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TRANS-SORTAL KNOWING IN *THE CLOUD OF
UNKNOWING* AND *BOOK OF PRIVY COUNSELLING*: SOME
PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The overall theme of "Religion Beyond Myth and Enlightenment" is addressed in the fourteenth century classic of English spirituality, *The Cloud of Unknowing* and its companion piece, *The Book of Privy Counselling*.¹ Here knowing "God" requires an achievement that is incommensurate with what we are naturally disposed towards or capable of – and yet of which each can become capable through grace and practice. To help illustrate this, the present essay will employ discussions that we have presented in an earlier work and to which we briefly allude without providing here the appropriate more elaborate explication.²

I. The "Christian Distinction" and the Cloud of Unknowing

The implicit dogmatic background of these works, which makes possible its teaching on faith and contemplative prayer, is what Robert Sokolowski has called "the Christian Distinction."³ This is a distinction between God and the world that comes to light in Judaeo-Christian revelation and the light of faith, as unfolded especially by St. Thomas Aquinas. It is not properly a distinction for philosophy or discoverable by philosophy, but philosophy

¹ The author is unknown, but presumed to be a Carthusian monk. We have followed, with some exceptions, the translation of A.C. Spearing (London: Penguin, 2001), which also includes the author's translation of *The Mystical Theology of St. Denis*. We have consulted the original text in *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling* ed. P. Hodgson (London: Oxford University Press, reprint, 1973). Note that the various translations differ as to where Chapters in *The Book of Privy Counselling* are placed; the original has no chapters. For the historical questions of authorship and lineage, see D. Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961). For a living legacy and expression of indebtedness, cf. the movement of "centering prayer" in the U.S. See, e.g., T. Keating, *Foundations of Contemplative Prayer and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

² James G. Hart, *Who One Is*, Books 1-2 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009).

³ R. Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); also his *Eucharistic Presence* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1993), chapter 5; and his *Christian Faith and Human Understanding* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2006). Also T. Prufer, *Recapitulations* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1993), chapters 2-7. Cf. Hart, *Who one is*, Book 2, chapter VII. David B. Burrell has shown that the "Christian Distinction" is to be expanded to include other faiths. See, e.g., *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (London: Wiley-Blackwell: 2011). Also Sarah Grant relates it to Vedanta advaita thought in *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). I wish to thank John Maraldo for a helpful reading of this essay.

may be moved to the novel conceptual spaces opened by faith to enrich faith's reflection. For phenomenological philosophy, all intentional presencings of objects, themes, states of affairs, etc. are *within* the "world" (albeit in different ways, cf. the difference between ideal and perceptual objects), and the world as such, as ultimate horizon, itself eludes being made present in such presencings. In this sense world transcends what is present, even though it is co-intended in all presencings. Creationist doctrine does not, of course, speak of the world as an intentional correlate of a transcendental agency of manifestation, but rather of all that is apart from God and as creatively known by (manifest to) God. The advantage of grasping creation or "the world" as an intentional correlate of transcendental consciousness is that it enables the developing temporal sense of the meaning of "the world" to appear, as well as the peculiar finitude of world, i.e., as a "natural" whole. But it also brings to light both the exalted place as well as the limit of reason's display: Even though it leaves nothing out of "all there is" in so far as the unknowns that are encompassed by "all" are still intended by the creaturely intelligence, the most excellent of these are intended in an empty and, apart from faith, impotent intention. At the same time this whole does not have definite closed boundaries because of the empty unfilled intention at play in presencing "being" and "all there is."

This problem of boundaries of the world is inseparable from the problematic way in which for phenomenology the presencing one's death and the death of the agency of manifestation may be thought of (naively) as within the world. Connected to this is the way the world and perhaps its conceptual demise may be thought of (transcendentally) as occurring *for* the agency of manifestation and yet leaving the agency of manifestation in tact. And are both the meaning of the world and one's death in the world encompassed within the display of this agency – even though this agent itself is contingent and does not give its self-presence to itself? Such considerations would add to the indefiniteness of the world's boundary.⁴

Although the agency of manifestation along with its acts of presencing are not in the world, their actuation and sense are tied to manifestations or presencings in and from out of the world. Thus even the way presencing is present is world-bound. Thus it may be said that all philosophical distinctions and discoveries whatsoever are either world-bound, world-determined, or within the world and presuppose the world necessarily as the ultimate basis and horizon.

Typically for philosophy "God" is inseparable from the world, and thus "God" (or god) as the most excellent consideration of human thought is proposed as, e.g., the foundation of the world and of the presencing of the world, the center of the world that is transcendent to the immanence of the presencing of the world, the ultimate telos or the perfection of the world itself, the entelechy or Idea informing the agency of manifestation, etc.⁵ In this sense, for

⁴ See *Who One Is*, especially Book 1.

⁵ For an attempt at synthesizing Husserl's hints at a philosophical theology, cf. my "A Précis of a Husserlian Philosophical Theology," in

philosophy, "God" (or god) is part of the world because philosophy's themes reach no further than the ultimate conceptual and axiological horizon of the world, the ultimate setting for all meaningful experience, and they reach no further than the conditions of the transcendental agency of manifestation of the world.

For "the Christian Distinction," in contrast, God transcends the world and thus transcends the agency of manifestation of the world and thus is beyond the categorial-conceptual scheme of the world and what is within the world. In this sense, although world is the ultimate horizon of reason, *quoad fidem* the "God" of the world is not the truest and proper sense of "God."

The phenomenological "world" as the ultimate setting of rational experience is a whole that includes the endless other wholes of intentionality within it. Yet this whole, as the foundation (*Boden*) of all knowing as well as an infinite idea and horizon, is not merely an indeterminate determination but its *determinable* determination is opened by grace and faith, and in this weak sense world is capable of an enlargement to the Christian Distinction and thus to being part of a new whole greater than itself, namely the whole of God plus the world. Here we have a graciously created whole, one of whose parts, the creator, is absolutely independent of this whole. But philosophy on its own does not extend the world unto the Christian Distinction.

Further, the necessities elucidated by the philosophical analyses that show, e.g., that this opening is both necessary for the achievement of ultimate existential and theoretical meaning and impossible for humans to realize (Blondel), point to the new gracious conceptual spaces already opened by faith, and thus reveal for Christian philosophy the transcendence of graced reason. They reveal grace secretly working in our life in the world, a world that appears, apart from such effective gracious workings, as a closed and sufficient whole. Such philosophical analyses are legitimate and corrective but must not forget that they are borne by faith empowering reason in a way that reason bereft of faith is impotent. The sufficiency of the world has a kind of evidence for both the ancient and modern "pagan" that is both explained and critiqued by faith-empowered reason.

God is transcendent to the world and to the agency of manifestation because God is the creator from nothing of all that is, the world and agency of manifestation. All of creation, present as the setting for all that we make present, is absolutely dependent on God for its being and essence (or kind of being). God's being is the absolute infinitude of being in all its perfection, and thus contains all perfection within Godself. This means God's essence is being or to be (verbal infinitive); God's act of "to be" is necessary and God's essence is to be, whereas everything else is a limitation and kind of being, i.e., it is contingent, and thus need not be. Creatures truly are, self-subsist substantially or in themselves and are not mere illusions; but their self-sufficiency, however dense and real, is a gift, and thus absolutely contingent,

Essays in Phenomenological Theology, ed. S. Laycock and J. G. Hart (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 89-168.

and must be contrasted with the self-sufficiency of God which is absolute and incomparable with the self-sufficiency of creatures which is always relative, created, and conditioned.

Whereas the setting of all creation, the world, is “really related” to God as being absolutely dependent on God, God is not “really related” to the world. As recent philosophers have said, there is a “Cambridge relation” between God and the world⁶: The world is related to God but God is not related to the world. Or as Sara Grant puts it, what is in play is a “non-reciprocal dependency relation” between the world and God. St. Thomas Aquinas, who lived about one-hundred years before the author of *The Cloud*, used an example, the infelicity of which was mined by the “process philosopher,” Charles Hartshorne: I am related to the pillar, e.g., it is in front of me or to my left, but the pillar, an unsentient being, is not related to me. But, as Robert Sokolowski has observed, (in spite of the embarrassing implication of Aquinas’s example drawn by Hartshorne) to say that God is not related to the world is not a psychological or moral observation but an ontological one. It refers to God’s essence and being, not how God is as creator and redeemer. That God is creator and redeemer are not necessary for God’s being, otherwise creation would be necessary; but the content of revelation manifests God as loving, merciful, etc. The *theological* task is to think of these world-related terms, i.e., redeemer, creator, loving, merciful, etc., within the context of the “Cambridge relation” or the more fundamental doctrine of the Christian Distinction and God’s not being in a real-ontological relation to the world. We may here note the proximity of this doctrine to the Vedantan *advaita* doctrine of the non-twoness of the relation, which is not a monist or identity theory.

In terms of the excellence of being, God plus the world is not greater than God alone, and God minus the world involves no diminution of the fullness and excellence of being which is Godself. To make this distinction possible Aquinas required a unified sense of being, for which he used the Latin infinitive *esse*, which encompassed the being of God and creatures. This was a faith-filled, theological distinction, because the analogical way things show themselves, e.g., as substance and accident, actual and possible, real and ideal, universal and particular, material, living, sentient, and spiritual, etc. enjoys a rich sameness or homogeneity which is not captured by the Christian Distinction between the being of the world and the “being” of God. The task is to avoid a radical otherness or twoness, while permitting creatures to be in and by themselves even though totally and radically dependent. Aquinas thus was able to say: With more creation there were more beings (*entia*) but not more *esse*, by which latter term he referred to the perfection of being (the act of *esse* or to-be) that belonged properly to God and in which creatures may participate through creation. Of course, this means that properly speaking God is not a being, *ens*, or kind of being, but To-Be Itself

⁶ See B. Miller, *A Most Unlikely God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996). Cf. also my *Who One is*, Book 2, chapter VII.

The Cloud's companion piece, *The Book of Privy Counselling*, has some rich formulations that express this dogmatic background of faith, but *The Cloud* itself assumes and articulates these less explicitly. These passages (*Book of Privy Counselling*, Ch. 1) are within the context of the specific theory of contemplation which will preoccupy us in this paper but they point to the metaphysics of "the Distinction."

When you come to be by yourself, do not think in advance what you are going to do next, but put aside good thoughts as much as evil thoughts [...] And see that nothing remains in your active consciousness but a naked purpose (*nakid entent*) stretching out to God, not cloaked in any specific thought of God in himself, what he is in his own nature or in any of his works, but only that he is as he is. Let him be so, I pray you, and do not make him anything else; pry no further into him with intellectual cleverness. Let that belief be your foundation. You must think and feel this naked purpose, freely fixed and rooted in sure belief, to be nothing but a naked thought and a blind awareness of your existence: as if you said inwardly to God in your mind, "The fact that I exist, Lord, I offer to you, with no concern for any attribute of your being except simply that you are as you are—nothing beyond that."

In contemplation, as presented in *The Cloud* and *Book of Privy Counselling*, there is at once an aspiration to unity and a reciprocal mirroring of the "nakedness" (being bereft of concepts, properties, images, etc.) of the sheer infinite being of God which is beyond all properties, concepts, etc. and the ontological sense of conscious self-aware self (usually *mynde*). This reciprocal mirroring can be done with especial symmetry because, as we shall see, the self itself too in its "substance" and most basic "naked" being, is non- or trans-sortal. (By non-sortal and trans-sortal I mean a referent that is itself presented by or grasped through (*trans*) properties, qualities, features, etc. and which may initially be taken to be a complex of such "sorts," but which itself is not a property or quality, etc.) Here in this early passage in the *Book of Privy Counselling*, the darkness of God, tied to God's being beyond the properties and concepts bound to the world, can come to reflect oneself's own non-sortal being— and perhaps vice-versa.

Let this humble darkness be the mirror in which you see yourself and your whole consciousness (*[d]i mynde hole*). Think no further of yourself than I am telling you to do of your God, so that in this way you may be one with him in spirit, without division or dissipation of consciousness. *For he is your being, and you are what you are in him, not only as your cause and your being, but because he dwells in you as your cause and being.* (Italics added by JGH.) And so in this work of contemplation think of God as you do of yourself, and of yourself as you do of God, that he is as he is and you are as you are, so that your thoughts are not dispersed or divided, but united in him who is all—always excepting this difference

between you and him, *that he is your being and you are not his.* (Italics added by JGH.) For though it is true that all things are in him as their cause and being, and that he is in all things as their cause and being, yet he alone is his own cause and his own being. For as nothing may exist without him, so he may not exist without himself [...] Look up lightly, then, and say to your Lord, either in words or in the purpose of your heart: 'The fact that I exist, Lord, I offer to you, for it is yourself.' And think nakedly, plainly, simply that you are as you are, without any kind of ingenuity. (*Book of Privy Counselling*, Ch. 1.)

The Cloud here stresses the non-twoness (cf. the Vedantan *advaita*) and the non-reciprocal dependency relation of creation to God. It implies that God is my being but I am not God's. It further implies but does not state, that we may take "He is your being" as a way of saying that the perfection of who one is, e.g., the haecceity or unique essence of myself or, e.g., of Peter (*Peter-ness*), pre-exists exemplarily in God's essence (these are rich themes in Aquinas and Eckhart), as does any perfection. God is one's being as creator and exemplar; all created being is a likeness of God. And each is called and chosen before the foundation of the world (e.g., *Ephesians* 1:4) to partake of this divine eternal life. As such one's profoundest identity is prior to the individuation of the created world, i.e., prior to evolving nature, intersubjectivity, society, culture, etc.

To make clear the exemplary selfhood of "Peter-ness" in God's essence apart from the created Peter, we must distinguish *esse* as it is created, a finite *ens* with an actual creaturely essence, and as *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, Infinite Pure Subsisting To Be Itself, not an *ens*, encompassing all the perfection of whatever is. As N.-J.-J. Balthasar put it, God "by identity is all the perfection of being [...]" In a very true sense God is more myself than I am, since he has given being to me. God is myself by excess; God is by excess the perfection of all finite being. God is *hyper-moi* and it is in this sense that God is not me. God is *hyper-tout* [everything in a transcendent way] because pure To Be uniquely."⁷

II. Faith and the Call to the Work of Contemplation

The grace and revelation in Christ call created persons to share in the eternal life of God, which is a life beyond the whole which is the world. It is a call to a life which is beyond the proper realm of intelligibility, i.e., that of the world. The inner essence of God which as revealed in Christ offers an articulation of God's being that is within and beyond the world. Finite spirit is commensurate with the world's intelligibility, but God's transcendent intelligibility is at best problematically analogical. Whereas the primary base of meaning is in the world for terms like "creation" or "father" or even the essence "Socrateitas," the

⁷ N.-J.-J. Balthasar, *Mon moi dans l'être* (Louvain: Institut Supérieure de Philosophie, 1946), 116. See J. G. Hart, *Who one is*, book II, 392-397, and all of chapter VII in Book 2. See also my "Die Individualität des wahren göttlichen Selbst. Eine Eckhartianische Meditation," trans. R. Kühn, in *Meister Eckhart: Erkenntnis und Mystik des Lebens*, ed. R. Kühn and S. Laoureux (Freiburg/Munich, Alber, 2008), 383-407.

true theological sense of such referents is shrouded in the mystery of the *via negativa*, the negation of the senses essentially bound up with the world or creatures, and in the *via eminentiae*, where positive properties are exalted to an infinite degree (by reason of the graced eros of spirit's will and intellect, i.e., beyond a filled intention or act of comprehension). In *The Cloud* this apophatic *via negativa* or path of negating the properties is emphasized over the analogical understanding of the specific contents of faith and dogma. It strives for a trans-anagogical, trans-analogical state which is an unknowing in "our terms," but which nevertheless, because it is the highest creaturely epistemic achievement short of the beatific vision/union with God, it is what the contemplative, indeed every Christian, should, and presumably implicitly does, strive for.

The best analogy for understanding theological analogy is perhaps that proposed by Barry Miller,⁸ which draws on the notion of a "limit simpliciter." This, like a regulative idea in Kant and Husserl, is a matter of infinite degree. The grasp of the predicates and attributes one ascribes to God falls endlessly short of God. This is distinguished from the "limit-case" which differs absolutely, not in degree, from that of which it is an infinite regulative idea or "limit-simpliciter." Godself and the Kingdom of God are exemplarily "limit-cases." Thus we may think of how we may have the *limit simpliciter* of ever smaller lines, or ever slower speeds, or ever larger angles. But the *limit case* here respectively is a geometric point where there is no line at all, or where there is rest and no motion at all, or a curve of a circle where there is no angle at all. The example of the limits-simpliciter find a kind of telos in the point, the absence of motion, and the curve or circle. In terms of the Christian Distinction we may say that pagan gods and even the god of process theology are arrived at by thinking of perfections along a line of a *limit simpliciter* of human perfections, whereas the God of the Christian Distinction poses a *limit-case*. The advantage of these examples is that in spite of the radical transcendence of the *limit-cases*, the *limits simpliciter* have vectors toward the *limit-cases* without ever being able to reach them, i.e., one can always have, e.g., a smaller line, a wider angle, a slower speed, and never reach the "absolute perfection" of the point, or a circle, or motionlessness.

In this respect, phenomenologically considered, the "world" is present as an ultimate horizon and as such is an infinite task of advance and ameliorization through the agency of manifestation and action. It is thus always a presencing of what is a *limit simpliciter*, an endlessly determinable determination. Yet spirit's secret infinite eros of presencing and amelioration can be raised by grace to aim at what is not commensurate with this infinite determinability. Therefore faith and revelation are necessary to move beyond the limits of the ultimate context of the world and to seek another incommensurate transcendent and more basic intelligibility and goodness—which are sought as such, i.e., as incommensurately intelligible and good, only for and to faith; *quoad nos philosophos*, the world itself is the standard of intelligibility and goodness.

⁸ B. Miller, *op. cit.*

Whereas life in the world may reach a level of complacent contentment, often because of sin and when spirit's latent infinite eros is dulled and mesmerized by forms of ontification, which the Hebrew Bible calls idolatry, spirit has an infinite horizon of intellect and will, and thus is able, in fact actually is called, to ascend heights immeasurably beyond what ungraced reason displays and the world offers.

This is the story of revelation and of faith and charity. The grace of faith at its very beginning, ritually accomplished in Baptism, is the seed of the heights of actualization beyond which the human spirit cannot go, which St. Thomas and others called the light of glory, *lumen gloriae*.⁹ *The Cloud* follows the Catholic tradition in teaching that faith, as the seminal presence of divine light and love, is the lived elevation beyond the highest human capacities. The "mystical" life or "contemplation" actualizes this light and love; it is the exfoliation of that which is already seminally present (*inchoatio vitae aeternae*) in faith's beginnings.

Faith thus is actualized also in the love of neighbor and, more generally, in charity and justice. But *ceteris paribus* foremost it is actualized in contemplative prayer because this prayer is most explicitly the actualization of the perfection of the grace of faith. *The Cloud* teaches that there are many other ways of following Christ and kinds of prayer besides contemplative prayer. Chapter 21 outlines these teachings. Its teaching culminates in endorsing the *locus classicus* in the Gospel of *Luke* (10: 38-42) that Mary has chosen the best part. This is the third stage where "the person enters the dark *cloud of unknowing* in secret and all alone centers all his love on God." (See *Exodus* 24: 16-18 and the "transfiguration" passages in *Matthew* 17:1-8, *Mark* 9: 2-8 and *Luke* 9: 28-36), for exemplary uses of the term "cloud" in Judaeo-Christian scriptures.)

Note the paradoxical character of the "cloud of unknowing": If we remain in the realm of concepts drawn from the world to apprehend and shed light on God, we are in an unknowing that is without light without knowing it. If in faith we move out of this realm of relative light and seek to enter into the absolute transcendent intelligibility of God by moving beyond the realm of concepts, we enter knowingly into what is relatively darkness and what must remain, insists *The Cloud*, between us and God: an insurmountable darkness. Yet it is a superior light of an odd "knowing," indeed the maximal luminosity of which we are capable, in spite of its being bereft of any proper worldly sense of knowing. St. John of the Cross named the darkness a purging, secure, excessive light.

Thus, *The Cloud* teaches that contemplative prayer along with its kind of work is the highest form of knowing because it aspires to provide in faith the beginnings of the ultimate actualization of creaturely spiritual existence and this is a union that absolutely transcends the ultimate setting of human meaning, "the world."

⁹ Cf. our later discussion in Section 9.

Indeed contemplative prayer recapitulates the very essence of faith and is the highest epistemic achievement of the human mind, even though its necessary condition is the non-cognitive evidence of Christian faith. This is surely the teaching of both *The Cloud* and of St. John of the Cross, who amplified the teaching of *The Cloud* three-hundred years later.

A difficult epistemological issue is that this knowing is achieved by love rather than properly the intellect. The key question is, in what sense is the will or heart epistemic? Is its motion necessarily founded on an "ontic" doxastic act (Husserl) or intellectual apprehension of an object, or may it have a kind of pre-reflexive and non-objective "knowing" of its own quite apart from the "object-rendering" doxastic act? *The Cloud* clearly subordinates intellect to the love of which the will is capable, but it remains unclear to what extent this loving will is bereft of any founding cognitive intentionality. Yet *The Cloud* teaches that all intentionality of God that renders God an object of an intellectual apprehension, all "ideas about God," even the most wonderful considerations, are to be silenced in contemplative prayer (covered with a thick cloud of unknowing) in favor of love and the ardent stirrings of love (cf. the "living flame" of John of the Cross) which alone, in this life, may reach God (Chapter 8). We return to this topic, albeit inadequately, in Section 7.

To see how contemplative prayer actualizes and makes explicit the very essence of faith one must consider the basic principle of the condition for the possibility of perceiving the presence of a revelation of God: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me first draws him." (*John* 6:44) This means there is not merely the "exterior calling" of the preached word or holy life of others, but there is a prior or at least simultaneous interior calling which, as Aquinas, echoing Augustine, teaches is the beginning of the fulfillment of the eternal calling of the individual person, and this "is nothing else than a certain interior instinct by which the mind of the person is moved by God to assent to those matters which are of faith and virtue. And this calling is necessary because our heart is not turned to God unless Godself draws us to Godself."¹⁰ In faith the presence of God is obscurely but emphatically present as the "final end" or ontological destiny of the individual person, "awakening a lively desire to see God such as God is in Godself [...]" And the satisfaction of this awakened tendency, which itself is already "inchoatively" this ultimate union with God, and thus appears as sovereignly good to the believer, is not to be satisfied in this life.¹¹

For medievals like Aquinas this burgeoning longing, which is incommensurate with our ungraced eros of mind, is inseparably the desire for happiness and which, because always obscure and usually perverted, e.g., by the allure of riches, power, fame,

¹⁰ See Thomas's Commentary on *Romans*. Ch. 8 lect. 6, n. 707.

¹¹ R. Aubert, *Le Problème de l'act de foi*, (Louvain: E. Warny, 1958), 730. It seems likely that the work of Michel Henry on non-reflective self-awareness that highlights faith's non-intentional status can help us think about the instinct, inclination, or what *The Cloud* calls the "stirring." See, especially his *C'est moi la Vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), *passim*, but especially 108 ff. and 192 ff.

pleasures, etc., especially prior to faith, found another likeness: When we perceive someone coming we do not perceive Peter, although in fact Peter is the one coming whom we see.¹²

The Cloud (e.g., Chapter 49) clearly indicates that faith reaches maturity in contemplative prayer above everything else by relying on “this humble stirring of love in your heart.” One is to follow this as the guide of life and the way to one’s final destiny. Here God is the principal agent, “chief stirrer and worker,” and the believer only the “consenter and sufferer.”¹³ “Such a good will is the perfection of all perfection.” The purest form of this love and good will is described by such terms as a “blind, devout and glad stirring” (Chapter 48) which can, on occasion, well up as a foretaste of heavenly reward “from abundance of joy” which comes from within. This joy is not to be held suspect whereas many other forms of sweetness, pleasures, etc. should be. It is free of suspicion because it is a “naked intention directed to God without any other goal than Godself”; Chapter 7). This emphasis anticipates the Kantian and Feurbachian charge that the doctrine of God as the ultimate end of spirit’s dynamism (the “on account of which” and “toward-which”), happiness, and ontological destiny of the person involves not God-centeredness but a “hook” of a self-referential, self-centered, self-interest.

Throughout (but see especially Chapter 34) we learn that only God can teach how one achieves the work of contemplation. Always the work presupposes both the capacity and the desire, both of which are gifts from God. Without such gifts the destiny of the human person is missed. And, “without God’s work, no saint or angel can think of desiring it.”

The nature of this work is such that its presence gives a soul the capacity to have it and feel it; and no soul can have that capacity without it. The capacity for this work is inseparable from the work itself, so that whoever experiences the work has the capacity for it, or else he would not experience it – so much so that without this work a soul is as it were dead, and cannot long for it or desire it. You have as much of it as you will and desire, neither more nor less, and yet it is not a will or a desire but something, you do not know what, that stirs you to will and desire you do not know what. (Chapter 34)

III. *The Work of Contemplative Prayer*

What precisely is the “work” of contemplative prayer? Obviously it is tied to and guided by the desire and its stirring. Again, the dogmatic background of “the Christian Distinction” sets the basic guidelines. The metaphor of “the cloud of unknowing” captures the odd intentionality of referring to what is at once beyond the world and more interior to oneself than is oneself. (Cf. “He is your being [as cause and exemplar] you are not his.”) This odd intending is propelled and sustained by a stirring of love which is

¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I. q. 1. a. 1, ad 1.

¹³ This may all be translated into a Thomist vocabulary of grace; see Knowles, *op. cit.*, 93-94.

a grace. It aspires to do justice at once to God's transcendence and immanence.¹⁴ Let us attend at first to the transcendence.

At the beginning of Ch. 3 we read:

Lift up your heart toward God with a humble stirring of love; and think of himself, not of any good to be gained from him. See too, that you refuse to think of anything but him, so that nothing acts in your intellect or will but God himself.

The Cloud here goes on to say that when we attempt this, especially in the beginning, "you will find only a darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing, you do not know what, except you feel in your will a naked purpose (*nakid entent*) toward God." Here and elsewhere throughout *The Cloud* we are exhorted to intend, mean, Godself, and not God's distinguishing most excellent attributes or properties, not even God's goodness to us or how God is our Good and our fulfillment.

What *The Cloud* would have us do is approximated already by the way we intend others, foremost in the second-person. Consider that when one says "you" and invokes the presence of the other person, one intends what the other intends when she says "I." (See below for more on the achievement of "I.") Thus this intention of the other bypasses or "passes through" the Other's, e.g., status, beauty, relation to me, any attribute, pleasing or otherwise, and targets the self-aware one who has these features and by which I identify the person. I could not address her if she was not recognizably present to me through her properties, but these are not the "target" of my intention. Especially in the intention of love it is evident that I intend the Other in terms of what she intends when she says "I", because this intentionality is different from that of admiration, lust, being charmed, amazed, etc., where clearly the properties, e.g., abilities, of the person are at least the partial the focus of my attention. As J. McTaggart insisted, love intends the Other not in respect of his properties.¹⁵ In short, we are familiar with an intending that moves through and beyond the undeniable and ineluctable sortal dimension of the person.

In the case of contemplative prayer, this going beyond the properties is properly described as work. In the case of the love exhorted to in the Gospel, one is mandated to love everyone but especially exhorted to love one's enemies, those who are malicious towards one, those who are ugly and whom the society (the "world") regards as losers, rejects, etc. Here one's love goes to "something" that transcends these repugnant properties. In the case of prayer, one is exhorted to go beyond God's properties, actions, attributes, etc.; but also one must wrestle with distracting

¹⁴ The prayer beginning *The Cloud* is directed "to whom all hearts are open, and to whom all desires speak and from whom no secrets are hidden." And concludes: "I beseech you to *clense [d]e entent of myn hert* with the inexpressible gift of your grace, so that I may perfectly love you and worthily praise you. Amen."

¹⁵ J. McT. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968 [1927]), chapter XLI; cf. also my *Who one is*, Book 1, chapter IV.

thoughts which intrude and assert themselves because not only is one selfish, but the mind needs images and concepts for its wakeful attending, and which, like thoughts “about God,” even the most lovely ones (which are to be given a welcome in other kinds of prayer and meditation) intrude themselves between God and the one praying.

The Cloud offers a variety of techniques to go beyond the incessant stream of images, desires, concepts, trains of thought, etc. One is the use of a “gathering word.” The goal is the *nakid entent* directed toward God. In each person there would seem to be a distinctive way of gathering oneself together in the presence of God into a simple word, like “love” or “thanks,” (“the shorter it is the better”) that one may return to whenever the distractions surface. That word “will be your shield and spear, whether you ride in peace or in war. With this word you are to beat on the cloud and darkness above you. With this word you are to beat on this cloud and this darkness about you and smite down every kind of thought into the cloud of forgetting; so if any thought forces itself on you to ask what you would have, answer it with no more than this one word.” (Chapter 7).

Note that to the cloud of unknowing above us which we embrace as the proper trans-worldly, trans-sortal realm of Godself, there corresponds the irrepressible realm of our stream of consciousness, our desires, anxieties, unfinished conversations, the flow of images, concepts etc. This we are to abandon and suppress by consigning it to the “cloud of forgetting.”

Another technique (see Chapter 32) is: While these thoughts and distractions are “pressing so hard upon you, between you and your God,” pretend that you are able to “look over their shoulders, as it were, searching for something else – and that something is God, enclosed in a cloud of unknowing.” This should work after a short time, providing one keeps to the “naked intent” and longing desire to see God.

The same chapter has another device:

When you feel that you are quite unable to push them down, cower down before them like a wretched coward overcome in battle, and think that it is foolish to strive against them any longer, and therefore, in the hands of your enemies, you surrender yourself to God.

The Cloud goes on to say that in trying this you should melt entirely to water, and if this “technique is intelligently understood, it is simply a true knowledge and feeling of yourself as you are, a wretch and lump of dirt...¹⁶ and such knowledge and feeling is humility. And this humility deserves to have God himself descending in his might to avenge you on your enemies, and to take you up and tenderly dry the eyes of your spirit...”

¹⁶ This clear and just ascription of properties to the self, given the standpoint, gives way to a consideration that points to a non-sortal consideration later. See Section 5, below.

But *The Cloud's* last word is not captured by the metaphor of spiritual combat or militancy. Chapter 46 directly criticizes the work's assuming a form of straining or brute force. "Be wary, then, of this beast-like roughness, and teach yourself to love skillfully, with a gentle and composed countenance in body and mind." One is to humbly await the will of God. Indeed, in Chapters 46 and 47 he urges that because the desire for God may become so fleshly, bodily, subtly self-interested, it is good to "hide from God the desire of your heart" because, of course, "such concealment would come to his knowledge" but in an unselfish, purely spiritual, and non-self-referential form. Again, the critiques of Kant and Feurbach seem partly anticipated here.

Finally, we may mention what may be called the pathway to spirituality provided by a meditation on spirit's immateriality as revealed in the intentionality of knowing. First we may note some remarks in Chapter 63 about *mynde*, which like "mind" in modern English is made to stand for numerous things, among which, as we noted is "self." I think Sperling does well to translate it *here* as consciousness, even though elsewhere "mind" or "self" would do as well. In the beginning of Chapter 63 we learn that consciousness (*mynde*) in itself is a power for which there is no corresponding proper act of its own, but rather it is active (wakeful) through its subordinate powers. It contains in itself spiritually not only all other powers but also all the objects upon which they work and this is evident in experience. *The Cloud* goes on to state that reason and will are principle powers of mind and may lay claim to being "pure spirit" because they work without any kind of bodiliness.

A basic philosophical issue is addressed in part in Chapters 67-68 of *The Cloud* which show the danger of the language of spatiality, e.g., up and down, in and out, inner and outer) when used to describe the mind's referring, attending, focusing, etc. The imagination has the propensity to presence thinking in bodily-thingly ways, but foremost in its thinking about the innermost self as agent of manifestation. "Take care, then, that your spiritual work [here foremost that of contemplative prayer] is nowhere in the body; and then, wherever the object on which you are focusing your mind's activity may be in substance, there you will certainly be in spirit, as truly as your body is in the place where you are physically present." Relative to bodily-spatial categories in reflecting on mind, self, and intentionality, it seems that what one is doing is nothing and no where, foremostly in regard to God. One must accustom oneself to "give up this everywhere and this something, in favour of this nowhere and this nothing." And, although often in *The Cloud* feeling is tied to bodiliness and sinfulness, here (end of Chapter 68) we learn that "this nothing can be better felt than seen." (Here "feeling" seems best thought of as the self or mind's ineluctable immediate self-awareness.) And it turns out for the person who perseveres in non-reflexively feeling this nothing (i.e., aware of the self's not being anywhere in its self-aware spiritual agency), such a one "is blinded by abundance of spiritual light more than by darkness or lack of bodily light. Who is it that calls it nothing? It is our outer man and not our inner. Our inner man calls it Everything, for from it he learns well to have knowledge of all things, bodily or spiritual,

without any special attending to any thing by itself." I take this to refer to the non-sortal immaterial self ("I") as that to which or the one to whom intentional knowing brings the world and what transcends the world. Here the felt or self-aware oneself as the "inner man" and the self-luminous pole of synthesis of all consciousness is seen to be intentionally Everything and the manifold of this everything is present to this pole without a piecemeal itemization of each thing.

IV. The Non-Sortal Self and its Naked Intent

The non-sortal character of persons is evident in first-person experience. Consider that when one says "I," one refers, *I* refer, to "myself as myself." "Myself" here is not a sortal fallible reference, e.g., I do not refer to myself *as*, or under the aspect of being, the father of this young woman, a student of philosophy, born in Chicago, etc. Further "myself" is always already non-referentially, non-intentionally, non-reflectively present prior to any such reference. But in such a non-intentional, non-referential self-awareness as well as in the achievement of "I" one is self-present infallibly without need of any third-person non-indexical term or consideration except oneself.¹⁷ This means that basic self-awareness is both a non-sortal and non-referential knowing, and in the case of "I," it is a non-ascriptive, non-sortal reference. Consider how the amnesiac or young child may use "I" inerrantly and, perhaps in the limit-case of the former, not know who in the world she is; in the case of the young child, she knows hardly anything about herself that the adults in her life would find significant for identifying her: her gender, race, nationality, height, age, first language, state of health, kin, or even her being self-aware.

Thus, in contrast to both non-reflective, non-referential self-awareness as well as the referential achievement of "I," the referent of "who one is" – as a matter of reflection and third-person reference – is richly voluminous in identifying property-ascriptions. These serve to determine one's public intersubjective identity. Yet we always also intend ourselves and most often one another as non-sortal, i.e., as the bare substrate of such markers through which we identify the referent and who persists throughout the accretion and loss of the properties. Even our use of proper names betrays such a distinction. When I refer to "Barak Obama" I may be implicitly referring to a type of "smooth clever politician" (a *Barak Obama*), but properly I am referring to whom it is who may or not have certain properties.¹⁸ Further, we may note that when we say that "'persons' are not sortal terms" we mean that in referring to persons we refer less to a kind than to a "this" or a radical singularity.¹⁹ That is, in referring to persons we are not properly referring to some thing, kinds of beings, *quiddities* or properties, but to someone. I don't say "I want to introduce you to Barak Obama" in the way I want to introduce you to or

¹⁷ See J. G. Hart, *Who one is*, especially Book 1 where the debts to H.-N. Castañeda and Andrew Brook are obvious.

¹⁸ Again, see my *Who one is*, *passim*, Books 1-2.

¹⁹ R. Spaemann, *Personen* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cott, 1996). See the discussions in Sokolowski's *Christian Faith and Human Understanding*, especially chapter 11; and J. G. Hart, *Who one is*, Book 1, *passim*.

show to you *homo sapiens*, a human, a politician, or a salesman. I might be introducing you to “the President” and this (office) might be all you are interested in, but strictly I introduce you to the one who holds temporarily the office, and this one is not a What but a Who.

In referring to persons with proper names, or in the second-person, foremost in love, and the first-personal indexical “I,” we are referring to radical singularities and not natures, kinds, quiddities, or properties. But even though this referent is bereft of properties it is not a *nihil negativum* or, e.g., the nothingness of a “cloud,” but rather a rich individual who is an individual *per se* and not *per accidens*. The Thomists, rather than the Scotists, will say that we are not referring to a haecceity, unique essence, or singular *quidditas*, when we refer to “Peter,” nor is the “myself” of first-personal experience, which likewise is bereft of properties in both its indexical as well as its pre-intentional self-reference, a quiddity. Rather the Thomist wants to root the unique *per se* individuality not in the kind of being or quiddity as an haecceity; rather the unique *per se* individuality is grounded in the *esse*, the “thatness,” the *quodditas*. This is the principle by which the exemplary mode of being of persons, as being unique beings by and for themselves, is constituted.²⁰ This is a Christian philosophical position, not one that is purely philosophical.

It is the Thomist line that the author of *The Cloud* follows. This is brought out especially in the *Book of Privy Counselling*. Recall that in contemplation the simplicity and nakedness, the trans-sortal presence of God, mirrors the self and the self’s presence: “‘The fact that I exist, Lord, I offer to you, it is yourself.’ And think nakedly, plainly and simply that you are as you are, without any kind of ingenuity.” In the first chapter, and throughout the *Book of Privy Counselling*, there is the unconcealing of the naked self, the substance, deep center, the true self, etc. by way of a kind of philosophical-theological “epoché” or disengagement of what appears in favor of the fact that it appears and *is*. (This approaches reversing the eidetic reduction of Husserl which disengages the actuality of the appearing being in favor of the essence appearing.)

This theme of the nakedness of the “myself” as the non-sortal referent of “I” is partially indicated in the way *The Cloud* gives special place to the referent of the second-personal pronoun. In a way similar to Socrates in *Phaedo* (114c), *The Cloud* shifts the reference from *psyche* as a third-person referent to the first-person – if we accept that what I intend when I say “you” or “you yourself” or “yourself” is what you refer to with “I.” “When you find ‘yourself’ mentioned in spiritual writings, it should always be understood as your soul and not your body” (Chapter 2). Admittedly “my soul” as something I have is not I myself as having it, but *The Cloud* appears to strive for a sense of soul which

²⁰ See A. Marc, *Dialectique de l’affirmation* (Brussels and Paris: Declée de Brouwer, 1952), 610 ff. Also J. Owens, “Thomas Aquinas,” in *Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation*, ed., J. E. Jorge (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 173-1994). But see the critique in E. Stein, especially *Endliches und Ewiges Sein* (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 1986[1949]), especially chapter VIII.

has body and soul, and is, in others, what we target with “you.” “Your soul” may refer thus to both the self as nominative and accusative, the one having and what is had. In the same Chapter *The Cloud* elevates that which *The Cloud* refers to with “you” and “yourself” to the highest ontological creaturely status, equal to angels and less only than God.

God is/exists absolutely and is the creator of all that is. Yet the difference and distinction is to be retained between God and oneself, so that in contemplating God you are not dispersed but united in him who is all, all the while not forgetting that “he is your being and you are not his.” The author of the *Book of Privy Counselling* (Chapters 1 and 2) becomes indignant at the blindness of those who claim not to be aware of their own existence, who claim not to think and feel that they are. “Someone who cannot think and feel that he is – not what he is, but that he is – I consider excessively ignorant and simple.” He makes the point that both grace and native ingenuity, even in the work of contemplation, may reveal what one is, both in all one’s complexity of attributes and one’s moral stench. Of this we are to let go. “But to think that you exist is something you can achieve in your own ignorance and simplicity” without any cleverness of learning or natural gifts. Leave behind all these discoveries and intricacies, as beneficial as they may be, for they are “very dispersed in comparison with this blind awareness and offering up of your being, and distract you from the perfect oneness that ought to be between God and your soul. And so press forward on the most profound level of spirit which is your being, and do not turn back for anything of any kind, however good or holy [...]” (end of Chapter 1, *Book of Privy Counselling*)

It is important for the author of the *Book of Privy Counselling* to uncover the naked bare substance of the soul in its uniqueness for three basic reasons. *First*, in uncovering this “thatness” of myself, which is a unique “thisness,” I uncover what there is of God in me, the non-duality, and my *hyper-moi* or exemplary myself, and find the closest union possible I may have with God.

Second, in uncovering this I realize my attachment to myself apart from God. In *The Cloud* this ineluctable feeling of oneself is mostly regarded moral-theologically and always as something inserted between oneself and God. In Chapters 43-44 of *The Cloud* it seems that the naked sense or feeling of oneself is admittedly necessary for the knowledge and experience of everything else. Therefore, even though it is inseparable from all knowledge and feeling, it itself is sin and estrangement from God. Here the reader is exhorted to radically extirpate and destroy the sense and feeling of oneself. We even read: “For someone who knows and feels not only what he is but that he is can be sorry in earnest; and someone who has never felt this sorrow has reason for sorrow, because he has never yet felt perfect sorrow.” But somehow beneath this awareness that one exists and beneath this more or less perfect sorrow that one exists there is a feeling or sense that a noble indifference to one’s destiny is still possible, “so long as God is pleased.” Yet in all this sorrow the soul does not desire not to exist for that would be diabolical madness and contempt for God; “but rather the soul is well pleased to exist and offers heartfelt

thanks to God for the excellent gift of existence, even though it desires unceasingly to lack knowledge and feeling of its existence" [!] (Chapter 44).

But in the *Book of Privy Counselling* there is a shift. The ineluctable naked feeling of oneself is taken less moral-theologically and in Chapter 14 the reader is exhorted to "rely without ceasing on the naked feeling of yourself, always offering your being to God as the most precious offering you can make." The one praying must "be careful that the feeling is naked, for fear of deception." This suggests that a bare, naked self-feeling or self-awareness is possible, free of reproach as well as of intentionality, conceptualization, valuation, etc. Abiding in this naked self-awareness/feeling means intellectual starvation and cannot last long. Aristotle's claim, "that man naturally desires to know," is acknowledged, but the author urges that we let it here (in prayer) hunger because what is at stake is the only possible grace-empowered "knowledge" of God and oneself in God in this life. Here feeling in regard to God and oneself takes precedence over knowing. Indeed, this feeling seems identical with faith. Here it is not clear whether it is inseparable from the "naked intent."

The *Book of Privy Counselling* returns to the tension between the distress and struggle against the mind's inveterate categorial intentionality, e.g., perceiving, remembering, imagining, etc. The author says: things will get better, the pain and difficulty will diminish, as you continue. But this struggle may be conceived as a rest "in that the soul is not in doubt as to what it must do, and also because it is granted certainty, that while engaged in this activity, it will not go astray" (end of Chapter 14). Here the struggle seems implicitly to be carried by "the naked intent" and one's pure will to keep it pure.

And this brings us to the *third reason* why the discovery of the bare naked substance of the soul is important: It uncovers the naked intent. In the last passage of the *Book of Privy Counselling* the naked intent appears to be one with faith's stirring of the heart in the midst of the cloud of unknowing which opens the trans-sortal dimension and the naked feeling of oneself. The naked self and naked desire are inseparable in as much as "he is your being and you are not his." We are most truly ourselves when we are who God knows us to be in Godself. "For God with his merciful eye regards not what you are, or what you have been, but what you want to be" through the gracious naked intent and desire. *The Cloud* approves Augustine's view that "the whole life of a good Christian is nothing but holy desire [or: holy longing]" Augustine continues: "That is our life, to be trained by longing; and our training through the holy longing advances in the measure that our longings are severed from the love of this world [...]"²¹ For *The Cloud* this holy longing and stirring is a kind of infallible divine guide; for the outer man it is nothingness and darkness, but for the inner man it is "Everything." This "blind, devout and

²¹ See the second to last paragraph of *The Cloud* where we have a reference presumably to the text of St. Augustine in *Homilies on 1 John* 2: 27-38, *Fourth Homily*, §6, cited here from *Later Works*, ed. J. Burnaby, Library of Christian Classics, Vol. VIII (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 290.

glad stirring love," will be able to guide with certainty in regard to the stirrings of the heart, either "from within by the spirit of God, or else from without by the advice of some judicious spiritual father" (end of Chapter 48).

V. Beyond Myth and Enlightenment

Thus, the pure naked love of God which is constitutive of our being is our guide; yet it seems that we may monitor it, in some respects even purify it, by not letting our outer, propertied self or the world attach themselves to it. "How wonderfully is man's affection transformed into spiritual feeling of this nothing when it is nowhere undergone." (beginning of Chapter 60) Again, this spiritual "feeling" that sustains contemplation recalls Aquinas's pre-propositional, pre-linguistic "interior instinct," the calling by God whereby the life of faith begins in the depths of the spirit where alone God may be actively present. It is directed to the "First Truth" for its own sake as outwardly present in the preached word even though it goes through or beyond the word to Godself as the sovereign Good of the person who is thereby "called" or inclined by it. The believer "knows how good it is for him to give himself in this way to the truth of faith"²² while being moved by Godself revealing, and nothing else, e.g., not by any rational intelligibilities or inferences, or merely subjective inclinations. Christian life begins with this obscure grace and in this life never gets beyond this cloud of unknowing.²³

The Cloud of Unknowing provides a sense of the knowledge most worth having, the "wisdom," that is beyond myth and Enlightenment. We here take "myth" to refer to the narratives which present sacred transcendent realities as dramas happening within the ultimate horizon of the phenomenological world. We, in this essay's context, take "Enlightenment" to stand for the rational-philosophical stances, inaugurated in the eighteenth century, that argue for a critical, skeptical, agnostic view of traditional religion in general. The position defended by the Enlightenment was usually that of a philosophical naturalism. We may borrow from Kant the formulation that we, as thinkers and agents, necessarily aim at or are drawn by the unconditioned, *das Unbedingte*, but all that we find in experience are *Dinge*, or things that are conditioned. Myth as a philosophical error common to religion(s) regards naively states of affairs or beings that are or were doubtlessly in the world as forms of the transcendent unconditioned.

Yet this version of myth lacks nuance and hence the imperative to interpret by, e.g., historical contextualizing and/or framing the story into a doctrinal philosophical- theological or an existential framework. Myths are always food for more thought. For example, the "sacred exemplary times" of many myths are not merely about superheroes and gods, but can be, e.g., in the traditions of the *Upanishads* and Abrahamic religions, about what

²² St. Thomas's Commentary on Ps. Denys, *De Divinis Nominibus*, c. 7, lect. 5

²³ For an excellent discussion of Aquinas's view of faith's beginnings in an "interior instinct," see J. Alfaro, S.J. "Supernaturalitas Fidei iuxta S. Thomam," *Gregorianum*, Vol. 44(1963), Fasc. 3, 501-542; Fasc. 4, 731-787.

begins the beginnings we know, and there is even the insertion of philosophical narratives into the mythic ones, as in *Genesis* and *John 1*, that propose divine causality that is incommensurate with making or the transient efficient-causal motion of bodies in space and perhaps time; in the *Upanishads* there are mythic narratives intertwined with a metaphysical reflection on the multiplicity of persons derived from and constituted by their awareness of an eternal absolute trans-personal Being that is Self-aware.

In *The Cloud* we, with the help of phenomenological insights, are reminded of how our ordinary experiences of one another and ourselves involved an odd but extraordinarily rich non- and trans-sortal form of presencing. Myth thrives on the extraordinary super-natural properties of persons in the world, but our self-consciousness and our awareness of others' self-awareness reveals to us what is beyond properties and what in this respect is the invisible referent in our intending ourselves and one another. Even one's awareness of mythic figures as self-aware persons, e.g., as heroes and gods, is an awareness of a transcendence that is not coincident with the things in the world. But contemplative treatises such as *The Cloud* urge us to radicalize this move to the non-sortal through the prayer intending the transcendent creator who is beyond all form and intelligibility.

Whereas much of the Enlightenment debunked religion as myth and projection, Kant straddles the poles of atheism, on the one hand, and religious liberal agnosticism, on the other. Kant's doctrine of the regulative idea as constitutive of the mind's dynamism toward infinity in thought and action furthered the direction of the philosophy of religion for the next two-hundred and fifty years. However, because the idea of God is *only* a transcendental idea, it is inherently contradictory, indeed "a transcendental illusion," to hypostasize the transcendental idea of God, and thereby to posit God as something able to be present, and thus conceived as existing within the horizon of being, the world. Transposing "God" from an idea to a conceivable reality is to make that of which the idea is an idea, i.e., the unconditioned condition, a thing. It is to make *das Unbedingte ein Ding*.

Thereby having reduced religion to a transcendental condition (i.e., a priori transcendental idea) of the mind's inherent functioning, one may say all contemporary skeptical accounts of religion are given a basis. Because God, the infinite Good, the telos of existence, etc. transcends our efforts to render him present in a conceptual-explanatory context, God is essentially phenomenologically-ontologically absent. And thus for those persuaded by the skeptical elements in Kant's analysis, the undeniable phenomenon of the restless heart or what *The Cloud* calls the "naked intent" as the foundation of faith's prayer is not only a result of a transcendental illusion; it, furthermore, points to the futility of this most fundamental human passion. Therefore theologians who elevate it as the defining dynamism of the human person reprehensibly legitimate what must be regarded as a metaphysical neurosis.

In contrast, for the tradition of *The Cloud*, the "naked intent" or fundamental drive of the spirit toward infinity, is the foundation

for the apophatic directives of *The Cloud*. These exhort the person to be respectful for what is given in experience but more solicitous for that which is adumbrated as essentially beyond whatever is given in experience. One must go beyond even whatever traditional propositional-doctrinal-biblical articulations we have been blessed with and move further toward that which this apophatic experience heads, even though these received articulations are necessary conditions for our initial and sustained ability to focus our attention on religious matters.

This apophatic movement beyond what may be presented is not motivated by skepticism, but rather by the faith-experience: The adumbrated experience (that which “the naked purpose” is directed to) of transcendence is the insurpassibly rich source of our apophatic movement beyond what is given. As the author of *The Cloud* puts it in his translation of “St. Denis”: “We pray to be raised up through the negation of all things that exist, to praise in transcendence him who is intrinsically transcendent,” thereby moving toward “this transcendentally shining darkness.... that is beyond understanding.” Indeed, the nascent pure naked intention of God is at once the source of faith and is sustained by faith. It is the emergent burgeoning anticipatory experience of God as the source and telos of the infinite desire. But even at the term of our knowing, the highest knowing of which we are capable, says St. Thomas and implicitly *The Cloud*, God’s essence in Itself is beyond our grasp and we know God *as remaining unknown*. Our highest knowing in this life, and in some respects in the “next life” (see below), is the actual knowing that what God is exceeds everything we may know of God.²⁴

Just as the perception of “you” involves that I move beyond the myriad features, through which you are perceptually present to me, to the invisible non-sortal referent of what you refer to when you say “I”, so in prayer there is a “metaphysical” movement beyond all the perceptual, conceptual, remembered, pictured, and imagined means by which the sacred “subject matter,” i.e., “God,” is usually made present to me. “The cause of all intelligibilities is not Himself intelligible.” “We pray to be raised up in this transcendentally shining darkness, and by seeing nothing and by not knowing, to see and know in this very absence of sight and knowledge him who is above all seeing and knowing,... to praise him who is intrinsically transcendent.” (See translation by the author of *The Cloud of The Mystical Theology of St. Denis, passim*, but especially Ch. 2.)

Doubtless the sacred theological-doctrinal traditions are in play in articulating this naked intent in terms of God’s adumbrated obscure presence as actually existing Goodness with a power of attraction. Similarly, the theological-doctrinal tradition is in play in the person’s explication of her self-awareness as creaturely nothingness. We have called this basic doctrine The Distinction, i.e., the distinction between God and the world upon which all other distinctions depend. The fruit of these strivings and practices is that the believer realizes that, like all creatures, she

²⁴ See St. Thomas, *De Potentia* q. 7, a. 5, ad 14; for more texts and discussion, see Jacques Maritain, *Les Degrés du Savoir* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1946), 468 ff.

may say: God is my being and I am not God's. God's own being is ineffably independent of mine. Here again the tradition provides the interpretive concepts which shape the experience and are that by which the believer gives words and meaning to her basic experience: I am essentially in a necessary "existential" non-reciprocal dependence relation to God, exemplarily in the response of love presencing God's transcendence only through God's own immanent presence.

The *Cloud* seeks to discipline the mind's infinite eros in terms of an apophatic motion heading toward that than which nothing greater can be conceived and which is eminently and insurpassably good in itself. But it also stresses that this desire reveals the Distinction which highlights the essential ontological unity and non-duality of all reality, i.e., that this desire is Godself's own efficacious presence beckoning the creature to be herself truly. The tradition, we have said, articulates the unity between God and the world in terms of "the Distinction" between God and the world in such a way that there is required an affirmation of God being more ontologically interior to me than I to myself. At the same time this further requires affirming that God bereft of or minus the world does not diminish the perfection of God, and God plus the world is not greater than God alone.

VI. Senses in Which Faith is Ultimate Enlightenment

If myth by reason of the necessities of its genre mistakenly confines what is essentially transcendent to the world, in our explication of *The Cloud* we may be said to move beyond myth. This is because we have to do with what essentially is transcendent to the world as well as the Distinction between God and the world (as the limit of our power of conceptualization and imagination). In this respect we are removed from dealing with transcendent realities at home within "the world," again understood as the ultimate phenomenological horizon. We in this respect are dealing with the single term of the Distinction that does not need the Distinction in order to be, and thus does not need the other term of the Distinction, the world, in order to exist. Moreover, we surely move beyond myth in moving beyond the non-sortal referent of persons, even though this is the richest form of knowing anything in the world. And a fortiori we move beyond myth in moving to the trans-sortal, trans-intelligible essence of To Be. But an analysis of *The Cloud* encourages our entertaining a more basic sense of "enlightenment." We want briefly to pause over this.

In the eighteenth century a major influence for the Enlightenment was German Romanticism which made the principle of self-consciousness a primary factor in philosophical enlightenment theory. Here the principle of "enlightenment" refers less to a moment away from naivety to maturity or progress in one's conscious evolution than to the fact of consciousness as a non-reflective self-luminousness going in advance of all manifest facts and acts of clarification, display, and articulation. This "metafact" of self-consciousness is at the foundation of all enlightenment in spite of some modern natural scientific efforts to ignore this basic

condition for the possibility for all forms of appearing and the very agency of appearing, scientific or not.

But in our view, self-awareness is inseparable from the “naked desire.” We do not acknowledge this reluctantly as a futile passion to be extirpated. Rather it is taken to be the inherent essential teleology, the movement from empty to filled intentions, constituting and accompanying the clearing opened by self-consciousness.

To the extent that one does not hear, or is not aware of, the call to faith within this setting of self-consciousness and within the clearing it opens and seeks to fill, the preceding discussion may appear as myth and benighted non-enlightenment. We must not overlook that the social setting of necessity informs the articulation of this clearing and shapes the awareness of the call to faith as a necessary worldly condition, even in the privative forms (e.g., agnostic) of religious formation. But to the extent that one acknowledges that the core strands of the religions most of us are familiar with are founded on a faith emanating from a self-consciousness opened upon an infinite horizon, an informed faith which further moves the believer to appropriately appreciate what is absolutely transcendent and beyond all forms, and appreciate what is transcendentally immanent to the non-sortal self-awareness, then it is eminently this faith which is beyond myth and enlightenment.

Here clearly by definition is the form of enlightenment which is beyond all possible myth and enlightenment (or Enlightenment). The non-sortal core of the unique essence of persons is infinitely surpassed by the non-sortal/trans-sortal essence of Pure Subsisting To Be which is not a unique essence or ipseity, among other unique essences. Rather as *ipse ipsissimus*, the pure essential ipseity or Who, is beyond, but comprehending all, restricting forms or “whats,” as well as all finite ipseities or unique essences.

And in the midst of faith’s apophatic movement to what is beyond all conception and all proper sense of knowing (as presencing in a filled intention of what was meant in its absence) there is the adumbrated knowing (presencing) by naked desire of the transcendentally beautiful in the shining darkness which propels and sustains the movement of intelligibilities and goods within the horizon of experience. Here we may say, in accord with the Christian tradition, that the faith-experience of the “naked intent” would not be an easily identifiable experience (cf. the “interior instinct” [St. Thomas] or the experience of one’s being drawn [John 6: 44]), and even though what it is drawn to is still an empty intention and is still able to be explicated as directed to God’s trans-sortal essence, the being-drawn has a unique kind of felt authority. For believers this being-drawn is present eventually as a self-defining “absolute ought,” and thus far from being merely a stop-gap postulate.²⁵ Yet it may be present obscurely and its explication fallible, i.e., that the ontological foundation of this faith-filled desire is the adumbrated towards-which of the trans-sortal essence of God.

²⁵ See Edmund Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana XLII* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), Part IV.

We have suggested that the apophatic knowing is sustained by the “naked intent” which moves beyond the affirmations of the “cataphatic” or affirming and propositional knowing of traditional sources of theological reflection. The cataphatic explications themselves are always within the infinite horizon of God’s trans-sortal essence and thus inadequate explications of the naked intent. The cataphatic by itself can quicken the “naked intent” as well as the drive to the apophatic by being a partial filling of what remains an empty intention. **But if the telos of the apophatic movement is the “limit-case” of Godself, and the limit of our knowing is God as “remaining unknown,” we must say that what keeps the apophatic movement from being an infinite idea or “limit-simpliciter” analogous to the ever smallest line (instead of “the point” toward which this infinite advance heads but never achieves), is faith. Only faith secures this distinction here in this all-important matter. There is no definitive philosophical remedy for the suspicions of atheism.** The infinite idea or “limit-simpliciter,” e.g., of the march toward presencing the kingdom of God or the smallest line, holds open the door to agnosticism and skepticism that the “limit-case” closes: In knowing the limit-case one knows that essence to which the limit-simpliciter points. If we think of the truth and goodness of all of creation (or of the world as the ultimate horizon of intellect and will) as a limit-simpliciter, God is the limit-case, i.e., that perfection toward which creation/the world points. But apart from faith there is no closure, no transition to the limit-case.

VII. The Subject of Faith and Ultimate Enlightenment

Yet with God present in faith we have an infinite essence, indeed the infinite essence of To Be, and only God is capable of knowing Godself as infinite subsisting To Be. **And in as much as this divine knowing is not an intentional knowing of something else (God is, after all absolute) or even of God as other to Godself (as if God were inadequately or indeterminately self-present prior to reflection), we may posit that it is God’s non-intentional, non-reflective self-consciousness by which God knows Godself’s infinite essence.** Yet the Scriptures teach that we will see God as God is. And while no creature as such can know God (and live!) for the creature to “see” God, the creature must become one with God in a way that transcends her natural finitude and preserves the natural indestructible unity called for by the Distinction. Indeed, Aquinas teaches that in the culminating union the very divine essence itself (*ipsa essentia dei*) becomes the “intelligible form” of the created intellect and thus the creaturely spirit sees God’s own essence through God’s own essence becoming the creature’s own power to “see” or make present. This latter Aquinas calls the *lumen gloriae*, the light of glory. Of necessity it would seem that unless the creature *per impossibile* was herself Godself it would still be true that in a certain sense God would still be present as “remaining unknown,” analogous to my never being able to have your first-personal experiencings or experience what you experience in saying “I” even though a deep love unites us. But the *lumen gloriae* effects a kind of insurpassible oneness and sameness but not identity of God and creature. Aquinas names this sameness with

God the God-form or the form of God (*deiform*). (See *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 5 and 6).

This seemingly arcane theme of the *lumen gloriae* is essential to the unique oneness at the heart of the theological Distinction between God and the World. If the Distinction asserted the ultimate twoness and thereby insisted on the ultimate union as one of I-Thou where I could never in any way refer to God in referring to myself, and never in any way refer to myself in referring to God, we would not have done justice to the ultimate oneness of what the Distinction distinguishes. Nor would we have done justice to the exhortation to live now, not simply from out of myself, but out of Christ/God living in and through me. On the other hand, if the Distinction requires a non-twoness or non-duality that emphasizes the oneness and thus a monism, then the union with God would require that the ultimate union of each "I" with God would result in the creaturely referent of the first-person singular being dissolved into a reference to the divine I. The Distinction works against both ontological "schizophrenia" of a competition between creaturely being and God, in this case between the Divine source of I-ness and consciousness, and the (ontological dualist) quest to preserve the creaturely ownness, which would appear to be smothered with the prospect of God being present in one's innermost ownmost self-consciousness. The monist resolution would not even be an I of I's because each I, in realizing the absoluteness of its divine origin would be absorbed and subsumed, and the radical differences required by love, adoration, thanksgiving, forgiveness, etc. would be obliterated. The ultimate union would eliminate the creatureliness of the creatures, and thus their joy, as well as the means of preserving the meaning of "salvation history." And yet the reality and preservation of the creaturely ownness itself is most properly itself when it can say, "I no longer live but God/Christ lives in me."

The teaching of the *lumen gloriae* aspires to secure a oneness that preserves the "transcendence" of the lover and the beloved to each other, and yet keeps the oneness of what is distinct in the Distinction. St. Thomas expressed this by saying that this light of glory is not the medium in which God is made present, but, as the very essence itself of God, it effects divinization or deiforming of the created spirit such that Godself is a medium by which, under which (*sub quo*), Godself is made present. The analogy is God begetting God in begetting the Son.

We may not forget that this position is already in play in the actuality of faith. God is essentially beyond any created intellect, even the graced elevated one, but the elevation to union with God as well as the faithful advance toward God is primarily and principally not what "I" do, but it is what Godself graciously does. The philosophical theologian must make room for a metaphysically non-contradictory and robust sense of a divine "I of I's" that does not obliterate the essential-phenomenological absoluteness ownness, singularity, and aloneness of self-experience. For philosophical-phenomenological reflection, quite in contrast to faith, the "source of the I" as a first-personal reference yields nothing phenomenologically. For example, the

primal streaming-presencing-temporalizing is for the I and had by the I. All that is there is oneself as self-present or given to oneself without one's having any say in the matter of such giving or self-presencing; each says "I am" but each's coming to be (or passing away), is not first-personally available. In a similar respect one's *having oneself* is not a result of one's active self-possession but rather active self-possession, reflection, resolve, etc. presuppose this and this itself is something given to me in my being me, i.e., it is not achieved by myself. Similarly the notion of a transcendent "ground" or "foundation" of consciousness as available to first-personal self-experiencing inserts a destructive shaft of opacity in the transparency and luminousness of self-awareness.

Yet faith teaches that the advance toward God is God's own continuous grace informing my freedom. This grace is "lived" even if there is no specific thematic or conceptual articulation of this ready at hand.²⁶ Thus the "I" of my advance toward God is myself as carried by what transcends me immanently, in some sense the divine I of myself, more interior to me than I am. We saw that the Distinction requires acknowledging God's essence as exemplarily I myself, *hyper-moi*. If the Distinction requires us to affirm God's primacy, even letting our first-personal apodictic self-certainty be measured by faith's certainty in God, as Karl Barth insists, then in conceiving our ultimate union with God the non-reciprocal dependency relation requires God's gracious presence to take the lead.

In this respect perhaps the "thing-ontology" of the tradition may mislead us in these matters. We here are talking about the ultimate union of the creator and the created spiritual person. To say that God is present in the grace of ultimate union as the primal-Thou suggests a duality. It does not do justice to the original oneness of the creature's relation to God and God's being the absolute source of the being of the creature. Further although it properly insists that God as Other is not an object, but rather as primal Thou is the absolute and originating subject graciously inviting me, it overlooks that in my addressing God as Thou I refer to what God refers to in God's "I Am" and, at the same time, it implies God's efficacious presence in enabling me to address God. But this I Am that I address in addressing God is of necessity also my own *hyper-moi*, more intimate to me than I am to myself.²⁷

²⁶ Karl Rahner, *The Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroads, 1997), 150; from the German, *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 154.

²⁷ Karl Rahner, 117 ff.; *Grundkurs* 128-130, proposes that we think of the causality involved as formal and not efficient causality. Here the analogous "formal cause" is God's self-communication in which the giver, Godself, is the gift. As a formal-constitutive element in another subjectivity does not merely effect something that is distinct from it, but becomes itself the inner constitutive principle in the one who experiences and is effected by this causality of the principal formal-causal agent. This analogy may be applied to the totality of life, including the blessed afterlife. Cf. our discussion below of *lumen gloriae*. Rahner's discussion provides third-personal thing-ontological categories for what we are attempting to discuss in terms of the first-

We avoid the miscues of a thing-ontology if we use the language of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, I, Thou, self-consciousness, etc., without pretending to resolve and surmount the fundamental mystery of the Distinction. And with this prioritizing of the fundamental concepts of self-consciousness, we assume that we are *not* dealing with limits-simpliciter but rather concepts that are not regulative ideas. Yet whereas the concepts of person, forms of knowing, presencing, etc. may, because of the apophatic-analogical-anagogical movement, appear capable of possible endless perfecting, the concepts of what are the transcendental conditions for presencing as such, e.g., self-awareness and what "I" refers to, would seem to be, precisely as transcendental conditions, to be presupposed as the limit-case for such infinitizing or endless tasks.

This means that the "ground of self-consciousness" for faith is not only not an unconscious substrate or state of affairs, but rather a divine self-consciousness; and in faith one is awakened to "depths" of consciousness unavailable to philosophical reflection. This seems to be reflected in the consideration that the received exemplars for Christians for thinking about the relation of the creature to the creator in this context are found in assorted texts of St. Paul, the synoptic writers, and *John 1* and especially *John 17*. Here in language that is closer to philosophy and love poetry than to myth, there is revealed in analogies with filiation, procreation, speaking and thinking not only the knowledge most worth having and the most perfect form of loving, but the first principles at the heart of being.²⁸ We have to do with principles of all there is and all intelligibility. But these principles, beginnings, sources, etc. are revealed to be divine persons subsisting in their relationships of love and communication. The apophatic infinitizing impulse promoted by *The Cloud* finds its mysterious foundation in the life of love of the divine persons for one another. This "life" is one of subsisting relations of communication, mutuality, and love. This is more fundamental than their being principles of the world we know. What is primary is the Father's begetting His Eternal Son and the Son's responding to this eternal love. The Father, as the beginning which/who is unbegun and unbegotten, eternally conceives or expresses Godself in God's Son. The Father as eternal self-luminous creator brings about everything else that comes to be in and through the light and wisdom of the Eternal Son. And the light of the world, the manifestness of being as actuated by creaturely agency of manifestation is itself the indwelling presence of the Eternal Son in the agents of manifestation. All that the Son is and has is received from the Father. And thus the Son too may declare (see *John 8*) with the same truth the "I Am" uttered by Yahweh in *Exodus 3:14*.

personal ontological categories. The "Christian Distinction" is basic in each case.

²⁸ See Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Doctrines, Collected Works*, 11 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 256-315 for a historical-theological-biblical discussion of Christ's eternal generation and consubstantiality with the Father.

At the heart of Being there is a oneness in the triune distinctness that does not admit a creaturely worldly analogue but in which all creatures have their deepest springs and exemplarity. The creature's faith is acknowledgment of herself as a child of God through Christ, and thus as one, but not identical with, the Father and Son. Faith is avowing her own radical self-origination: What she as believer refers to with "I" reaches back to the absolute I of I's which, as the source of all self-luminosity, ipseity, and being, eternally begets all creatures in the Son, and the light of creaturely minds is the indwelling of the eternally begotten Son.

Thus the trans-sortal referent of God is not merely that One whose essence is To Be, or the Primal Thou, but that One who begets the Son and all creation through the Son, and who is both primal Thou and unbegotten I of oneself. God is the insurpassibly transcendent in immanence creative I-sourcing-I of what/whom each refers to when she says "I." Thus the ultimate doctrinal "enlightenment" is that in each's saying "I am" there is echoed the "I am" of Jesus which itself is an expression of the "I am" of the Father. The theological significance of each's "I am" is possible through the non-dual distinction of God and the world as a non-reciprocal dependency relationship, as well as the affirmation that the non- and trans-sortal sense of oneself is inseparably united with the triune God's self-awareness, and, finally, that the prayerful lived loving awareness of the non-duality and no-thingness of God and of oneself is itself God's gift, the "gift of the Holy Spirit," the Spirit of God, and God's grace.

The theme of the Holy Spirit's presence throughout especially in the writings of St. Paul robustly preserves the unity of the Distinction. Here the creaturely egological absolute ownness and the absolute creative divine egological agency are evident in the exemplary creaturely self-effacement that is also a self-realization. For example Paul says "I worked harder than them [the other apostles], though it was not I but the grace of God which is with me." This "being led by the Spirit" and saying "Abba, Father," in praise and gratitude is itself the Spirit bearing witness to one's being a child of God. It is now evident in one's first-person experience and in the way one lives that "it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." (See, e.g., *1 Corinthians* 15:1; *Romans* 8:16; *Galatians* 12: 20.)

This gracious darkness and excessive light of the prayer of faith reveals oneself in the present moment, through the share in the Sonship of Jesus, begotten of God. This prayer of faith, as the sharing in the prayer of Jesus, has thus basic forms of two professions of Jesus: "Abba, Father" and "I Am."²⁹

VIII. A Rahnerian Conclusion

In *The Cloud*, self-awareness ("the naked feeling of oneself") is the principle of the awakening to the calling to be an image of the imageless God and an agent of manifestation and truth. But, as a desire to know, this must be integrated into awakening to one's

²⁹ Abhishiktananda (Henri LeSaux, OSB), *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974).

eternal vocation in the beginnings of faith, i.e., awakening to the presence of the *semen luminis gloriae*, the beginning movement toward (or “naked intent” of) the most perfect voluntary and intellectual union with God. Karl Rahner has named this calling the “supernatural existential” that functions in the core of the person. It functions as the entelechy of the unique self-consciousness moving the person to the enlightenment surpassing all possible illuminations because it is coincident with one’s eternal sonship. He also speaks of God becoming the subjective principle of both the calling and address of faith but also the hearing of faith. As such there is a divinization of the *a priori* luminosity of the human subject’s transcendentality.³⁰ This self-consciousness, this life of faith, is informed by what is at once the telos and presupposition for all explanation, elucidation, and justification. It itself cannot be accounted for by anything in the world, certainly no efficient causes in the space and time of the world. It thus may lay claim to being an ultimate “enlightenment.”

In the *Cloud* and Christian contemplative tradition in general one’s self-awareness and unique kind of non-sortal knowing of one’s unique self is one with call of God, God’s birth in the soul, and even God’s eternal begetting of God’s eternal Son. And yet this life of faith, as Karl Rahner has pointed out, may have an anonymity in so far as its doctrinal or even agnostic explications may be bereft of any familiar Christian symbols and propositions.³¹ What is not in doubt is that in each instance we have a self-consciousness opened onto the horizon of the world, called to manifest honestly what is true, and, when possible and proper, to prefer the better to what is good, the best to the better, and not to permit what someone is supercede who she is.

But foremost each is called to the “cloud of unknowing” beyond all knowing. Each is situated, whether she knows it explicitly or not, in the unity of the non-duality of God and the world; and each’s I-agency is inseparably the possibility of begetting God’s presence in one’s own heart and soul and in the heart and soul of others. But it is only explicit faith which permits this articulation which is beyond myth and Enlightenment for the believer. For the non-believer whether faithfully or inauthentically looking on, what is in play for the believer does not appear as beyond myth and Enlightenment; indeed, as Kierkegaard noted it may even look comical.

³⁰ Rahner, *Ibid.* Chapter V, 138-175; *Grundkurs*, Ch. 5, 143-179.

³¹ Rahner, *Ibid.* 151 ff. and 176; *Grundkurs*, 157 ff., 178.