogy of Being, and this independently of all the duly justified technical considerations that distinguish “attribution” from “proportionality.” Nothing, frankly, should be more coveted than remaining in our creaturely state, and therefore in “difference,” for thereby we paradoxically fulfill our Creator’s “desire for the limit.” Far from any “angelism,” we are first caught in our “humanism” – not as some current to be overcome or as an era to address, but because our “pure and simple” humanity (*ab homine puro*) is primarily that in which our creatureliness consists. God’s desire is therefore first, and paradoxically, that we “remain men” and thereby faithful also to his project of creation.

The divine never goes against the human (in a proposition that is certainly not reciprocal), and the *limit* is not bad in itself and only becomes so in its accusation and its transvaluation into a *limitation*. We are “composites” because God is “simple,” and such a simplicity is for us neither desirable nor enviable because it belongs only to God and does not demand to define us. “Our” composition makes our humanity, even though “his” simplicity makes his divinity. Such is the ground of our finitude, in which God also takes on a body, at least in his sharing of our pure and simple humanity.

3. *A question of Being*

But there is more, and better, in my view, in the Thomistic determination of God’s simplicity as an affirmation *in counter-relief* of man’s finitude. The Heideggerian exegesis of the Thomistic questions has greatly (as I have said), and even too much, centered the debate only on the question of “Being.” The famous “forgetting” of Being would not in reality be a forgetting in light of Thomas Aquinas, and the distinction between “Being” (*esse*) and the “act of Being” (*actum essendi*) would permit us to bring out a positive and dynamic concept of Being that Heidegger himself had not seen: “Being is said in two ways,” as Question 3 [The Simplicity of God] emphasizes. “It may mean the act of essence (*actum essendi*), or it may mean the composition of a proposition (*compositionem propositionis*) [...]” (Ia, q. 3, a. 4, ad. 2).⁶² Certainly the examination is just and deserves to be developed.⁶³ But the question today is another one. It is not that the question of Being had one day to be overcome (God “with” or “without” Being), but that behind or at the heart of ontology lies, frankly, the question, also crucial, of the possibility for man of maintaining himself within his own Being, following very precisely in this God’s design according to Thomas Aquinas. Saying indeed of man that his “existence is caused by another (*habeat esse causatum ab alio*),” and that in him “existence differs from [his] essence (*esse est aliud ab essentia sua*)” (Ia q. 3, a. 4, resp.) is not only establishing the “dependence” or the “participation” of man in God, in the profound intimation of the act of Being to all beings at the heart of a creation newly defined as “relation” (Ia q. 45 a. 3 resp.). This avowal of reception opens also and first to the way of contingency: “that which is not its own being (*non est suum esse*),” as this time the *Contra Gentiles* asserts, “is not through itself necessary (*non est per se necesse est*)” (GC I, 22).⁶⁴ The formula certainly does not indicate that everything is contingent or that everything could just

⁶² [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁶³ In particular J.-B. Lotz, *Martin Heidegger et Thomas d’Aquin*, op. cit., p. 43: “Compared to the Being of Heidegger, I will retain Being as Thomas conceives of it, as follows: human thought, and in general all human accomplishments, are carried out within the horizon of Being that has always already manifested itself [...]. Aquinas reaches a Being that simultaneously exceeds finite essence and the corresponding act of Being because it is their common foundation: the Being that signifies absolute plenitude [...]. Thomas Aquinas penetrates these ultimate depths that Heidegger does not wrest from *forgetting* and that alone give access to God.” [My translation. – Trans.]

⁶⁴ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

as well “be or not be,” (*être ou ne pas être*)⁶⁵ God alone excepted. But it emphasizes at the very least that all necessity, probably like all contingency, can itself only be received from God. I have said this repeatedly, and we must now insist on it. Finitude is wanted in Thomas Aquinas because the created Being is never subsistent by itself (*ipsum esse*); finitude is on the contrary endured or noted in Aristotle because no creation indicates an intention that would be capable of creation (*ex nihilo*): “Creation is not change (*creatio non est mutatio*), except according to our mode of understanding,” as Aquinas indicates, here in an abandonment (*déprise*) rather than a reprise (*reprise*) of the Stagirite. “Creation places something in the created being (*ponit aliquid in creato*) according to relation only (*secundum relationem tantum*) [...]”⁶⁶ Respecting the creation that is “his own,” God also respects what constitutes its genus and does not destroy what he originally initiated. Created within the limit, man therefore remains limited, even though the unlimitedness of resurrection will come to metamorphose him, without, nevertheless, ceasing to assume the limit: “For everything that is finite by its nature is *limited* according to the nature of some genus *that is itself limited*,” as we have already noted and as the *Summa Contra Gentiles* states definitively [CG I, 43].

To Étienne Gilson’s famous pages about the difference between the God of Aristotle and the God of Thomas as far as creation is concerned, we must now add at least this note: the God of St. Thomas is not only “a God Who loves,” nor that of Aristotle “a god who lets himself be loved” (in an opposition that, besides, leaves something to be desired), but the God of St. Thomas is a God of “the transcendence that opens onto a possible immanence,” whereas the God of Aristotle is a “God of such a great distance” that he cannot *want* anything, not even immanence.⁶⁷ The horizon of finitude is indeed historically liberated on the basis of the “Christian representation of the created character of every being,” as I have indicated following Martin Heidegger [*supra*], and this Thomistic historicity is still incumbent upon us today in that it sounds the charge of a God who will never only take refuge in the hindmost worlds of his own privacy. The limit as a simple resultant of divine excess in Denys, and therefore as a mode of limitation, therefore here becomes, paradoxically, the proper place of the Being-there of man *in via* in Thomas Aquinas. The obscurity of God does not, or no longer, results from his dazzle in the cloud but from our having been made as limited Beings: “We must say that God is incomprehensible to every intellect and impossible *for us (nobis)* to contemplate in his essence [...],” emphasizes Thomas, commenting on and, in my view, modifying Denys’s *On the Divine Names*, “and this is true of our *terrestrial life* – or, better, of our ‘state of being on the way’ (*hoc est statu viae*).”⁶⁸ Ignorance, though it be already erudite here, does not therefore come from the *excess* of the source of light (Denys or J.-L. Marion), but on the contrary from the natural *narrowness* of its receiver (Thomas or my own interpretation): “It is not the *excess* that constitutes the difficulty,” emphasizes Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht, articulating together *Théologie négative et noms divins chez Thomas d’Aquin*, [*Negative Theology and Divine Names in Thomas Aquinas*] “but the failure to reach it,” or even, I dare add, the limit *for us* of what remains forever unreachable here below.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁵ [Note that this French phrase is the French translation of Hamlet’s famous question, “To be or not to be.” – Trans.]

⁶⁶ S. th., Ia q. 45, a. 2 ad. 2, et a. 3 resp., respectively. [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁶⁷ Cf. E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (1932), trans. A. H. C. Downes, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936, p. 75. [Translation modified. – Trans.]

⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *In librum beati Dionysii de Divinis nominibus*, Cap. 1, lect. 1. [My translation of the French quotation. – Trans.]

⁶⁹ Cf. Th-Dom. Humbrecht, *Théologie négative et noms divins chez Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris, Vrin, 2005, p. 405, commenting on another formula of Thomas Aquinas’s *Commentary* on Denys’s *On the Divine Names*: “after all the knowledge that we have of God *in the present life*, what God is remains hidden from us” (*De Divinis*

hollow of finitude therefore here perfectly reaches its *fullness*, as is clearly evident. When man is paradoxically summoned by God to the point farthest from him (“to see the essence of God is possible to the created intellect by grace, and not by nature” [Ia q. 12, a. 4, *sed contra*]), he paradoxically discovers himself at the point closest to what he himself is in his creaturely state and therefore also to God in his creative and redemptive project. Against all expectations, the disproportion of man to God demands not a disproportion or a rupture of the human to make himself like the divine (the Greek perspective of divinization), but a proportion of God who, by choice, bends and gives himself to man’s portion (the more Latin aim of the humanization of God): “Now, God is the most perfect agent,” emphasizes the *Summa contra Gentiles* with regard to creation. “It was his prerogative, therefore, to induce his likeness into created things most perfectly, *to a degree suited to created nature (quantum naturae creatae convenit)*” (CG, II, 45, n°2, emphasis added).⁷⁰

IV. The consistency of the *ens finitum*

Phenomenological finitude, primarily drawn out as a philosophical horizon, therefore now appears, ultimately, as a “theological limit” wanted and desired by God. Brought back to the divine will and to his project of creation as “relation,” man is first called to remain in his humanity, by which precisely and paradoxically he bears a greater resemblance to the divinity who came to become incarnate. But we could not be content, as I have announced, to derive the limit from the unlimited. Having discovered the *primacy of the limit* [“deficiency as limit” (q. 1) and “the ways for God as ways for man” (q. 2)] by *relating it to the unlimited* as its creative and intentional principle [“nothing is simple, except God” (q. 3)], it now remains to make of this finitude itself a veritable “*distinctive mark*” of man [*Auszeichnung* (Heidegger)], to follow here the program initially set out (*supra*). A “law of proportion” thus dictates its measure, which first accounts for our knowledge of God here below, then clips the wings of our pretention to angelism, and finally consecrates *us* as a “limited phenomenon” rather than a “saturated” one.

1. *The adage of the limited proportion*

We have only just emphasized this: God imprints his likeness in created things only “to a degree suited to created nature (*quantum naturae creatae convenit*)” (CG II, 45 n°2). Very early, and this from his first writings onward (*Commentary on the Sentences*), Thomas Aquinas thus shares the intimate conviction of a necessary “measure” of the participant to the participated – in which, moreover, in my own view, he was not first the disciple of Denys, but on the contrary his most secret attacker, seeing in the Dionysian ineffable all the limits that it has, precisely in its unlimited character. The opening of the *Commentary on the Sentences* testifies to this in a formula of “proportionate participation” that one could well erect as a principle: “anything that participates in something is in it *in the mode of what participates (in eo per modum participantis)* because nothing can receive *beyond its own measure (quia nihil potest recipere ultra mensuram suam)*. Since, therefore, the finite mode of every created thing is finite, every created thing receives a finite being” (*Sup. libros Sententiarum* L. I, d. 8 q. 1, a. 2 s. c. 2).⁷¹ The adage is exemplary here; that is the least one can say. The *Summa Contra Gentiles* even makes it its spearhead, of which some will say that the formulation

nominibus..., expositio n° 68, cité p. 404). [My translation. – Trans.] This formula marks, in my view, a distance with relation to Denys [position of the “limit”] rather than a simple reprise [repetition of “excess”].

⁷⁰ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of Falque’s quotation from the French. – Trans.]

⁷¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Super libros Sententiarum*, lib. I, d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, s. c. 2. Cité et traduit par G. Gravil, *Philosophie et finitude*, op. cit. (Cerf), p. 109. [My translation of the French quotation. – Trans.]

characterizes Aquinas's thought definitively and in its specificity: "*quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*" – "everything that is received is received in the manner of the one who receives" (CG II, 79, n° 7).⁷²

Man certainly receives and participates in the subsistent Being that he himself is not, thus receiving his limit from the very Being of God, who always and forever wants that limit thus: *omnis creatura habet esse finitum* – "every creature has a finite being," as the *Commentary on the Sentences* emphasizes from the beginning.⁷³ But the limit is not, or no longer only is, a "state that gives itself" insofar, then, as we are created. It is and becomes also an "aim that is intended," by man and for this man this time, if indeed not every vocation could so easily free itself from its condition. The "manner of the one who receives" (*modum recipientis recipitur*) therefore also accounts for "that" which is received (*quidquid recipitur*). Said otherwise, and to recall anew here the "decisive test" of the anthropological reduction [*Cordula*], the taking into account of the receiver also moves as a condition of the givenness of the giver. No one, be it God himself in his supposed "objective evidence" (H. Urs von Balthasar [*La gloire et la croix*]), gives at just any time, or just anywhere, or to just anyone. The question of the "type of receiver that Christianity presupposes" (K. Rahner [*Foundations of Christian Faith*]) also matters, provided that this act of restriction or contraction of the unlimited to the limit articulates less philosophically "a measure of God taken (*prise*) and understood (*comprise*) by man" than it kenotically exposes a "measure of oneself by God offered to man."⁷⁴ The participated (God) dictates his law to the participant (man) only insofar as the participated himself (God in his unlimitedness) has made the theological choice of the participant (man in his limit). The Incarnation and redemption paradoxically sign this *decision to restrict*, which alone is capable of offsetting the *excess of givenness*. Through them, a new mode of dwelling at the heart of the limit itself is established.

This law of restriction or of concentration even becomes such, or so central in the eyes of Aquinas, that God himself comes to the point of submitting himself to it, independently of any mode of reception of man. Able to not create such and such a being in his "absolute power" (*potentia absoluta*), the Christian God kenotically makes the choice to bow to it in his "conditioned power" (*potentia ordinata*). The miracle "outside of nature" (*extra naturam*) is never "against nature" (*contra naturam*), insists Aquinas, precisely and paradoxically because the "limit imprinted on the laws of creation" is also that within which God paradoxically makes the choice to confine himself: "the existence of a non-round coin is possible," emphasizes Thomas, duly commented on by J.-P. Torell, "whereas it is impossible [including for God] for a circle not to be round (*circulum autem non esse rotundum est impossibile*)," and least once his laws have been enacted.⁷⁵ Announcing here, and as in advance, the later debate with Descartes on the creation of the eternal truths, it is not submitting God "to the Styx and the Phoenix" to say that he himself bends under the weight of his own laws, provided that the choice to embrace man's limit is first theological (creation and incarnation)

⁷² [My translation of the French quotation. – Trans.] Cf. J.-P. Torell, who raises this formula to the rank of the no less famous "*cum gratia naturam non tollat sed perficiat*" ("grace does not destroy nature but perfects it" [S. th. Ia q. 1 a. 8, ad. 2]). *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 2: Spiritual Master*, op. cit., p. 252.

⁷³ Thomas Aquinas, *Super libros Sententiarum*, lib. I, d. 8, q. 5, a. 1, s. c. 2. Cité et traduit par G. Gravil, *Philosophie et finitude*, op. cit. (Cerf), p. 108. [My translation of the French quotation. – Trans.]

⁷⁴ Cf. V. Holzer, *Le Dieu Trinité dans l'histoire, Le différend théologique Balthasar – Rahner*, Paris, Cerf, *Cogitatio fidei* n° 190, 1995, p. 333: "If Rahner stated a measure of God for man, he did not think it as a measure of God taken and understood by man, but as a measure of himself by God offered to man." [My translation. – Trans.]

⁷⁵ CG II, 55, n° 3. Taken up and commented on by J.-P. Torell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 2: Spiritual Master*, op. cit., p. 239.

and not simply philosophical (crushing God under an intellectual evidence unworthy of his power). Man's challenge is to be caught between animality and angelism, and Aquinas seems, for his part, to have decided. So be it, bestiality lies in wait for us, and everyone will be able to avoid it. But there is something worse, or more devious, than man's mere "becoming animal": namely, his pretention to identify himself with a sort of angelism that does not belong to him. A "body without conscience," certainly man will fall into sin (limit hypothesis of animality). But a "conscience without body," he will not for all that be exempt from sin (limit hypothesis of angelity). Remaining a body from beginning to end, from his birth to the final resurrection, man's corporeality is not only, for Aquinas, an addition to a *psyché* that only struggles to manifest itself. On the contrary, it marks the constituent that is most proper to him, which certainly distinguishes him from angelity, but which also constitutes his proximity to the incarnate Word. In the vis-à-vis with the angel, man remains in his limit: that of his carnal Being-there by which finitude this time takes on the figure of his corporeality.

2. *The temptation of the angel*

Paradox of paradoxes, there has existed not only the angel who sometimes was tempted to defy God, but also man who frequently wants to rival the angel. We often wrongly suppose that Aquinas merely restricts matter to the reception of a form, such that the body would only be the inadequate receptacle of an (angelic) soul capable of overflowing it: "Now the contraction of the form comes from the matter (*coarctatio autem formae est per materiam*)" as we read concerning "God's knowledge" (Ia q. 14 a. 1, resp.). But it remains, however, for us to understand which, matter or form, makes the choice for such a restriction or coercion. Said otherwise, does man possess by nature an unlimited intellect of which his body negatively marks the limit (finitude as "limitation"), or is his intellect already so limited that it in reality seeks only in its body the wherewithal to be realized (finitude as a "distinctive sign")? Aquinas's response comes bluntly. To the question "Whether the intellectual soul is properly united to such a body?" Thomas responds straight away that "since the form is not for the matter (*formam non sit propter materiam*), but rather the matter for the form (*sed potius materia propter formam*), we must gather from the form (*ex forma*) the reason why the matter is such as it is (*sit talis*); and not conversely (*et non e converso*)" (Ia q. 76 a. 5, resp.). A veritable reversal, and even a quasi-Copernican revolution, must therefore occur here. Our body does not limit an unlimited spirit, in the view of the Angelic Doctor, but our spirit, which is limited because it was created thus, also seeks the limit in order to unfold. The limit (of the spirit) tends toward the limit (of the body) and does not seek to transgress itself into the unlimited. "Remaining in the limit" – this is the ground, in Aquinas's view, of the unwavering union in man of the soul and the body: "But nature never fails in what is necessary," the same article continues. "[T]herefore the intellectual soul had to be endowed not only with the power of understanding (*non solum haberet virtutem intelligendi*), but also with the power of feeling (*sed etiam virtutem sentiendi*)" (Ia q. 76 a. 5, resp.). A limited spirit therefore seeks and finds for itself a limited body, rather than a limited body restricting and enclosing an unlimited spirit. The desire of a body for the soul is not simply a lack but is properly "creative or productive of an object" (Deleuze): we are a body because the spirit requires it, desires it, and wants it, and not the reverse.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Cf. G. Deleuze et F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1973), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983 p. 25-26: "To a certain extent, the logic of desire misses its object [...]. From the moment that we place desire on the side of *acquisition* [...] which determines it primarily as a *lack*: a lack of object, a lack of the real object. [...] If desire is *productive*, it can be productive only in the real world and can only produce reality. [...] The real flows from it

Everything is, in this sense, a matter of “connaturality” or of affinity, to say it this time in the terms of finitude. For the angelic intellect, it is “connatural (*connaturale*) to know natures that are not in matter,” since the angel is not a body, nor does it seek a body for itself, save exceptionally in order to manifest itself to man [the angel of Tobias, for example]. But such knowledge remains “the natural power of the intellect in our soul in the state of its present life (*secundum status praesentis vitae*),” as the same article clarifies, “united as it is to a body (*quo corpori unitur*)” (Ia q. 12 a. 4, resp.).⁷⁷ Far from creating an obstacle, the body here serves as a vehicle or *medium* for our intellectuality, to speak here with Paul Claudel.⁷⁸ Should one want to leave it, one would forget that in which our humanity consists: “The weakness of human knowledge in relation to angelic knowledge does not lead Thomas Aquinas to regret that man must, in order to know, start with sensation,” as A. Gravil justly emphasizes. “*It would be absurd to wish to have a knowledge that was not appropriate for our nature.*”⁷⁹

Whence the ultimate consequence, this time from the eschatological and not only protological point of view. The beatific vision itself and the resurrection remain also, in Aquinas’s view, within finitude or the limit, certainly in order to inhabit it otherwise or to metamorphose it but without ever, paradoxically, wanting to transgress it: “the created light of glory received into any created intellect cannot be infinite (*non possit esse infinitum*) [...]” foresees Question 12 concerning beatification (Ia q. 12, a. 7, resp.); and the soul, separated from the body in death, waits for the resurrection of the body to complete what it lacks in order to shine fully and anew as a “composite,” certainly limited but also inhabited – by God’s glory, that is: “Perpetually, then, the soul will not be without a body,” as the final part of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* explains and promises (CG IV, c. 79 n°10, trans. Charles J. O’Neill). The evangelical imperative to “become *like* angels” (Luke 20:36) does not make angels of us – far from it – but rather sends us back to our specific vis-à-vis as a humanity facing the divinity. By reading Thomas Aquinas today, one therefore learns of what we are really made – and what constitutes the “thing itself” of our humanity *in via*: the “limit” as the phenomenon that is most proper to us, wanted by God (theological limit) as well as noted by man (phenomenological finitude).

3. *The limited phenomenon*

In view of the first questions of the *Summa Theologica* revisited in light of finitude, the “human phenomenon” therefore does not appear to us first as “saturated,” even though a glory could always precede it, even at the risk sometimes of crushing it. Man is, and remains, first “(the) limited phenomenon,” at least in that God himself embraces and desires the limit within which he created him. From “saturation” (J.-L. Marion), we will therefore distinguish “limitation,” or rather the “limit” (my own perspective), less to deny the glory of the divine than to recognize the thickness of the human.⁸⁰ Denys, certainly able to serve as a spearhead

[...]. Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object” (emphasis added). [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of the French. – Trans.]

⁷⁷ [Translation modified to follow more closely the wording of the French. – Trans.]

⁷⁸ P. Claudel, “Sensation du divin,” in *Présence et prophétie*, Fribourg, Egloff, p. 55: “It is not the spirit alone that speaks to the spirit; it is the flesh that speaks to the flesh.” [My translation. – Trans.]

⁷⁹ A. Gravil, *Philosophie et finitude*, op. cit. (Cerf), p. 129. [My translation. – Trans.]

⁸⁰ Cf. [for the saturated phenomenon], see its first formulation in J.-L. Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” trans. Thomas A. Carlson, in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2001, pp. 176-216; and its development in *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, (1997), trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, § 21-22, pp. 199-221: “Sketch of the Saturated Phenomenon.”

for the distance of the ineffable, could not so easily play that game in Aquinas. Positively *limited* in its “distinctive mark” (*Auszeichnung*), rather than nourished by regretting a “(negative) *limitation* of the being” (*Beschränkung von Seiendem*) [*supra*], the creature therefore expects of the Creator less that he suppress and exceed our own limits than, rather, that he inhabit them to transform them from the inside, but without ever, nevertheless, claiming to rupture them. That we remain “humans”: such is, as I have said, the dearest wish of the “divine,” not against the angel (that we are not) but for the man (that we are always called to become to a greater extent).

By passing also via the Thomistic prism of the (theological) limit, the (phenomenological) finitude of man therefore corresponds, in a sense, to a *vocation*. Whereas the “limit” was previously nothing but mistrust (Gnostic tendency) and would later become a mere convenience (phenomenological neutrality), it responds, this time and specifically for Aquinas, to a *double call*: the call for man to hold himself to it and the call for God to come into it. The “diversity of creatures” does not say, in this sense and only, the effort of the limited creature to raise itself towards the unlimited Creator [q. 2: ways to go to God]. It announces and requires, rather, the kenotic condescension of a God searching for creatures as “limits” in which to still give himself [q. 47: Treatise on the Creation]. Rather than transgressing the limits and thereby denying the finitude of the world, the God of Christianity therefore multiplies, on the contrary, the “created” or “limited Beings,” as so many receptacles of the divine that are always impossible to exceed, and precisely thereby ensuring that he remains fully within them rather than exceeding them: “God brought things into being in order that his goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them (*et per eas repraesentadam*),” as we read, magistrally, at the heart of the *Summa Theologica*. “[A]nd because his goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, he produced many and diverse creatures (*produxit multas creaturas et diversas*), that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another (*ut quod deest uni ad repraesentandam divinam bonitatem, suppleatur ex alia*)” (Ia q. 47, a. 1, resp.).

Conclusion: *The quest for an in-common: reason or finitude?*

Theological limit *and* phenomenological finitude, the conclusion is simple: we are men forever and always, and we will remain so rather than being angels. Finitude is shared among all men today more than yesterday (“modern man who only exists as a figure of finitude” [M. Foucault (*supra*)] and marks in this sense, and in the final analysis, the limits of an “in-common” or of a “common trunk” of all men amongst themselves, rather than a specificity as such. Whereas Aquinas yesterday sought in “natural reason (*ratio naturalis*)” that “for lack of anything better” that was, however, suited to all men, and in particular to those who share in neither the Old (the Jews) or the New Testament (the heretics) [*Contra Gentiles*, I, 2], we will therefore, in my view, today call for “finitude” or the sense of the “limit” as the veritable community of humanity, itself also waiting to be metamorphosed.⁸¹

⁸¹ We attribute today this crucial place to Thomas Aquinas in the relation between philosophy and theology [moment of tiling]. Cf. *Crossing the Rubicon, The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology*, trans. Reuben Shank, New York, Fordham University Press, 2016, § 5, Tiling and Conversion, p. 130 [“The Natural and the Supernatural”]: “The model advanced by Bonaventure or Pascal of the relay of philosophy by theology [...] no longer suffices without running the risk of leaving no place for the God-man to assume the human dimension. At least at this stage of the meeting of the human and the divine, Aquinas’s model of overlaying is preferable after it is somewhat transformed.” Duns Scotus (finitude) – Thomas Aquinas (tiling) – and Bonaventure (conversion) mark, in my view, the three “medieval” movements of a renewal of the relation between philosophy and theology today.

Suited to all, to the “good” as to the “bad,” the simple recognition of the “limit” constitutes our existence as well as our common presence. Christianity is still waiting for its *common and purely human base* on which it will this time deserve to be built. Yesterday natural and limited reason (Thomas), and today finitude as mortality (Heidegger). The approach remains the same, but the terms are different. Grace certainly is given to all, but it is, however, welcomed only by a few. Nature, on the contrary, albeit in its “worst-case scenario,” constitutes “our all” and immediately concerns every one of us: “As the knowledge of God’s essence (*per essentiam*) is by grace, it *belongs only to the good (non competit nisi bonis)*,” proclaims the Angelic Doctor, in the best of cases. “[B]ut the knowledge of him *by natural reason (per rationem naturalem)*,” admits Aquinas, this time in all cases, “can belong to both good and bad (*potest competere bonis et malis*)” [Ia q. 12 a. 12, ad. 3]. The *fullness* (knowledge by grace) reveals once again the blessing of the *hollow* (knowledge by nature). Our state of living “here below” (*status viae*) first demands that we content ourselves “in common” with the “little that we have” (finitude, nature, or reason?) in order then for “everyone in his own right” to live on “all that we are” (grace, perfection, illumination). That there is not necessarily a “drama of atheist humanism” as *The Metamorphosis of Finitude* sought to show, is not a concession to the contemporary world, and still less a deduction from Thomas Aquinas, but it precisely fulfills this quest for a “community for today” (finitude rather than reason) that, by the act of the incarnation and of the resurrection, can in Christ be both assumed and transformed (metamorphosis).⁸²

Translated by Sarah Horton.

⁸² *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, chapter 3, pp. 30-40: “Is There a Drama of Atheist Humanism?”