The Humility of God in a Scientific World

Revolutionary scientific discoveries in this century, particularly in the area of cosmology, have made the question of divine action in the created world a controversial one. While conservative theologians hold on to a medieval world view in which God acts in and guides a closed universe that comfortably fits “in the palm of God’s hand,” others have abandoned the medieval view to confront the challenges posed by the new cosmology. A universe in which chance, chaos, and complex interactions comprise the physical fabric compels theologians to interpret divine action in radically new ways. The myriad of books and articles on this subject within the last ten years is an indication that the new cosmology is calling for a new theology.

While the efforts of scholars to discern the role of God in creation are commendable, they are, at the same time, circumscribed by the notion of God as unified being. The Christian version of Aristotle’s unmoved mover, thanks to the genius of Thomas Aquinas, has compelled scholars to speak of God as a single agent acting in the world. While the notion of God as absolute being is not disputed, it tends to obscure the fact that the Christian God is a trinity of persons and acts in the world as trinity.

In this paper I will explore God’s action in the world not as being but as absolute and self-diffusive good, an idea based on the theology of the Franciscan theologian, Bonaventure. For Bonaventure, God is trinity precisely because God is by nature a self-diffusive good. My thesis is that God acts in the world as the good and this good is the love of the triune God. Since the good is hidden in the ordinary events of the universe, I propose that divine love is a humble love that undergirds the creativity of the physical world and allows the goodness of the world to unfold, revealing the universe as the heart of God.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOD AND CREATION

With the explosion of science in the twentieth century and the revelation of the physical world as a complex interaction of particles and molecules, there is perhaps no more urgent question than how God acts in an evolutionary and unpredictable universe. The question of divine action has, since the enlightenment, been pushed further to the
edge only to become obsolete for some scholars in the face of science as the answer to religious questions.

Beginning with the enlightenment, the God of “traditional theism” came to appear hopelessly irrelevant and out of place. The God of the enlightenment deists was one who created the universe at some definite point in the past to be governed solely according to the immutable laws of nature. Newton’s mechanistic view of the universe held up a causally closed universe with little room for God’s special action in specific events—and then only as the “God of the gaps.” A century later the French scientist Pierre Simon de LaPlace reduced all of nature to an impersonal mechanism. The interiorization of religion, initiated by Immanuel Kant and confirmed by Frederick Schleiermacher, left the “starry heavens” and the clockwork of nature abandoned in the universe, resulting in a collapse of distinction between creation and providence. The physical world was seen as causally closed, deterministic and reducible to that of its physical parts: the action of a free agent (human or divine) entailed a violation of natural processes (Russell, 1997: 50). Special divine intervention could only mean that God violated or at least suspended the laws of nature. The legacy of the enlightenment world view informed by Newtonian physics gave rise to the natural universe as a given datum whose secrets could be discovered by only the competent expert.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, classical physics was replaced by two new theories which revolutionized scientific thinking of the physical world: special relativity and quantum mechanics. No longer was the universe considered a brute, indifferent, mechanism which operates according to unchanging laws. Rather, the static cosmology of Newton was replaced by the big bang universe of Einstein. Randomness, chance, and unpredictability became the essential elements that made the universe essentially what it is. As Michael Drummy states: “From the study of the smallest sub-atomic particle to the discovery by Edwin Hubble that the universe is expanding, our collective view of the universe has, in the incredibly short space of about fifty years, been irreversibly and abruptly altered” (Drummy, 1996: 256). Because of the advances made by science since the enlightenment, particularly in the areas of theoretical physics and evolutionary biology, many scientists are now willing to consider new features involving dynamism, change, and movement in their efforts to apprehend how the universe operates. Rather than viewing the universe as a closed causal mechanism, it is seen to be more like an open, temporal process with an ontology in which the genuine, material effects of human and even divine agency are at least conceivable (Russell: 51).

For many scientists, the fact that the universe exists in the form it does constitutes nothing less than a mystery, given the forces and the
possibilities that have opposed it and continue to do so. The more scientists penetrate the secrets of the physical universe, the more some scientists come away with a sense of awe and majesty. Even Stephen Hawking, an avowed agnostic, is compelled to ask:

What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? . . . Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing? Is the unified theory so compelling that it brings about its own existence? Or does it need a creator, and, if so, does he have any other effect on the universe? And who created him? (Hawking, 1988: 174).

Hawking’s question echoes the famous question posed by the German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz: “Why something and not nothing?” Drummy states that if Hawking’s musings on God’s role as Creator of the universe are any indication at all, science may indeed have arrived at the point where the question of “something-not-nothing” is one that it wishes to ponder. What science delivers to us about the natural universe can, and should, become material for philosophical and theological reflection (258). Yet, theology lags far behind the explosion of scientific knowledge. For the most part the theological community of the twentieth century has doggedly pursued strategies designed to cope with a mechanistic physics now long abandoned, and in the process, it has largely failed to recognize these changes and their significance (Russell: 51). Only at the end of this century is theology waking up to the discoveries of science and beginning to ask, where is God in this vast universe and how is God acting?

THE QUESTION OF DIVINE ACTION

The question of divine action is a complex one made by the world of science itself in which chance, chaos, and complex interactions at the subatomic and molecular levels play a significant role in the evolution of life processes. One of the striking developments in science in recent years has been the increasing recognition that many dynamical systems—physical, chemical and biological—can become unpredictable in their observable behavior by unknown means. This type of unpredictable behavior due to indeterminate variables is referred to as chaos. Chaos means that “a system can have complicated behavior that emerges as a consequence of simple, nonlinear interaction of only a few components . . . Through amplification of small fluctuations it can provide natural systems with access to novelty” (Peacocke, 1993: 53). Changes in weather patterns, for example, can arise from a butterfly disturbing the air; changes in the turbulent flow of a river can result from the effects of a pebble. Ilya Prigogine identifies these unpredictable changes in patterns due to arbitrary variables as “order
through fluctuations,” since arbitrary fluctuations can ultimately transform a whole system (Prigogine, 1984).

Although chaos plays a significant role in the functional pattern of physical systems, chance too plays a significant role and poses a challenge to the place of divine action in the world. Chance is described as “the unanticipated juxtaposition of two unrelated causal trajectories such as the casting of dice, fluctuations in chaotic systems, changes in weather, and so on” (Russell: 53). Science employs two categories of chance: (1) chance in the classical domain, where chance is epistemological, that is, the result of our ignorance of the presumably underlying deterministic processes in physical, chemical, and biological systems, and therefore suggestive of an underlying metaphysical determinism in the macroscopic domain, and (2) chance in the quantum domain where chance is ontological, since the theory of quantum underscores the inability to measure simultaneously the position and velocity of a particle. Chance, therefore, indicates an underlying metaphysical indeterminism in the atomic and subatomic domain (Russell: 55).

The significant role of chance in the evolution of life processes has led some scholars to suggest that God has a self-limited omnipotence and omniscience which God imposes upon himself in creation. Einstein’s famous statement, “God does not play dice,” has led some to speculate that God acts through chance by allowing creation to explore its own possibilities (Peacocke: 120–21). In this respect, God imposes a self-limitation with regard to divine action so that chance may freely operate according to its own internal laws. Chance, as Arthur Peacocke points out, creatively interacts with law to allow new life forms to emerge and evolve (118). Peacocke is one who supports the notion of limited divine action in creation in favor of chance:

For, in order to achieve his purposes, he [God] has allowed his inherent omnipotence and omniscience to be modified, restricted and curtailed by the very open-endedness that he has bestowed upon creation . . . The attribution of “self-limitation” to God with respect to his omnipotence is meant to indicate that God has so made the world that there are certain areas over which he has chosen not to have power (121–22).

God, according to Peacocke, feigns ignorance in order to yield to creation’s inherent creativity. Rather than ordering the universe with divine precision, God “chooses” to create a world in which God does not know the outcome of non-linear systems or the unpredictable character of subatomic constituents (122). Peacocke claims that God’s self-limited omniscience and omnipotence is the self-emptying (*kenosis*) and self-giving of God in creation. This “costly becoming” of the world
is what he identifies as God’s love, since God allows creation the freedom to follow its own laws and designs (123). While God guides physical processes through a type of gentle persuasion “from above” (top-down causation), God does not interfere on the local level of events. Rather, God allows nature to “play” according to its own rules and in this way to be creative. The notion of creative play in nature at the cost of divine action, however, places the whole design and order of the universe in doubt. If chance has the lead role in the cosmic drama, one must ask: what does God do while creation is at play?

Nancy Murphy states that any acceptable theory of divine action must “explain how God and natural causes conspire to bring about the world as we know it via our scientific picture of law-like regularity and the genuine randomness of quantum events, as well as our experience of free will” (Murphy, 1995: 325–57). In Murphy’s view, all quantum events involve a combination of natural and divine causality; they are determined, though only in part and not solely, by God. God’s role is in activating or actualizing one or another of the quantum entity’s innate powers at particular instants, and these events are not possible without God’s action. God sustains the world, she claims, by acting at both the macro level and quantum level not only as a guiding influence but also as a causal joint, ensuring an orderly creative series of processes that give rise to life forms. “The laws that describe the behavior of the macro-level entities . . . are indirect though intended consequences of God’s direct acts at the quantum level” (346). She further states, “I am proposing that the uniformity of nature is a divine artifact” (348). While Murphy grants a greater role to divine action in creative processes, indicating that no quantum event is possible without God’s action, she is unclear with regard to exactly how God acts. Although she does not attribute any limitation to God, divine action is nevertheless circumscribed by the creative processes themselves. Rather than describing a divine contraction in order to create, Murphy assigns God the role of the “articulating joint,” ensuring proper causal connections which make the universe what it is and the human person as the optimum viewer. How this “joint” actually operates in the created world, however, is nothing less than a mystery.

THE GOD WHO ACTS IS TRINITY

One of the problems of divine action in creation is the language about the nature of God who is involved in creation. Owen Thomas’ remark is noted: “Theologians continue to talk a great deal about God’s activity in the world, and there continue to be only a very few who pause to consider some of the many problems involved in such talk” (Thomas, 1990: 35). Language about God’s action in the scientific world is compounded by a lack of clarity with respect to the nature of
God. By describing God as one who operates at both the macro level and quantum level, for example, God is imaged as a singular being who acts as a singular agent. The God-language of the religion-science dialogue tends to be monistic: God is, on one hand, the unmoved mover of Aristotle, and on the other, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, in terms of a Christian dialogue between religion and science, the term God presupposes trinity. God is not one spirit acting as an agent in the world; God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit acting as trinity in the world. The God who acts is the triune God and any discussion on the relation of religion and science must take note of the Trinity (Thomas, 1997: 71). However, the western doctrine of trinity with its emphasis on the divine unity tends to obscure the work of the Trinity in creation and needs correction by the eastern doctrine, with its emphasis on the distinctions of the persons. Denis Edwards rejects the idea of a “causal joint” between divine action and created causality as if God intervenes as a single agent to bring about events. Rather, he draws on Richard of St. Victor and St. Bonaventure to describe a relational-communal model of trinity, in which the Trinity interacts with both chance and lawfulness in the world (Thomas: 71).

Edwards, I believe, is on the right track. Western theology, particularly in this century, has relied heavily on the theology of Thomas Aquinas for whom God is a unity of substance in a trinity of persons—pure being and pure act. Thomas’s God is essentially Aristotle’s unmoved mover, and the question of God’s action is the question of how pure absolute being “acts” in a world of becoming. It is because Thomas’s God of absolute being underscores the unity of God rather than a trinity of persons that Edwards looks to other models of the Trinity. One model that he highlights is the doctrine of the Trinity described by the Franciscan theologian St. Bonaventure. With its emphasis on relationship and love, Bonaventure’s doctrine of the Trinity is one that is especially relevant to the scientific world because of its dynamic nature. I would like to examine Bonaventure’s doctrine more closely to show that the triune God of love is one that does not pose any self-limitation with regard to knowledge or power, unlike Peacocke, but rather manifests these divine attributes through divine humility which corresponds to the nature of God as good. Divine love does not mean that God “withdraws” so that creation may act; rather, divine love communicates itself entirely and freely as the good and this good underscores the dynamism of creative events which give rise to forms of life.

BONAVENTURE’S DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The most outstanding characteristic of Bonaventure’s trinity is its relational nature which arises from the fact that God is essentially
good. While Bonaventure concedes that God is absolute being he goes one step further to say that God is absolute good. God’s being is God’s goodness. Bonaventure borrows the idea of God as the self-diffusive good from the Pseudo-Dionysius, a sixth-century monk, whose Neoplatonism led him to describe God as a self-diffusive good (bonum diffusivum sui), which gives rise to being (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 156). In his work the Divine Names, the Pseudo-Dionysius indicates that the good precedes being and, indeed, gives rise to being. Nothing that exists and is of life exists apart from the good. He writes:

Given that the good transcends everything, as indeed it does, its nature, unconfined by form, is the creator of all form. In it is non-being really an excess of being. It is not a life, but is, rather, super-abundant life. It is not a mind, but is superabundant wisdom. Whatever partakes of the good partakes of what preeminently gives form to the formless. And one might even say that nonbeing itself longs for the good which is above being (73).

For the Pseudo-Dionysius, the world is a theophany, a manifestation of God, because it flows out of the self-diffusive goodness of God. This idea is highly influential on Bonaventure’s view of the created world which he describes as a mirror reflecting the goodness of God (Bonaventure, 1982: 76–77).

Bonaventure’s view of creation as reflecting the good corresponds to the fact that creation is integrally linked to the Trinity whose persons are distinguished by the good. The Father is the fountain source of the good since the Father is first and without origin. As the fountain fullness (fontalis plenitudo), the Father gives himself totally by producing another. The Father gives rise to the Son who is generated by the very nature of the Father as good. This dynamic union between the Father and Son is bonded in the love of the Spirit (Hayes, 1974: 33–47). Following Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure identifies the highest good as love and states that the perfection of love requires a trinity of persons, the lover, the beloved and the fruit of love expressed in a third person. He unites Richard’s notion of God as a community of love with the Pseudo-Dionysius’s self-diffusive good to describe the persons of the Trinity as a dynamic relationship of self-diffusive love (Cousins, 1978: 106). God is outward moving dynamic trinity whose essential life is marked by personal gift. For Bonaventure, this is the basic and normative reality of the universe. Given that reality at its deepest levels is a dynamic diffusion of the good, he sees creation as a limited actualization of the infinite and dynamic good that marks the divine order. The created universe is grounded in the relationships of God who is love. Because of this integral link between God and the created world, God is not the “unmoved mover” of Aristotle but the
“moved lover” who freely creates precisely because God is love and this love is manifested in the eternal self-diffusion of the good.

Bonaventure affirms that the act of creation arises from the eternal fecundity of the Father and is an overflow of that fecundity. The fountain fullness of the Father within the Trinity is recapitulated in creation and the Trinity itself becomes a fountain fullness expressing itself outward and into the world. The creative trinity becomes for the created universe the emanating fountain fullness of the good and does not merely provide a base for creation but imparts its dynamism to creation. Creation, therefore, is not a mere external act of God, a making of an object on the fringe of divine power. Rather, it shares in and expresses the unfathomable mystery of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, the dynamism of eternal divine love (Cousins: 57).

Creation is linked to the triune God through the Son, the Word of God. It is through the Word that God and the universe interpenetrate. For Bonaventure, the Word expresses God as trinity since the Word is uniquely united to the Father and Spirit. To say that God acts in the world is to say that God acts through the Word who is at the center of the creation process. It is through the Word that everything comes into being, a divine act characterized by the self-diffusion of the good between the Father and Son, that is, a divine act of love. The contemporary theologian Jurgen Moltmann states that the logic of creation is the logic of love. Examining the question of creation’s contingency on the divine, Moltmann indicates that raising the question of whether or not it was necessary for God to create the world is to preempt the nature of divine love which creates both freely and by the very nature of itself as love. As Moltmann writes:

When we say that God created the world “out of freedom,” we must immediately add “out of love.” God’s freedom is not the almighty power for which everything is possible. It is love, which means the self-communication of the good. If God creates the world out of freedom, then he creates it out of love. Creation is not a demonstration of his boundless power; it is the communication of his love, which knows neither premises nor preconditions . . . God therefore does what for him is axiomatic—what is divine. In doing this he is entirely free, and in this freedom he is entirely himself (Moltmann, 1985: 75–6).

Moltmann highlights two aspects which are essential to God’s action: creativity and freedom. God freely creates because God is essentially love and “love cannot be anything else but creative.” This corresponds to Bonaventure’s notion of the Trinity as the self-diffusive good which by its very nature is totally communicative. He writes: “The purity of goodness is the pure act of a principle loving in charity with a love that
is both free and due and a mixture of both, which is the fullest diffusion by way of nature and will, which is a diffusion by way of the Word, in which all things are said, and by way of the Gift, in which other gifts are given” (Bonaventure, 1982: 104). The goodness of creation, therefore, is characterized by its creative freedom and is good precisely because of its relational nature which corresponds to fact that creation is grounded in the trinity of love.

THE ACTION OF GOD MANIFESTED IN JESUS CHRIST

Although Bonaventure did not describe God’s actions in a scientific world he would agree that if we want to know how God acts in the world then we must take note of the person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word who is historicized in space and time. The incarnation of the Word is the great mystery of God’s action in the world. In the incarnation, God is not only most high (altissime) but God is intimately related to us (piissime) and through us to the whole physical world (Bonaventure, 1963: 35). Bonaventure states that Christ is the most noble perfection of the universe because he combines in his person material, spiritual, and divine natures (Bonaventure, 1996: 55) and, as such, is the center of the universe (Bonaventure, 1969: 8).

As a Franciscan theologian, Bonaventure emphasized the fact that the Word took on human nature in poverty and humility. In his sermon on the nativity, he states that God humbly bent down to lift the dust of our nature into unity with his own person (Bonaventure, 1989: 57). For Bonaventure the incarnation of the Word characterizes the divine poverty and humility and is a manifestation of God as the self-diffusive good. God gives himself totally to the other both in the inner life of the Trinity (Father-Son relation) and in creation, and in doing so, turns totally toward the other to give all that he has and all that he is. In other words, God acts in total love. The incarnation is not due primarily to sin, according to Bonaventure, but to the completion of the world in love.1 In Christ the whole cosmos is lifted up and imbued with the diffusive love of God.

While the historical life of Christ reveals the poverty and humility of God, Bonaventure perceived that the fullest manifestation of divine love is shown in the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross not only reveals divine love but it is mysterium, an overflowing of divine love in the uni-

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1 Although Bonaventure does not hold strictly to a doctrine of absolute primacy, he nevertheless indicates that sin is not the first reason for the incarnation but rather the last reason. The primary reason for the incarnation is to manifest the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, a reason that corresponds to the fact that God’s love is fully manifested in Jesus Christ. See Francis Xavier Pancheri, The Universal Primacy of Christ, Juniper B. Carol, trans. (Front Royal, Va.: Christendom Publications, 1984) 19–20.
verse. Christ Crucified discloses the heart of God in the heart of the universe. If you are amazed, he states, at this self-diffusing good which gives rise to the Trinity of persons distinguished by their personal properties yet one in substance, you will be further amazed to discover that the highest good which gives itself totally is the mystery of the Crucified Christ (Bonaventure, 1982: 107). For in him is joined the first principle with the last, God with humanity, eternal with temporal, most simple with the most composite, the most perfect and immense with the most lowly. Bonaventure, therefore, links the self-diffusive good to the mystery of Christ Crucified. He indicates that it is precisely because God is good (love) that Christ Crucified expresses the mystery of God who is love in the created world. The humility of the cross reflects the eternal humility of God. In light of the Crucified, Bonaventure indicates that being is embodied love—an agapic love which possesses nothing for itself but rather gives itself entirely and completely to the other, just as the Father eternally diffuses his entire good to the Son and Spirit. Since being itself is constituted by goodness, the very existence of life in the universe means that God’s action in the world is manifested in the good. To be is to be good and to be good is to be in relationship. Zachary Hayes states that in the physical world “isolated, independent existence must be given up in order to enter into broader and potentially deeper levels of existence” (Hayes, 1997: 91). In this respect, the physical world reflects the model of Christ, the embodied goodness of God, whose suffering and death on the cross in obedience to the Father brings about the fullness of life for humanity and the entire cosmos.

DIVINE ACTION

The revelation of divine love in the poverty and humility of Jesus Christ indicates to us how God acts in the world. God is not merely an external agent who pushes quarks and gluons around to produce the elements of life. God is the self-diffusing good whose goodness gives rise to being through the Word. That is, the very existence of every thing that is “spoken” through the Word manifests the goodness of God. To say that God acts in the world is to say that the good begets the good—and this divine good begets created good precisely through creativity and freedom. Karl Rahner suggests that evolutionary change occurs because of a power that comes from within—a power not due to the nature of creature but understood as the “pressure” of the divine being acting within. God is at the heart of the evolutionary process, empowering it from within and moving it toward active self-transcendence (Rahner, 1984: 479). We can identify Rahner’s “power” as Bonaventure’s self-diffusing good manifested in the cosmos as the humble love of God, a love which gives rise to
being, sustains creativity, and draws the universe ever closer to the divine heart.

The notion that the humble love of God comprises the inner force of the created universe underscores the notion of a self-organizing universe, one that can entertain chance, randomness, complexity, and chaos, and give rise to beauty and order that can be intelligibly perceived. As John Haught states:

> The universe of complexity and chaos suggests an understanding of God’s power as gentle and persuasive rather than coercive. A world which, as a whole, is so sensitive to the initial conditions from which it has evolved is one that seems to be guided more by tenderness than by brute force . . . God does not force the world into some final shape in an instantaneous display of magic . . . but . . . allows it to proliferate into an amazing creative diversity of adaptive systems (Haught, 1995: 156).

This divine self-restraining character is fully compatible with God’s love which, rather than being rigidly deterministic, is total self-giving in freedom and creativity for the sake of the good, which both gives rise to created being and characterizes being.

While the appearance of an autonomous, self-organizing universe may not seem to need God at all, it is precisely the action of divine love as a humble love hidden in the world that allows the universe to unfold as we know it (anthropic principle). Haught claims that if God is to create a world truly distinct from the divine self, such a world would have to have an internal “self-coherence” or autonomy. In order for the world of creation to be distinct from the Creator, God “lets be” by freely “withdrawing” the exercise of divine power and expansive presence (160). While this idea is also noted in the works of Moltmann and Peacocke, it reflects the Thomistic notion of God as absolute being. When we consider the same idea in terms of the self-diffusive good, we see that there is no sense for divine “withdrawing” to allow for creation, for the very self-diffusion of the good is itself creative. The notion of the good preempts any need to speak of a “divine self-contraction” in order to create. As we have noted, this divine diffusive good is the humble love of God, a love that shows its “power” by hiding itself in the universe in the form of the good. God’s omnipotence is the humble trinity of love sustaining the world in created goodness. God’s love is a love that imparts freedom to creation, allowing creation to act in accordance with its own internal laws and nature. And yet, it is precisely because divine love is other-centered, interacting with the other for the sake of the good, that creation is never abandoned by God. Rather, God’s humble love hides itself in the ordinary structures of the physical universe in a manner comparable to the presence of God hidden in
the Eucharist in the form of ordinary bread. As Haught writes: “It is only because we have not thought extensively about divine love as a self-emptying that we find ourselves surprised that a divinely created universe is a self-organizing one” (161).

Just as God does not force humans into submission nor exercise control over human life through force or domination, so too, in the natural world God infinitely loves and this love is the divine humility which is not opposite to divine power but itself is the “all-mighty” power of God. Haught states that God’s “power” is more effectively manifested in a humble “letting be” of a self-organizing universe (161). I would prefer to say that God’s power manifests itself in a self-organizing universe through diffusion of the good. The transformation of elements into life forms and processes is, as Haught suggests, the self-outpouring of divine love that both invites the world into being and continually challenges it to raise itself ever further above indefiniteness and nothingness (161).

THE UNIVERSE, THE HEART OF GOD

Although the humility of God’s love in the physical universe may seem to enclose God within the confines of the universe, Bonaventure clearly states that creation is no more than a point in time compared to the immensity of the divine good. God “is an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” (Bonaventure, 1982: 103). God is a coincidence of opposites (coincidentia oppositorum) manifested in the mystery of Christ and this nature of God as a coincidence of opposites corresponds to the fact that God is absolute and self-diffusive goodness. Because God is a coincidence of opposites, God’s transcendent nature as absolute good is God’s immanence as self-giving love. Bonaventure indicates that “God’s power is his humility; God’s strength is his weakness; God’s greatness is his lowliness. God is first and last, eternal and present, simple and great, everywhere present and nowhere contained” (107). Because God is “within all things but not enclosed; outside all things but not excluded, above all things but not aloof, below all things, but not debased, God is supremely one and all-inclusive and is, therefore, all in all” (100–1).

The absolute inclusiveness of God means that there is nothing apart from God nor does God ever withdraw from creation for the sake of

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2 The notion that God hides himself in the form of bread in the Eucharist is declared by none other than Francis of Assisi who, in his own expressive manner, exhorted the faithful to take note of the humility of God. Referring to the Eucharist in his Letter to the Order (27) he states: “That the Lord of the universe, God and Son of God, so humbles himself that for our salvation he hides himself under the little form of bread! Look brothers at the humility of God.” English trans. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, Francis and Clare: The Complete Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) 58.
creativity. The notion of “divine contraction” contradicts the nature of God as good for the good naturally communicates itself by giving itself to another. To say that God allows nature to “play” does not mean that God hides or withdraws his presence. Rather, it means that God’s love diffuses itself creatively and freely. God does not assume ignorance so that creation may follow its own design and laws. Rather, God humbly lowers himself in the universe, as revealed in the incarnation, and hides himself in the form of the good. In this way, the order of the universe unfolds not according to intelligence but according to love. Order is the perfection of love, and this love is the goodness of the evolutionary, albeit unpredictable, world, a goodness that is dynamic, relational, and oriented to the fullness of life.

Perhaps it is time to stop talking about the universe as the mind of God and to start talking about the universe as the heart of God. Bonaventure indicates that in the journey to God knowledge and love form a dialectic. Ultimately, however, love transcends knowledge (110–16). It is not surprising that the highest form of life in the universe, the human person, has the capacity to love to such a degree that the human person can be transformed into the likeness of God. In light of humanity, Bonaventure indicates that God’s creative love freely calls forth within the world a created love that can freely respond to God’s creative call (Hayes, 1997: 91). It is when the human person participates in the humble love of God that the universe becomes truly personal. Humanity, however, recapitulates the entire created order, indicating that life processes are not the result of blind chance but the dynamism of divine love hidden in the universe, drawing it ever closer into the heart of God, that is, into the life of the Trinity. Through the diffusion of divine love, the trinity imparts a dynamic and creative presence that allows humanity and the physical universe itself to be creative and transcendent.

To speak of the universe in terms of divine love is to speak of an ecstatic universe. As the Pseudo-Dionysius indicates, the universe longs for fulfillment and is drawn to the essential Good (God) who yearns for its creation and whose yearning has the power to move all things as final cause. Love, as the highest form of the good, has the power to transform because of its nature to unite. Divine love, therefore, undergirds an evolutionary universe precisely because it is relational and self-giving. The inherent movement towards more complex life forms is a movement towards the fullness of love. As Zachary Hayes states, God creates towards an end and that end embodied in Christ points to a Christified world (90). What appears to the sciences as a process of cosmogenesis is seen from the perspective of faith to be a process of Christogenesis. The universe is bound in a mystery of love, the perfec-
tion of which is found in Christ in whom the heart of God is disclosed as the pulse of the universe.

The humility of divine love that imparts freedom and creativity to the universe allows chance, chaos, and complexity to operate freely, reflecting a God who is neither the “God of gaps” nor the “God of causal connections.” To try to identify God’s action on the subatomic and molecular levels is to undermine the mystery of divine love. The fact that God’s love is humble means that it is hidden and it is discovered only in light of the good. The rational mind cannot comprehend the mystery of divine love—only the heart can penetrate this mystery that sustains the universe. That is why scholars, both scientists and theologians, will struggle to climb the mountain of knowledge in their pursuit of answers pertaining to God and God’s action in the world only to find that the mystics arrived long before the discovery of the evolutionary universe. For as Bonaventure states: Love goes further than knowledge.3

3 Il Sent. d. 23, a. 2, q. 3, ad 4 (II, 545b–546b).

REFERENCES


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