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## THE PERSON IN RELATION: AN ANALYSIS OF GREAT CATHOLIC EDUCATION VIA THOMISTIC PERSONALISM

This essay seeks to show the usefulness of the philosophy of Thomistic personalism in determining the type of education most beneficial to the human person’s highest development by building on St. Thomas Aquinas’s idea of personal *relation* according to both first act (*esse*) and second act (*operari*). Because the richness of this philosophy involves the use of Thomistic metaphysics and metaethics, anthropology, political philosophy, phenomenology and aesthetics and is meant to be applied (as in Pope St. John Paul II’s theology of the body), we discover a unique and fitting tool by which Catholic education may be considered and planned for based on what is most fundamental to the human person’s reality—the act of his existence and subsequent personalistic act, according to truth and love. Real applications are included in this essay.

### Being in Relation: The Measure of True Education

How do we determine whether the Catholic education we offer children and adults is most excellent? Since the time of the Enlighten-

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ment in Europe and the later influence of John Dewey in the U.S., modern educational philosophy has sought to shrug off traditional ideas about truth and reality that stem from the sense realism of Aristotle and the later use of revelation found in Scripture as starting points for reasoned thought, known in medieval times as scholasticism.<sup>1</sup> But rather than an emancipation of the knower in favor of knowledge of the world and other, the isolation of the knower through the Enlightenment philosophy of individualism has provided a sterile field, closing opportunity for real knowledge solely in upon the mind of the knower through his own determination. This is because the knower is not taken as the real *subject* of knowledge in light of who he is as *person*. It is the understanding of person that we will examine at his/her most fundamental level—that is, the act of his existence or *esse* in relation to God his Creator as what St. Thomas Aquinas calls the person’s “first act,” and the subsequent “second act” by which the person makes conscious acts of choice, also in relation with God, other, and the world around him. The understanding of the primal acts of the person as those of *relation* allow us to consider most accurately the means by which he may become educated both intellectually and morally according to his highest end. The recent philosophy of Thomistic personalism provides us with the means to make this analysis.

### **Thomistic Personalism: Uncovering Our Meaning as Persons *in Relation***

Thomistic personalism has evolved fairly recently from a broader and looser category of thought generally known as personalism. Personalism began with the work of Emmanuel Mounier (1895-1950), emerging from World War I in France as an impetus for social reorgan-

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004), 280.

ization and philosophical shift away from the modernistic starting point of Kantian ideas to the person himself as subject of philosophical thought. It had become clear that the tragedies of war that ensued as a result of the errors of both collectivism and individualism<sup>2</sup> required a new response in thought if man was to be saved not only spiritually but humanly on the grand scale. From the near despair within postwar culture spawned an awakening recognition and new allegiance to the dignity of the human person as philosophically primary. The dignity of the human person along with his social nature and vocation to communion were seen as central.<sup>3</sup>

For the first time, because the human person rather than an idea or thought construct was taken as the starting point for philosophical consideration, a conglomerate of approaches that could adequately explore the person emerged as the loose structure of this trend in contrast with an ideology or imposed system of thought into which all must be made to fit, as had previously been the case in modern thought. This meant different things to different thinkers, hence the rather loose understanding of what personalism in general might entail.

Most specifically, because of the rich history of preceding Catholic thought, particularly the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas that

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<sup>2</sup> On the errors of collectivism and individualism, see Matthew Schaeffer, “Thomistic Personalism: A Vocation for the Twenty-First Century,” in his *Thomistic Personalism: Clarifying and Advancing the Project*, Doctoral Dissertation, York University (Toronto, Ontario, 2016), 14–16, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://hdl.handle.net/10315/32235>. E.g.: “[T]he error of collectivism—the subordination of the person to the collective (in both moral and political matters) ‘in such a way that the true good of persons is excluded and they themselves fall prey to the collectivity.’ . . . [T]he error of individualism—the subordination of the good of others to the desires, fears, and preferences of the self (in both moral and political matters), producing ‘a system of morals, feelings, ideas, and institutions in which individuals can be organized by their mutual isolation and defense.’ . . . The first and most fundamental commitment of personalism, then, is this: there is a serious need for a third way between collectivism and individualism.”

<sup>3</sup> Thomas D. Williams, “What is Thomistic Personalism?,” *Alpha Omega* 7, no. 2 (2004): 168.

capitalized on Aristotelian and other proponents of truth from antiquity, the conjunction of the personalist approach with Thomistic metaphysics and anthropology resulted in a Thomistic personalism<sup>4</sup> that introduced leading Catholic thinkers to practical philosophical fields, primarily ethics, political philosophy and aesthetics. For personalism, as Karol Wojtyła noted, “is not primarily a theory of the person or a theoretical science of the person. It is largely practical and ethical.”<sup>5</sup> It involves the human person in act and relation. It is meant to be applied.

Instead of constituting an autonomous metaphysics, personalism in the broader sense offers an anthropological-ontological shift in perspective within an existing metaphysics and draws out the ethical consequences of this shift. Perhaps the best known strain of personalism in the broad sense is so-called “Thomistic personalism.” Represented by such figures as Jacques Maritain, Yves Simon, Etienne Gilson, Robert Spaemann, and Karol Wojtyła, Thomistic personalism draws on principles of Thomas Aquinas’s philosophical and theological anthropology in what it sees as a coherent development of inchoate elements of Aquinas’s thought.<sup>6</sup>

Catholic convert and philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) worked in personalist philosophy alongside Emmanuel Mounier in France for many years. Maritain became a Thomistic personalist, one of the first, and brought French personalism to the United States.<sup>7</sup> His

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<sup>4</sup> Thomistic personalism is “a practical philosophy—devoted to the dignity, mystery, and communal *telos* of the person—that is ever mindful of the concrete errors of individualism and collectivism (at both the moral and political levels), along with the need to ground practical philosophy in the truths of metaphysics (a need often rejected or forgotten today).” Schaeffer, “Thomistic Personalism,” 1.

<sup>5</sup> Karol Wojtyła, “Thomistic Personalism,” in his *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993): 165.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas D. Williams and Jan Olof Bengtsson, “Personalism,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2014 Edition), accessed Sept. 4, 2017, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism/>.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, “What Is Thomistic Personalism?,” 170.

work in philosophy, which he believed to be true science, focused on the nature of education and many of the eclectic aspects of personalism including aesthetics, politics, natural law and the sense realism of Aristotle, all with a strong grounding in Thomistic metaphysics.<sup>8</sup>

In Germany, the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) in phenomenology contributed to the German thought development of personalism by the work of Husserl's students, who included Max Scheler (1874-1928), Edith Stein (1891-1942), Roman Ingarden (1893-1970), and Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977). Like those of the German student group, Karol Wojtyła also became interested in the Aristotelian-Thomistic interface with the ideas of phenomenological personalism while a young priest in the 1940s.<sup>9</sup> And because phenomenology is characterized by method, the Thomistic personalism of Karol Wojtyła in contrast with that of Jacques Maritain developed the added dimension of providing a way to focus, for example, on relation as act as applied to the specific individual as a phenomenon of personhood, enlightening more fully the reality of this unique person's being through self-actualization. This supplied a need for the use of human relation as a "primordial" way for understanding the human being as person that had not been met in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, as cited in the

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Schaeffer, "Thomistic Personalism," 1: "Thomistic personalism is an emerging practical philosophy that seeks to synthesize the work of twentieth-century personalists with the philosophical work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Accordingly, its reach extends into moral, political, and legal philosophy; and its objectives are the same as every other serious practical philosophy: (i) to acquire the truth about practical philosophy insofar as this is possible, and (ii) to help human persons act in accordance with this truth."

<sup>9</sup> Williams, "What is Thomistic Personalism?," 170-72. Williams, however, mistakenly quotes that it was Roman Ingarden who encouraged "a young priest by the name of Karol Wojtyła . . . to read Max Scheler" (*Ibid.*, 171). It was rather Fr. Różycki at whose suggestion "Wojtyła decided to explore the work of the German philosopher Max Scheler." Fr. Ignacy Różycki was "Karol Wojtyła's former teacher, his housemate on Kanonicza Street, and the director of his habilitation thesis on Max Scheler" (George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* [New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1999], 126 and 387).

work of both Cardinal Karol Wojtyla and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, according to W. Norris Clarke, S.J.:

One of the stimuli for this line of thought has been the challenge laid down some years ago by Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, namely, that Christian thinkers had developed a relational notion of the person for use in theology, to help explain the Trinity of three Persons united in one God, but had not exploited it adequately, if at all, in their philosophical analyses of the person. He explicitly reproaches St. Thomas himself for this, and calls for a new, explicitly relational conception of the very nature of the person as such, wherein relationality would become an equally primordial aspect of the person as substantiality. To quote him [Cardinal Ratzinger]:

[In the relational notion of person developed within the theology of the Trinity] lies concealed a revolution in man's view of the world: the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality . . . and it is made apparent how being that truly understands itself grasps at the same time that *in* its self-being it does not belong to itself; that it only comes to itself by moving away from itself and finding its way back as relatedness to its true primordial state.

A similar criticism of the lack of carry-over from the theological notion of person to the philosophical by St. Thomas has also been made by Karol Wojtyla in his philosophical writings on the person.<sup>10</sup>

Janet Smith has an apt perception regarding why St. Thomas did not develop another, related characteristic of the person (i.e. consciousness) along the lines of the claim made by Clarke regarding relation of the person. She says: "Philosophy is interested in what is

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<sup>10</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993), 2–3, ref. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 132 and 137.

always true or true for the most part, whereas personalism attempts to find a role of central importance for the concrete particular human being.” Therefore, because philosophy deals with universals and not particulars, “the personalistic interest in the consciousness of a particular person is not a strictly suitable subject for philosophy.”<sup>11</sup> Further, she goes on to express Karol Wojtyła’s desire to bridge this gap, the crux of which appears to hinge upon the definition of the human person. She writes:

Yet, as a philosopher, John Paul II wanted to find some way to incorporate an interest in the “unique” and irreplaceable into philosophy, because it is always a unique and unrepeatable person who acts.

John Paul II himself commented on the difference between a universalizing philosophy and a particularizing personalism. In commenting on Aristotle’s definition of the human being as a “rational animal,” John Paul II stated, “The definition is constructed in such a way that it excludes—when taken simply and directly—the possibility of accentuating the irreducible in the human being. It implies—at least at first glance—a belief in the reducibility of the human being to the world.” He calls this view “cosmological.”<sup>12</sup>

We see in St. Thomas’s text: “*Person* signifies what is most perfect in all nature—that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature” (*S.Th.* Ia, Q. 29). But the human person is not reducible to the cosmological, and yet at the same time a particular, such as that meant by “individual, unique person,” may not by definition be defined. So what can *person* mean, how can we philosophically account for the unique dimension of the individual human being?

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<sup>11</sup> Janet E. Smith, “The Universality of Natural Law and the Irreducibility of Personalism,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, 11, no. 4 (2013): 1232.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1233, ref. Karol Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community*, 210.

### **Ratzinger on the Human Person: The Event or Being of Relativity**

Joseph Ratzinger considers Boethius's definition of the human person as substance in light of relation between Persons of the Holy Trinity and makes a startling assertion. He focuses on the idea of relation and calls it a "third specific fundamental category between substance and accident, the two great categorical forms of thought in Antiquity."<sup>13</sup> He also applies Aquinas's relational idea regarding the Persons of the Trinity<sup>14</sup> built upon the work of St. Augustine and the late Church Fathers to that of the human person and says that, "Relativity toward the other constitutes the human person. The human person is the event or being of relativity."<sup>15</sup>

Ratzinger explains,

According to Augustine and late patristic theology, the three persons that exist in God are in their nature relations. They are, therefore, not substances that stand next to each other, but they are real existing relations, and nothing besides. I believe this idea of the late patristic period is very important. In God, person means relation. Relation, being related, is not something super-added to the person, but it *is* the person itself. In its nature, person does not generate in the sense that the act of generating a Son is added to the already complete person, but the person *is* the deed of generating, of giving itself, of streaming itself forth. The person is identical with this act of self-donation. . . . Again we encounter the Christian newness of the personalistic idea in all its sharpness and clarity. The contribution offered by faith to human thought becomes especially clear and palpable here. It was faith that gave birth to this idea of pure act, of pure relativity, which

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio* 17, no. 3 (1990): 444–45.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," 439.

does *not* lie on the level of substance and does not touch or divide substance; and it was faith that thereby brought the personal phenomenon into view. . . .

I believe a profound illumination of God as well as man occurs here, the decisive illumination of what person must mean in terms of Scripture: *not* a substance that closes itself in itself, but the phenomenon of complete relativity, which is, of course, realized in its entirety only in the one who is God, but which indicates the direction of all personal being. The point is thus reached here at which . . . there is a transition from the doctrine of God into Christology and into anthropology.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger takes an intuitive, theological approach based on faith and Scripture to develop the idea of *person* in salvation history from God as one, to a Christological and Trinitarian understanding of relation and the implications that this “dialogical relation” and “logos” in Scripture have on man. May we take what is found in faith and Scripture as a starting point for philosophical extrapolation? By the understanding of what constitutes the philosophy of personalism, we may.<sup>17</sup>

Thomistic metaphysics also has much to say about the relation between God and man by which we may ultimately understand the self-giving act of the person. *Ipsum Esse*—Being Itself or God, and *esse*, existence, here the existence of the human person, share not only an existential relation of essential causality from the Creator to creature, but one of participation by the creature in God at each moment of existence.<sup>18</sup> *Esse* is the first act of the human person (for we are nothing if

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 444–45.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Williams, “What Is Thomistic Personalism?,” 164: “As a philosophical school, personalism draws its foundations from human reason and experience, though historically personalism has nearly always been accompanied by biblical theism and insights drawn from revelation.”

<sup>18</sup> *Esse* here connotes existence as opposed to essence on the part of man, but in God we know that essence and existence are one and the same. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 3.

not existing), completely reliant for this, our individual act, on *Ipsum Esse*, God. What implications does this have for the idea of *person* and his/her self-giving act in relation?

In his article, “The Doctrine of Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics,” Joseph Koterski, S.J., begins within the field of ethics and the idea that for Thomas Aquinas, “the natural law is nothing other than the rational creature’s participation in the eternal law.”<sup>19</sup> Koterski highlights the words *creature* and *participation* in Thomas’s text and states: “In my judgment, it [participation] is one of the genuinely fruitful ways of entry into Thomistic metaphysics, ranking with . . . the notions of act and potency, . . . the analogy of being, and the primacy of the act of existing.”<sup>20</sup> Here, through Thomas’s statement on man’s participation in the eternal law through natural law, we can see that Koterski’s unpacking of the Thomistic use of “participation” as part of the primary relation between man and God interfaces with the personalist thought of Joseph Ratzinger and Karol Wojtyla.

In fact, this particular statement is an assertion about the metaphysical grounding of ethics, for it explains that the moral law governing human conduct, natural law, is one of the ways in which “the rational creature” shares in the divine order, that is, God’s eternal law. Although “law” seems to us to be primarily a category of social thought, Thomas is taking it metaphysically as the “rule and measure” constitutive of all natures; it is the eternal law which impresses upon all things their tendencies toward their own proper acts and ends (*ST* I-II, 91, 2c). . . . As creaturely, human nature is ordered to a divine plan by Providence, and as rational, its very understanding of this order is crucial to the degree of perfection to be achieved in the process of participation. . . . [For which we must stay] constantly mindful of (1) the hu-

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., “The Doctrine of Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics,” in *The Future of Thomism*, ed. Deal W. Hudson and Dennis W. Moran (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 185.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

man being *as creature*, (2) the ongoing *dependence* of the creature on the Creator, and (3) the *humility* involved in “being measured,” in contrast to the *hubris* of some Protagorean conception of “man as the measure” of all things.<sup>21</sup>

Koterski goes on to very specifically address the relational aspect of creature to Creator and its meaning for understanding the meaning of *person*.

I think that bringing out the creaturely dimension would involve seeing the constant importance of being related to God as our source and our goal. While “being related to God” is true of all creation, the human way of “being related to God” is as “rational creature”—that is, as participating in some of the higher perfections of divine being, such as being-a-person, which Thomas and all Christian theology take to be the inner relation constitutive of God’s own being. The eternal relation of one divine person to another, that is, their communion with one another, suggests a relational definition of “person” that would give a more lively picture of “human person” than the Boethian definition of person so often quoted. Further, the communitarian aspects of such a definition would resist the individualism typical of our age with a decisive, polemical bite, even while protecting the truths of distinct substance and relative autonomy that at present need no defending.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Imaging of Jesus Christ: A Receptivity in Relation with the Father**

David Schindler uses the image of Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, as the prototype by which we may begin to understand our own relation to God the Father in participatory *esse* as our own first act, and our subsequent relations as second act. This has to do with who we are as persons stemming from the Source, how we act as creatures, and

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 187–88.

how we subsequently relate to the Source and other creatures through self-giving and conversely, receptivity.

What happens when we turn to the order of creation? First, we need to recall that all things are created in the Word Incarnate in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:1-3). All things, therefore, are created in the image of Jesus Christ (in the image of Christ who is himself “the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation” [Col 1:15]). All creatures, made in and through Christ, thereby “image” him—precisely in his receptivity to the Father. To be sure, there is only one hypostatic union: only Christ is *from the Father* in a way that is co-incident with absolute equality with the Father. The point is simply that Christ’s proper reality nonetheless lies *always* in being a “child”: Christ is perfect (divine) precisely *in* his childlikeness. . . . In the light of this, the most basic thing to be said about creatures is that they are “children” in the “Child.” Creatures “image” God not first as Father (he who goes out of himself), but as Son (he who receives from another, who is communicated). They “image” the perfection of God not first as “agent” but as “patient”: they are empowered to “represent” the “agency” of the Father only in and through the “patience” of the Son. In a word, they “image” first the God who, in Jesus Christ, is revealed to be receptive and thus childlike; only then (that is, always *in* and *by virtue* of the receptivity proper to childlikeness) do they “image” the self-communicative activity proper to fatherlikeness.<sup>23</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger draws this idea further: “Jesus has absolutely nothing besides being the emissary, but is in his nature ‘the one sent.’ He is like the one who sent him precisely because he stands in complete relativity of existence toward the one who sent him.”<sup>24</sup> We understand here, from a personalist approach, the mystical doctrine of the *nada* in relational receptivity of self to God of St. John of the Cross, according

<sup>23</sup> David L. Schindler, “Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” *Communio* 20, no. 3 (1993): 583–84.

<sup>24</sup> Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 446.

to which the human person continuously seeks to make a total gift of self through conscious act toward God and other, of which he is necessarily passively assisted in seeking and receiving through the direct agency of Jesus Christ, which culminates in his perfection in God. This is man living fully in relation according to the image and reality of the Person of Jesus Christ. Ratzinger sums up: “The human person is the event or being of relativity. The more the person’s relativity aims totally and directly at its final goal, at transcendence, the more the person is itself.”<sup>25</sup>

### Action Reveals the Person

Now let us turn to Karol Wojtyla for his input. In his book, *The Acting Person*, Wojtyla states that we know through experience.<sup>26</sup> He gives a philosophical grounding for Joseph Ratzinger’s anthropological definition of person as relation, the pouring forth of self as gift toward other. Wojtyla says that most fundamentally, it is *action* that “reveals the person, and we look at the person through his action.”<sup>27</sup> This differs from the moral value placed on personal act, such as we see expressed by St. Thomas in the second part of his *Summa Theologiae*, as Wojtyla describes:

[T]he performance itself of an action by the person is a fundamental value, which we may call the *personalistic*—personalistic or personal—value of the action. Such a value differs from all moral values, which *belong* to the nature of the performed action and issue from their reference to a norm. The personalistic value, on the other hand, inheres in the performance itself of the action by the person, in the very fact that man acts in a manner appro-

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>26</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 4 and 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

prate to him, that self-determination thus authentically inheres in the nature of his acting and the transcendence of the person is realized through his acting.<sup>28</sup>

Wojtyla says that this type of personal value of the act is concerned with the ontology of the person.<sup>29</sup> This is consonant with Ratzinger's description of *relation* experienced by the human being as *person*.

### **Relation Denotes the Person**

Ratzinger tells us that relation denotes the *person*. This is a universal, ontological statement. Wojtyla tells us we know *what* an individual person is, his unique essence, by examining his *action*. This is phenomenological philosophy, applicable to a particular. We see something new here in the assigning of the value of action: in the work of St. Thomas the value assigned is moral, belonging to the nature of the act itself according to a norm; in personalism the value of the act is said to inhere "in the performance itself of the action by the person, in the very fact that man acts in a manner appropriate to him." We remember that in personalism, our starting point is the person. What is this "manner appropriate to him?" By relation, it is according to the Person of Jesus Christ, as we saw earlier.

Moral act and personal act are certainly not at odds. Rather, this distinction of ideas both describes the objective toward self-actualization and perfection of the human individual as well as source and final end in God. But what the "value of the personal act" shown through personalism allows is a way to discuss—i.e. a philosophy of the particular individual as *person*—the reality of individual relation according to the individual person and the dimension of act itself. This

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

dimension of act, “personalistic act,” the value being placed on act itself, is important. It is possible that it allows *relation* to denote the *person*.

There is a distinction between relation as existential act, such as that in reference to God above, and the conscious “personalistic acts” of the person. We remember that God’s essence is his existence—he is Pure Act. We remember that for the human person *esse*, existence, is act. For the human person, essence is separate from existence. According to Wojtyła, our personal essence is determined by our conscious action.<sup>30</sup>

Relation seems to be related to act. We see that some of our relations are existential, such as my essence as creature is determined by relation to my Creator. But how I *consciously* act as creature in relation determines my essence according to my free will and *according to Truth and Goodness* because they are the exemplars of my conscious action. Truth and goodness are Divine attributes, transcendentals. The question is whether it is possible to say that the *Esse* in which my *esse* participates is actually existential relation “streaming itself forth” and it is this which enlightens me through my relationship to it as my participatory exemplar in my existence as well as in my deliberate actions. I can choose not to act in accord with truth and goodness, but when I do I become more and more actualized according to them and more and more who I am—a creature of God, an image of God.

### **A Third Category between Substance and Accident**

I wonder whether it is possible to continue this along the line of Ratzinger’s thought regarding a new categorization. He calls relation a “third specific fundamental category between substance and accident,

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

the two great categorical forms of thought in Antiquity.”<sup>31</sup> I wonder whether he makes this “third fundamental category” because it is of “action” or “act”—that is, because it stems from *esse* as act. The first category, substance, is of essence or “thing” that includes an implied existence proportionate to essence. The second category, accident, modifies thing. Relation, although contained within Aristotle’s categories as an accident, is more than an accident of place (here and there), quantity (more and less), or time (before and after). It can also be an *act* as in Ratzinger’s idea of person—“relation streaming itself forth,”<sup>32</sup> and it may be in this sense that it is proper to be considered another fundamental category, one of relation-as-act, relation between the *persons* of God and man that fits “between” the categories of substance and accident (which contains relation in the Aristotelian sense) because it is, by nature, existential (in act).<sup>33</sup>

### Relation in Light of the Transcendentals

Let’s consider relation-as-act in light of the transcendentals. Transcendentals are “judgment-based expressions (abbreviations for

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<sup>31</sup> Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 444–45.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* Besides, we remember the Gospel passage, “He—Jesus says—who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38). While Ratzinger uses “relation streaming itself forth” as directly referring to God as *Person*, Jesus tells us here the effect of the relation of the *Person* of Jesus with us when we enter into communion of faith in him. On the practical plane, this is continuously enacted and advanced within us through our experience of the holy Eucharist.

<sup>33</sup> *Relation* as “third fundamental category between substance and accident” then seems to include not only first act (*esse*) and second act (*operari*), but also communion with other by both first and second act (we first communicate our *esse* to other simply by our existence; by second act we both donate the gift of self to other and receive the gift of other).

existential judgments)”<sup>34</sup> about being. Andrzej Maryniarczyk, S.D.B., writes,

The knowledge we gain about reality in the framework of the transcendentals forms the foundation for all other knowledge, both philosophical and scientific. . . . For indeed it concerns aspects of the existence of being that are necessary for each thing, and at the same time are universal for all things.<sup>35</sup>

And by these judgments about being/*esse* are unpacked implicit relations that include not only that which is directly between God and man as *personally* inter-relational, but also every created existent in the world placed as a second relation between God and man as gift of God to man. Maryniarczyk continues,

The rationality of beings is manifested in the fact that particular beings realize in their existence the plan (or thought) developed by their Creator or maker. This plan is assigned to natural beings together with their essence, or is inscribed in human products under the form of a project, idea, or laws that our reason can discover.

St. Thomas Aquinas remarks: “It is clear, therefore, that . . . natural things from which our intellect gets its scientific knowledge measure our intellect. Yet these things are themselves measured by the divine intellect, in which are all created things—just as all works of art find their origin in the intellect of an artist. . . . A natural thing, therefore, being placed between two intellects [the divine and the human intellect—completion by A.M.] is called *true* in so far as it conforms to either.”<sup>36</sup>

The same relational experience between God and man through creation as gift may be discovered in man’s exercise of will toward his final good:

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<sup>34</sup> Andrzej Maryniarczyk, S.D.B., “On the Transcendental Properties of Real Beings,” trans. Hugh McDonald, *Studia Gilsoniana* 5, no. 2 (April-June 2016): 432, note 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 429–30.

The finality or teleology of the world comes to light when we discover that particular things in their existence realize a definite end that has been established by the will of the Creator or a maker. Therefore their existence has meaning. They are goods that come “from” someone and are at the same time addressed “to” someone. Thus we may say that natural things are put between two wills: the will of the Divine Creator and the will of man. Also we may say that real things are the end (purpose) of the appetite of our will. Our will—together with our intellect—discovers this end and orders all human action and conduct according to this end.<sup>37</sup>

These descriptions worded by Maryniarczyk offer particularly good understandings of the importance of reality as determined by relation between God, man, and the world that stems from the act of *esse*. We see the primacy of the use of the *transcendental* as judgment about being/*esse* in order to develop a course of education that is completely ordered to reality and the task of assisting the human person in reaching full actuality as image of God.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>38</sup> See *Ibid.*, 440: “As thus understood, the transcendental being can be treated as the metaphysical ‘principle of principles.’ For indeed this transcendental is the criterion of the cognition of the truth concerning real existence and cognition of being. As a consequence, in the framework of the transcendental being the following occur:

- the field of the realism of the world is unveiled before us; this field is made up of concretely existing things (and only them!) with the entire wealth of their endowment of content;
- we discover the originality or primacy of the order of the existence of a thing in relation to the cognition of it;
- we become aware that both cognition and action are connected with being and directed to being;
- we arrive at the understanding of what being is and why being is, which allows us to distinguish between what is real and what is a product of our thought; that which makes the world real from that which is a theory or hypothesis concerning the world; that which is from nature from that which is from culture, and so, that which is a product and construct of man, etc. Thereby we can remove at the very beginning of rational life all points that would lead to absurdity in the explanation of the world of persons and things. Equipped with this kind of key, we can easily define the field of realism.”

Transcendentals tell us about essential and universal properties of the world and the laws that govern their being.<sup>39</sup> We see this as foundational to true education. We are given the key to understanding self, God, and the world through relation in being. “The transcendentals singled out always add something new to the understanding of being, and as a result of this being is made explicit.”<sup>40</sup> Thing-*res* and one-*unum*, tell us “what is real in itself” taken here as concretely determined essence “non-contradictory in itself.”<sup>41</sup> Something separate-*aliquid* and something else-*aliud quid* get at a “mode of being”—here taken as “sovereign in being,”<sup>42</sup> being by relation to something else.<sup>43</sup> The transcendentals truth-*verum*, goodness-*bonum* and beauty-*pulchrum*<sup>44</sup> are called “vehicles”<sup>45</sup> that convey or relate these aspects of being to the human person’s faculties—the “fact of the universal connection of every being with the intellect of a person is unveiled by the transcendental truth (*verum*), and the connection with the will by the transcendental good (*bonum*).”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 444: “Among the laws of being . . . [are] the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, the law of the excluded middle, the law of the reason of being, the law of finality, and the law of perfection. These laws primarily show the source and foundation of the rational order.”

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 442: “The transcendentals singled out unveil (or make explicit) modes of being that are characteristic of all that really exists. They show what is real in two ways: (1) either as the mode of being of what is real in itself, (2) or as a mode of being in ordination to something else. . . . In the second case the transcendentals unveil the mode of being of what is real in ordination to another being.”

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 433–34: “[B]eauty reveals that real things are always a synthesis of truth and good, that is, in their essence they are perfect, since they result from the correspondence of the intellect and the will of the Creator (natural beings) or maker (works of art).”

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 443. Referring to *The Disputed Questions On Truth* (Q. 1, Art. 1, C.), Maryniarczyk notes: “Thomas explains that each new transcendental adds something to the

Transcendentals are said to be “divine attributes” or “divine names,” so that remembering Ratzinger’s description of God as *relation streaming itself forth* it might also be said that *relation* subsumes all of these. Of course, these transcendental distinctions in God, who is One, only take place as aids to the human mind. But perhaps these distinctions may help us grasp how it is that our recognition of and aim toward the transcendentals of truth, goodness, and beauty as exemplars in our personalistic act uniquely aid us in self-actualization. We become educated. We learn how to better identify with our primary Source and act according to it. In fact, we are drawn to act according to it as *ens*—the primary transcendental that “contains the content of all the other transcendentals, and those interchangeable with it. . . . For indeed this transcendental shows the most primary and fundamental property of what really exists, namely the possession of a definite content and an existence proportionate to that content,”<sup>47</sup> an existence which is *esse*, our *esse* participated in God. This forms us in relation with God and one another.<sup>48</sup>

All of the above has been intended to provide content and support for the idea that Thomistic personalism is a philosophy that can serve as a mode of thought or tool useful in unpacking the unique dimensions of the human person in relation to God and how this is the foundation for our understanding of *person*. It grounds our thought in the reality of *being* and how the child learns and knows the reality of

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understanding of being in the sense that it shows a new aspect of its act of being (*ipsius modus*) which was not expressed by the word ‘being’” (*Ibid.*, 441–42).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Jacques Maritain, “The Person and the Common Good,” trans. John J. FitzGerald, *The Review of Politics* 8, no. 4 (1946): 452: “[I]n the natural order there is a community of minds in as much as minds communicate in the love of truth and beauty, in the life and work of knowledge, art and poetry, and in the highest values of culture . . . it is truth and beauty themselves, through the enjoyment of which minds receive a certain natural irradiation or participation of the Uncreated Truth and Beauty or of the separated common good.”

the world and all that is in it, stemming from the existential underpinning of *esse*—created existence of each thing participating in *Esse*, our Creator, and all that this fundamental relation offers to each individual as act and potential. It offers a rationale for the child’s subsequent relational acts through intellect and will that continue his work in the forms of self-gift in love and reception of gift of other. Taken together, this work comprises the person’s self-actualization of both intellect and will, the bringing into lived reality his potentialities and growing “personhood” through relation, which ultimately bring him to perfection and his final end of beatitude in God. Together this makes up the object and means of Catholic education.

### **Applications**

Let’s turn now to Catholic education as a practical field where we may attempt to offer some brief applications concerning what we have learned about the human person through the philosophy of personalism.

In his work, *Recovering a Catholic Philosophy of Elementary Education*, Curtis Hancock writes about the historical blend of Christian philosophy and faith.

The Church Fathers recognized that we could put Christian philosophy in the service of faith, all in the spirit of *fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding.” Philosophy could assist in 1) interpreting Scripture, 2) explicating articles of faith, and 3) defending the Christian faith against those who condemn it as superstitious. Philosophy’s power to provide this assistance has repeatedly proved itself over the centuries, culminating in the thirteenth century in a theological synthesis (later known as

“Scholasticism”) whose greatest representative was St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>49</sup>

With its broad, eclectic foundation focused on the truth about the human person, perhaps Thomistic personalism is the “new Scholasticism,” the new synthesis that incorporates philosophy and the faith, according to the human person, for our time. Janet Smith suggests, “Soon seminaries will need to make an introduction to personalism a standard part of seminary education.”<sup>50</sup>

*The Center of Christian Moral Education:  
Love, not Precept*

Two new textbooks of moral theology have recently been produced in Rome that illustrate a shift in the way moral instruction is being devised based on *person in relation*. They are *To Walk in the Light of Love: Foundations of Christian Morality*<sup>51</sup> by professors at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, and *Chosen in Christ to be Saints*<sup>52</sup> by moral theologians at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. What we find here is a shift from a paradigm based on precept and law to a paradigm from the Gospels, one that is based on the act of the person as relation in communion—love.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Curtis L. Hancock, *Recovering a Catholic Philosophy of Elementary Education* (Mount Pocono, PA: Newman House Press, 2005), 46.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, “The Universality of Natural Law and the Irreducibility of Personalism,” 1230.

<sup>51</sup> Livio Melina, José Noriega Bastos and Juan José Pérez-Soba, *Camminare nella luce dell'amore: I fondamenti della morale Cristiana* (Siena, 2008, second edition 2010; Spanish edition: Madrid, 2007, second edition 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Enrique Colom and Ángel Rodríguez Luño, *Chosen in Christ to Be Saints: Fundamental Moral Theology* (Kindle Edition 2014; Roma: Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> Juan José Pérez-Soba, “The Truth of Love: A Light to Walk By. Experience, Metaphysics and the Foundation of Morality,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2011): 280 and 289.

Rev. Juan José Pérez-Soba of the Area of International Research in Moral Theology project<sup>54</sup> at the John Paul II Institute attributes the historic loss of the understanding of love as the central focal point of moral theology to two things: 1) the influence of late-medieval nominalist thought with its emphasis on obligation, and 2) the subsequent post-tridentine manuals which departed from Aquinas's organization around the virtues to an ordering based on law and the commandments.<sup>55</sup> Rather, Christ becomes our "living, personal law"<sup>56</sup> as we live out our relations in him through personal act, through love.

*Catholic Liberal Arts Education:  
Centering on Person in Relation*

Catholic liberal arts education is perennial education. It bases its teaching upon the nature of person in relation through the transcendentals, especially the good, true, and beautiful in conjunction with the age level psychology and pedagogical aptitudes of the child. It is a model

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<sup>54</sup> The Area of International Research in Moral Theology project at the John Paul II Institute in Rome "draws upon the ethics of Aquinas and a wealth of sources within the broader context of twentieth-century *ressourcement* theology . . . under the influence of thinkers like Henri de Lubac, S.J., and especially Hans Urs von Balthasar, while also drawing extensively upon the writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. . . . Since its founding in 1997, this project has been directed by Msgr Livio Melina, whose main collaborators have included the Spaniards Rev. José Noriega Bastos and Rev. Juan José Pérez-Soba." William Murphy, Jr., "Some Recent Moral Theology from Rome: Introduction," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2011): 252.

<sup>55</sup> Both pontifical institutes in Rome cited here are "working toward a reinvigoration of the field [of moral theology] along the lines encouraged by the 1993 encyclical *Veritatis splendor*." Murphy, "Some Recent Moral Theology from Rome: Introduction," 255.

<sup>56</sup> Pérez-Soba, "The Truth of Love: A Light to Walk By," 290: "The novelty with respect to other approaches which similarly articulate the priority of grace, but which have not been able to establish a link with human action, is that in *Veritatis splendor* this appears in the framework of the *new law* (VS n. 12, 23–26, 45, 107, 114), and thus in intrinsic connection with all that is meant by the natural law. From this, then, derives a way of proposing a morality that hinges not on the precept—which does not explain how the act arises—but on what the encyclical considers the profound unity that exists between the person's moral experience and the encounter with Christ."

currently being re-launched among Catholic schools, U.S. dioceses, and abroad. Bishop David Ricken of the Diocese of Green Bay, the “Catholic Schools Curriculum Foundations Document of the Diocese of Marquette Approved by Bishop John Doerfler,” and Professor Jānis Tāļivaldis Ozoliņš of the University of Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, cite the highest object and method of Catholic education as depending from the human person’s participatory relation with God, particularly the Person of Jesus Christ.

In his talk entitled, “All Beginnings Are Difficult” given at the 2015 launching of St. John Paul II School, the first Catholic liberal arts school in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Bishop Ricken states:

In Catholic education we have the unique privilege of forming and educating the whole person. What a responsibility. Every person has the duty to seek the truth because a sincere search for truth can only end in *the* Truth, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—Jesus himself. The true definition of freedom is the ability to move oneself towards one’s own good. This is another way that we can say a liberal education is an education for our freedom. By training the mind to think, to discern the truth from falsehood, it equips a person to move closer to the one Truth, to the one Good.<sup>57</sup>

The Diocese of Marquette, Michigan recently implemented a Catholic liberal arts curriculum across all nine diocesan schools, beginning in 2014. In the “Foundations Document” for this new educational model found on the diocesan website, we read:

The greatest happiness a person can attain is communion with Jesus Christ. Therefore, the core of our curriculum is the Person of

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<sup>57</sup> Bishop David Ricken, “All Beginnings Are Difficult” Talk on why Catholic liberal arts elementary education, St. Norbert College, DePere, Wisconsin, Nov. 3, 2015, accessed Sept. 20, 2017, <http://www.sjclassicalschoolgreenbay.org/2015/11/bishop-rickens-presentation-on-november-3-2015/>.

Jesus Christ. We hope to graduate students who have “encountered the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4). This relationship elicits in the student a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way, those who encounter Christ are drawn by the power of the Gospel to lead new lives characterized by all that is beautiful, good and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord’s disciples, the Church” (Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with Catholic Educators, Catholic University of America, 2008, 2).<sup>58</sup>

And J. T. Ozoliņš, in his article, “Aquinas and His Understanding of Teaching and Learning,” writes:

For Aquinas, teaching is connected with the Divine, since he argues that though human beings are able to teach, they do so in a secondary sense and that it is God who primarily teaches. This is because God is the source of all being and is the light at the heart of our being. In the learning process, a key feature of Aquinas’s account builds on the nature of illumination, which is to say an understanding of what is taught that enables us to see how what we have learnt connects to other things. Ultimately, these connections lead us to Wisdom, which is to say God, and for Aquinas wisdom in its different forms is the central aim of all teaching and learning.<sup>59</sup>

In these excerpts, God is seen not only as object toward which Catholic education aims as essential religion content and object of our faith relation, but the additional causal “why” is expressed as relation

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<sup>58</sup> “Foundations Document for the Catholic School Curriculum of the Diocese of Marquette, Approved by Bishop John F. Doerfler,” Marquette, Michigan, March 2014, accessed Sept. 20, 2017,

<http://dioceseofmarquette.org/images/files/Catholic%20Schools/Final%20Bishop%20approved%20Foundations%20Doc%20Cath%20School%20Curric%20Dioc%20Marquette.pdf>. Hereafter cited as “Foundations Document.”

<sup>59</sup> Jānis Tāļivaldis Ozoliņš, “Aquinas and His Understanding of Teaching and Learning,” in *Aquinas, Education and the East*, ed. Thomas B. Mooney and Mark Nowacki (Springer Dordrecht, 2013), 10, DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-5261-0\_2.

between God as Creator/Source and person as participant/learner that is applicable to every other aspect of education as well—both intellectual and moral. As J. T. Ozoliņš says, God is the true teacher of each of us as learner “because God is the source of all being and is the light at the heart of our being.” From the outset we are in relation with God not only by our existence, but through the use of what makes us characteristically human, our rationality that includes both intellect and will.

At the heart of the Catholic liberal arts curriculum is the Person of Jesus Christ. The Catholic liberal arts are designed to lead the student by way of the transcendentals, or the “vehicles” of the true, the good, and the beautiful, to God himself. Through elements such as wonder experienced through attention to physical nature and its classification, poetry enjoyment and memorization, the abstraction and exactitude of mathematics, science as *scientia*-knowledge, true beauty as harbinger of evangelization and practical application enjoyed through the applied arts and by virtue/character training, the student is formed through his intellectual and moral acts in the experience of the transcendentals and the principles they provide in order to become better prepared to relationally experience Jesus Christ in Scripture and the Mass, in the Eucharist and the other sacraments. When the student grows in his experience of relation in these ways that are in accord with his own personal reality, he becomes self-actualized according to his highest possibility.

### *The Teacher in Relation with Christ and Student*

Catholic education “is possible only when it is sustained by our teachers’ experience and witness of a personal relationship with Christ.”<sup>60</sup> The teacher becomes a person equipped to take part in the process of the education of another by his/her relation and ongoing

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<sup>60</sup> “Foundations Document,” 1.

identification with Jesus Christ. As St. Bonaventure challenges: “He only is a true educator who can kindle in the heart of his pupil the vision of beauty, illumine it with the light of truth, and form it to virtue.”<sup>61</sup> This is possible only through *relation streaming itself forth*, the “personalistic act” of the educator who lives in relation with student as witness to and image of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Thomistic personalism helps us analyze and intuit effective creation of education according to the metaphysical consideration of the true, ethical analysis of the good and phenomenological analysis of how it is lived out through relation and personalistic action, and aesthetic consideration of how beauty may be portrayed especially in leading to evangelization. Standard elements of this type of education stem from the understanding of relation between the human person and truth and goodness, faith, the Person of Jesus Christ, and community.



### THE PERSON IN RELATION: AN ANALYSIS OF GREAT CATHOLIC EDUCATION VIA THOMISTIC PERSONALISM

#### SUMMARY

The author shows the usefulness of the philosophy of Thomistic personalism in determining the type of education most beneficial to the human person’s highest development by building on St. Thomas Aquinas’s idea of personal *relation* according to both the first act-*esse* and the second act-*operari*. Because the richness of this philosophy involves the use of Thomistic metaphysics and metaethics, anthropology, political philosophy, phenomenology and aesthetics and is meant to be applied (as in Pope St.

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

John Paul II's theology of the body), the author helps discover a unique and fitting tool by which Catholic education may be considered and planned for based on what is most fundamental to the human person's reality—the act of his existence and subsequent personalistic act, according to truth and love. The author also presents a selection of real applications included in such an approach to the person in relation.

#### KEYWORDS

Thomistic personalism, first act, second act, *esse, operari*, act of existence, personal relation, transcendentals, principles of knowledge, truth, love, goodness, beauty, Catholic education, liberal arts education, metaphysics, metaethics, evangelization.

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