Occasionally in the history of theology, and more generally in the history of ideas, great thinkers are overlooked and forgotten. Sometimes this is a function of the philosophical trends of the time or the theology à la mode; sometimes of the material difficulty of the thinker in question; and sometimes of form, which is to say, an insufficiently limpid or popular style. And sometimes, in the most poignant examples, it is a function of all these factors. Such is the case with the remarkable Jesuit philosopher, theologian, poet, and critic Erich Przywara, S.J. (1889-1972), who is almost unknown today, but was without question one of the great Catholic theologians of the twentieth century and, arguably, the most brilliant and prolific German Catholic theologian of the first half of the twentieth century. To give some sense of his profile, in the 1920s and (so far as possible in the 1930s), he lectured all over central Europe, most famously at the Davos conferences in 1928 and 1929; and to give a sense of his productivity, he authored as many as forty works and eight-hundred articles and reviews. At the height of his productivity, in the *annus mirabilis* of 1923 alone, in addition to twenty-six lectures, he published four books and seventeen substantial articles (not counting reviews).

But, obscure though he may be today, Przywara was by no means unknown to the most prominent Catholic theologians at the time of the second Vatican Council. When Przywara was awarded the Upper-Silesian cultural prize in 1967, for example, Karl Rahner gave a *laudatio* for the older Jesuit in which, notwithstanding the nature of the genre, he made a number of striking claims about the "old teacher," among them: “I feel compelled to say that we, the next generation, as well as future generations still have critical things to learn from him.”¹ Indeed, he observes, “The whole Przywara, especially

---

the late Przywara, is yet to come. He stands at a place in the road that many in the Church have yet to get past.” All of which raises questions about what Rahner valued in Przywara, and why five years earlier Przywara’s protégé Hans Urs von Balthasar poured himself into a three volume edition of his mentor’s writings, hoping thereby to salvage the core of his writings for posterity.

I cannot hope to answer these questions fully; nor, indeed, given the temporal frame of our conference, can I hope to discuss Przywara’s late work. Rather, I would like to focus on Przywara's early thought and, in particular, his deployment of the concept of the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being, as a Catholic response to the philosophical and theological developments of the 1920s. Specifically, I would like to show the use Przywara made of this concept across a range of issues: from the dialectical theology of the early Barth, Gogarten, and Thurneysen, to the phenomenology of Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger, to the liturgical theology of Ildefons Herwegen and the Benedictines at Maria-Laach.

1. The *analogia entis in nuce*: Its conciliar basis and Augustinian-Thomistic refinement

The first thing to say about the *analogia entis* is that Przywara did not invent it; according to Karl Barth, the Antichrist did. (Now, whatever one makes of Barth's rhetorical barb, it must be understood as a similarly strident but in this case anti-Catholic instantiation of his famous "Nein!" addressed to Emil Brunner; for in both cases Barth is simply saying that he rejects all theological prolegomena, whatever form they may take, be it Brunner's commitment to some form of natural theology or Przywara's commitment to metaphysics. In short, he rejects the "presupposes" in the venerable Thomistic principle that “faith does not destroy but presupposes and perfects reason” (*fides non destruit, sed supponit et perficit rationem*), since, on his view, this kind of methodology gives reason -- and what we think we can establish by reason -- priority over revelation. Now, at the end of the day, I think Barth's charge against the *analogia entis* was something like Don Quixote's

---

2 Ibid. 272.
charge against the windmills; for even if we bracket the question of whether the *analogia entis* is a principle commended by reason and, as such, a basis for natural theology, it is also a principle commended by Scripture and, as Przywara tirelessly repeated, confirmed by the IV Lateran Council. In other words, whether or not it is a matter of reason, it is implicitly a matter of faith; moreover, as a matter of conciliar doctrine, it applies not just to the natural God-world relation, but even to the most exalted regions of supernatural participation *by grace* in the divine life. Indeed, as I hope to show, in attacking the *analogia entis* tout court, Barth was inadvertently attacking much of what all Christians hold in common.

But Barth was right that Przywara did not invent the *analogia entis*, and that it has long been part of the Catholic metaphysical tradition. As a specific term one can find it in Jesuit manuals dating back to Suarez’s *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, and it can be traced back even earlier to the Dominicans, specifically to Cajetan and John of St. Thomas. For that matter, it is the implicit if not explicit teaching of Aquinas, whom Przywara with good reason calls the teacher of the *analogia entis*. But, as Rahner pointed out, for Przywara the *analogia entis* is not just a scholastic technicality, a *terminus technicus*. Nor, for Przywara, does analogy function in theology merely to regulate theological language – guarding, on the one hand, against the presumption of univocity (of thinking that our words mean the same thing when predicated of God and creatures), and, on the other, against the false humility that is indistinguishable from agnosticism and presumes one cannot speak meaningfully of God at all. On the

---


4 For the *analogia entis* in Aquinas one need look no further than *Summa Th.* I, q. 4, a. 3, corp.: “Et hoc modo illa quae sunt a Deo, assimilantur ei inquantum sunt entia, ut primo et universali principio totius esse.”

5 Such is the conclusion that has been reached by a number of commentators on Thomas who restrict their considerations largely to *ST* I, Q. 13. See, for example, Herbert McCabe’s commentary in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 3: Knowing and Naming God (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), p. 106: “Analogy is not a way of getting to know about God, nor is it a theory of the structure of the universe, it is a comment on our use of certain words.” For further
contrary, as the *entis* in the phrase would suggest, for Przywara the *analogia entis* has a comprehensive theological significance. For, inasmuch it concerns the nature of reality, the relation between the finite and the infinite, and the ontological similarity-in-ultimate-dissimilarity between God and the world, it bears at the end of the day on everything.\(^6\) Even the most central Christian doctrine of the incarnation depends upon it. For if the world is univocally identified with God, there could then be on God's part no real advent, no real coming into the world; on the other hand, if the world is equivocally different from God, then Christ could not have been said to come unto “his own,” but would have been entering into a reality not simply fallen, but alien to God himself. The *analogia entis* thus turns out to be fundamental to Catholic doctrine on multiple levels, including, not just the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and sanctification, but also its engagement with the modern world. Indeed, Przywara goes so far as to call it “Catholicism’s metaphysical *a priori*.\(^7\) Before we turn to the question of how Przywara deploys the *analogia entis* in the 1920s, it is therefore all the more important to specify what he understood by this term, firstly, in light of the IV Lateran council, and then in light of Augustine and Aquinas.

In 1215 the IV Lateran Council was dealing with, among other things, the implications of Joachim of Fiore's Trinitarian theology. Against Peter Lombard, the Franciscan abbot had argued that the unity of God resides not in the divine nature, but in the unity of the persons of the Trinity, and that this unity was like that of "many men who are called one people, and many faithful, who are called one Church." The abbot also appealed to multiple scriptures, including Christ's high-priestly prayer in John 17:22: "that they may be one, just as we are one." In its decision, however, the Council sided not with the abbot, whose evident holiness it recognized, but with Peter Lombard, finding that Joachim's teaching failed to distinguish properly between the "union of identity in nature" and "the unity of charity in grace," and consequently threatened to collapse the insuperable difference between God and creation -- not to mention the threat he otherwise

---

\(^6\) In the words of Rahner, Przywara transformed the *analogia entis* “from a scholastic technicality into the fundamental structure of Catholic theology” (“Laudatio auf Erich Przywara,” 270).

\(^7\) *Ringen der Gegenwart*, 2 vols. (Augsburg: Benno Filser, 1929), II, 663.
posed of collapsing the immanent Trinity into the three stages of the economy of salvation. In the final words of the Council: “Inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos non maior sit dissimilitudo notanda” [“One cannot note any similarity between creator and creature, however great, without being compelled to observe an ever greater dissimilarity between them.”] Such, then, for Przywara, is the dogmatic basis of the *analogia entis*. And it is such a simple point, Przywara contended, that essentially any child could understand it, because it comes down to saying that God is *semper maior* -- ever greater.

But, of course, we can also be more precise; for if the *analogia entis* belongs, in the form of God being greater, to the implicit reasoning of a child, it can also be formulated more explicitly, with varying degrees of philosophical and theological complexity. And this, precisely, is what Przywara does, who refines the concept to such a dizzying degree of complexity that it becomes in its final form nothing less than a formal principle of everything (*forma sola universalis*), comprising not just all the philosophical tensions in the history of philosophy between, say, Heraclitus and Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle, Hegel and Kierkegaard, Husserl and Heidegger, et al., but in fact all metaphysical possibilities within a final, inscrutable analogy between two analogies: between a more idealist Platonic-Augustinian analogy of what he calls "transcending immanence" and a more realist Aristotelian-Thomistic analogy of what he calls "indwelling transcendence"). Fortunately, I don't have time to unpack such gnomic formulations, which go a long way toward explaining why at some point Przywara's thought became, even for those philosophically inclined, simply too difficult to follow. As von Balthasar observed with regard to Przywara's 1932 work, *Analogia Entis*, each page (to be understood) would really require about a hundred pages of commentary. Instead I will restrict myself here to showing in what ways Augustine and Thomas are enfolded into his understanding of the *analogia entis*, beginning with an article published in 1923 in *Stimmen der Zeit*, entitled "Gott in uns und Gott über uns" [God in us and God above (or beyond) us]. From this article we will also begin to see how he understands

---

8 Denz. 432.
9 See *Ringen der Gegenwart*, II, 543-78.
the *analogia entis* an antidote -- a kind of Catholic panacea -- for the dialectics of the time.

In the opening of his article Przywara suggests that differences between the confessions, that is, between Protestantism and Catholicism, call for a decision, an *Entscheidung*, in the sense of Gogarten.\(^\text{10}\) But Przywara does not think that premature attempts at ecumenism, of the kind he associates with Friedrich Heiler's "evangelical Catholicism," which was the precursor of today's "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," are helpful in this regard: "Neither Heiler's syntheses, nor premature attempts to claim similarities between the confessions without first examining their roots of the supposed similarities."\(^\text{11}\) Rather, he suggests that a proper decision can be made, and the cause of peace is served, only when each [confession] reflects upon what is ultimate, namely, its concept of God -- its *Gottesbegriff* -- because it is here, he thinks, that the real lines of difference emerge. And it is precisely here, for Przywara, that the *analogia entis* comes into play. As he puts it, "'The sign of contradiction' in this earnest debate, the sign which reveals the differences and bears the potential of healing them, is the God of the *analogia entis*, the God who is above us and in us."\(^\text{12}\)

On the face of it, it could seem odd indeed that Przywara makes the differences between the confessions turn on what, at the end of the day, is a matter of metaphysics. But following the interpretations of Troeltsch and Franz Kiefl, Przywara finds everything really does turn on it, specifically, on the Lutheran doctrine of God's exclusive agency, *Alleinwirksamkeit*, inasmuch as this is the root of Luther's rejection of all creaturely forms of mediation -- including the necessity of such creaturely institutions as the Church and its sacraments, or human works in general -- as contributing in any way toward salvation. And here, vis-a-vis Luther, we can begin to see how, for Przywara, the *analogia entis* comes to mean not just a general similarity-within-ultimate-difference between God and creatures, as was already stipulated by IV Lateran, but a similarity-

\(^\text{10}\) Notably, Przywara takes the dialectical theologians, Barth, Thurneysen, and Gogarten, rather than the fathers of liberal Protestantism, Schleiermacher and Ritschl, or their heirs Harnack, Wobbermin, et al. -- to be his chief interlocutors. This reason for this is that he considers Barth et al. to represent a "genuine rebirth" of Protestantism in the spirit of Luther. See 552f.

\(^\text{11}\) *Ringen der Gegenwart*, II, 543.

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid.
within-ultimate-difference between Divine and human causality, which the Lutheran doctrine precisely collapses. Indeed, this is where, for Przywara, Aquinas's doctrine of secondary causality becomes crucial not only for addressing the challenges posed by Luther, but the challenges posed by all the philosophical systems emanating from him, however, ironic, their manifestation may be: from Spinoza to the Lutheran Hegel, to that son of a Lutheran pastor, anti-Luther, and self-proclaimed anti-Christ, Nietzsche. For, in admittedly simple terms, whereas Hegel reduces human causality to an illusion whose only real reality is a divine logic, Nietzsche turns the tables on Luther-Hegel (in rebellion against such a God who tyrannically cedes no freedom to his creatures). If the former make human causality a fiction, the latter (along with Feuerbach, who with utter probity could call himself Luther II) takes revenge by turning God into a fiction. In short, the one fictionalizes and erases the other.

But, as Przywara keenly notes, the very positions that seem so antithetical are, at the end of the day, simply two faces of the same logic of identity, separated only by a thin line of perspective, subject like an Escher drawing to sudden reversals -- with the caveat that these reversals, which follow from the rejection of the analogia entis, come with frightful historical consequences. As Przywara strikingly puts it in the provocative final pages of Ringen der Gegenwart in 1929, “As for this unity as identity [Identität-Eins] of God and world, which took the place of polarity and its unity-in-tension [Polaritäts-Spannung-Eins] of God and world, what does it really matter whether one call it God or world, whether one call it the world-denying theopanism of Spinoza or the God-denying pantheism of Schopenhauer-Nietzsche? In either case the inevitable consequence was the frightful reeling of modernity between a sensual, pleasure-seeking intoxication with the world and a fanatical, eschatological hatred of the world: is not this the deadly fever that is shaking Europe even now?”

With these words in mind, I now come back to Augustine. According to Przywara, the chief importance of the North African church father with regard to the concept of God is to have shown that what is metaphysically ultimate is neither an absolute immanence nor an absolute transcendence, but a dynamic rhythm between them -- between the poles, so to speak, of divine immanence and divine transcendence. As

---

13 Ringen der Gegenwart, II, 960f.
Przywara puts it, "The great idea of Augustine, which constitutes the, so to speak, formal principle of his thought, and bears implications even for the subtlest branches of Christian ethics is this: "Deus interior et exterior, God in all and above all, God more inward than we are to ourselves, and yet transcending and surpassing us as the one who is infinite and incomprehensible."¹⁴ The point, for Przywara, is as simple as it is fundamental -- not just theoretically but also practically in that it translates directly into ethical terms. And so he goes on to say,

And because He declares himself to be a God of blessed mystical intimacy as well as being, simultaneously, a God of the coolest distance, the fundamental disposition of the soul that believes in God is one of "fearing love and loving fear" -- a fear that springs from love in that love fears to lose the beloved, and a love that by means of fear maintains itself in a state of holy sobriety and tender reverence. The element of love corresponds to "God in me"; the element of fear, to "God above me." Both, however, are bound together so that the immanence of "God in me" does not make God into man, and so that the transcendence of "God above me" does not ultimately make man into God.¹⁵

Conversely, for Przywara, the problem with modernity, beginning with the Reformation, is that it has been unable to maintain the two in productive tension -- in terms of what he

¹⁴ Ibid., II, 543.
¹⁵ Ibid., 543f. The conjunction of divine intimacy and divine transcendence is stated, perhaps most famously, in Confessions III, 6 (11): tu autem interior intimo meo et superior summo meo. For the ethical implications, however, see Enn. in Ps. 118, 22 (6): Tu interior intimis meis, tu in corde legem posuisti mihi spiritu tuo, tamquam digito tuo; ut eam non tamquam servus sine amore metuerem, sed casto timore ut filius diligerem, et dilectione casta timerem. [You who are more inward than my most inward parts, you have put your law in me, in my heart's depths, by your spirit, as by your finger, so that I might not walk fearing you like a slave, without love, but as a son, loving you with pure reverence and revering you with a pure love.] See also Ringen der Gegenwart, 577: “Catholic religiosity is and remains an ineffable polarity between ‘God in us’ and ‘God above us’ and therefore of ‘law and life,’ and therefore of ‘life and fear’ and of ‘joy and moral struggle,’ and whoever absolutizes one or the other of these poles can in the end no longer contribute to salvation, even if his exaggerations shed new light on an idea that has received less attention.”
calls a *Spannungseinheit.* Either it absorbs immanence into transcendence, and all creaturely objectivity and mediation into divine subjectivity (which Przywara calls "theopanism," borrowing the term from Otto); or it collapses transcendence into immanence, divinity into humanity, in which case we have pantheism in one form or another. Whereas the former makes nothing of becoming, which is reduced to the manifestation of either a divine will (Luther) or logic (Hegel), the latter makes nothing of being and reduces the question of being to the question of finitude -- which is why, for Przywara, Heidegger is precisely a pantheist, as odd as this designation might at first seem, who in 1927 makes a religion of authenticity out of the anxiety of finitude, of *Dasein,* and its being-towards-death.16 In both cases, however, Przywara avers, the concept of God is dissolved -- whether it be in the name of divine immanence and a religion of feeling (à la Schleiermacher) or in the name of a dogmatic theology of divine transcendence (à la Barth).17 Indeed, he suggests that both extremes are, at the end of the day, equally remote from a true understanding of God, and that the one leads as much to the denial of God as the other. Thus Przywara contends that Augustine remains for all posterity the "the thinker of the Christian balance," which is to say, the first great thinker of the *analogia entis,* since one finds in him both the God of blessed intimacy (divine

---

16 Nor is Przywara's view of Heidegger significantly altered by the latter's so-called turn to Being, since for Heidegger Being is never anything more than the Being of beings, apart from which it is precisely *Nichts.* Thus, even when Heidegger shifts into the apocalyptic register of Being's self-revealing, this cannot be said to constitute a breakthrough to a genuine transcendence. Admittedly, from an apophatic, Eckhartian perspective, it might be legitimate to speak of God as "no-thing," but this is not what Heidegger means, since theology is subaltern to ontology, understood as a strictly philosophical discipline. Indeed, if God is allowed to appear in Heidegger's philosophy, a possibility he seems to admit in his 1966 *Spiegel* interview, then it is not as Being itself on the order of Aquinas' *ipsum esse subsistens,* but only as a mythopoetic "entity" and in any event as something ontic ("das" Gott, "ein" Gott, which is rightly translated as "the god" or "a god") on the horizon of Being.

17 As he strikingly puts it years later, "All that is left [once the *analogia entis* is denied] is an either-or between a piety toward God that is hostile to the world and a piety toward the world that is hostile toward God. Such is the either-or between the Reformation taken to its logical conclusion (as in the early Barth) and secularism taken to its logical conclusion (as with Lenin and Stalin)." See *Logos* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1964), 112.
immanence) and the God who, “if you comprehend him, is not God” (divine transcendence).18

For Przywara, then, we may now summarize: the *analogia entis* means (1) according to IV Lateran a relationship between divine being and creaturely being in which God is “ever greater” (*semper maior*); and (2), following Augustine, a relationship between divine immanence and transcendence. But, once again, the balance is not static, but dynamic, which requires that it be read in light of the emphasis of IV Lateran on the “greater dissimilarity” (*maior dissimilitudo*) within every *similitudo*, however great (*tanta similitudo*). Thus, adopting Przywara’s shorthand, we may summarize the Augustinian-Lateran *analogia entis* as “God in-and-beyond creation” (from the side of creation) or, to be more emphatic in emphasizing divine transcendence, as “God beyond-in creation” (from the divine standpoint). But we have still by no means sorted out all that, for Przywara, the *analogia entis* implies. For that we would need to discuss at the very least two more things: (1) the tremendous import of what Przywara identifies as the Aristotelian analogy, which is to say, the form in which we find it in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* at V, 6, 1016b where he uses the word analogy to describe “a relation of one thing to another,” specifically, a relation of one proportion to another (*ὅς ἄλλο πρὸς ἄλλο*); and (2) the basis for the Thomistic analogy in an analogy between a “real distinction” between essence and existence in creatures and a real identity of essence and existence in God. In the words of Aquinas, *sua igitur essentia est suum esse*.19 Only then can we begin to appreciate all that Przywara means when he uses the term, *analogia entis*, since it refers not just to the God-world relation (let us call it the transcendent analogy of being), but also to the analogical nature of creaturely being as such (which we may therefore call the immanent analogy, or the immanent aspect, of the analogy of being.

---

18 "Si comprehendis non est Deus." See Augustine, Serm. 117, 5; cf. Sermon 52, 16: "Quid ergo dicamus, fratres, de Deo? Si enim quod vis dicere, si cepisti, non est Deus: si comprehendere potuisti, aliquid pro Deo comprehendisti. Si quasi comprehendere potuisti, cogitatione tua te deceptisti. Hoc ergo non est, si comprehendisti: si autem hoc est, non comprehendisti. Quid ergo vis loqui, quod comprehendere non potuisti?"

 Needless to say, this complicates matters considerably, and in Przywara’s *Analogia Entis* it gets even more complicated. It is therefore crucial to bear in mind that the full form of the *analogia entis* is a configuration of two different analogies – an immanent (“horizontal”) analogy and a transcendent (“vertical”) analogy – and, as such, can be said to have a cross-like structure. So let us begin with the immanent analogy of the *analogia entis*, which, building on Aristotle and Thomas, Przywara understands as a dynamic unity of essence and existence, each of which is related to the other, but irreducible to the other – just as, in anthropological terms, the human being is an irreducible relation between man and woman, or, for that matter, between soul and body. In both cases we can loosely speak of an immanent “analogy” inasmuch as the formal structure is one of *allo pros allo*. In and of themselves, however, these “analogies” have no explanation. Rather, they go to show that the creature qua creature is a mysteriously incomprehensible reality, indeed, a kind of abyss that is incapable of any final self-definition. For what the creature is, its essence, can never explain its existence – just as the most thoroughgoing scientific account of the universe cannot answer the fundamental philosophical question, which was well-known to the scholastics and reformulated by Leibniz, as to why there is something (anything or any law) rather than nothing. Indeed, following Przywara, the mystery of the real distinction is precisely why philosophy has never been able to get to the bottom of its own historical undulations between materialism and idealism, essentialism and existentialism, and so forth. But what is incapable of self-definition is not *eo ipso* without meaning or explanation in something beyond it. Rather, in itself, which is to say, in its essence, creaturely being – in its parts and taken as a whole – is a sign that points inexorably beyond itself, being constitutively an analogy of what alone can fulfill it. And it is precisely here, therefore, that the “transcendent” aspect of the analogy of being comes into play. For, to put it in dramatic terms, inasmuch as God (in Christ) enters into the abyss of creaturely being, and to the extent that God enters into it, the immanent analogy is redeemed as an analogy of the God who is mysteriously in-and-beyond it – in whom essence and existence, the ideal

---

and the real, indeed, even being and becoming (viz., within the immanent Trinity as an eternal movement of love) are one. In view of this admittedly brief sketch of what Przywara means by the analogia entis in light of Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and IV Lateran, let us now turn to how he deploys it, first, vis-à-vis the dialectical theology of the 1920s.

2. Przywara’s Engagement with Dialectical Theology

On September 30, 1923, Eduard Thurneysen wrote to Barth, saying “Procure a copy of the August issue of Stimmen der Zeit. In it there is an unusually perceptive and thorough essay about us by an interlocutor from the Catholic side. It is interesting because it makes the Catholic standpoint very clear. In addition you will find some substantial and in-depth observations about Augustine. The author is an expert. We come off well, even if our deepest motive were not seen…21 One wishes that Thurneysen had gone on to explain his (and Barth’s) deepest motives; but what is important here is that this marks the beginning of Barth’s reckoning with Przywara and – via Przywara – with Catholic theology. So what, exactly, did Przywara have to say about the movement? At some level, Thurneysen (and Barth) must have been flattered, because Przywara considered them – and not the liberal Protestantism of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Harnack, et al., - - to be the genuine heirs of the Reformation. As he puts it, “In declaring war against all subjective religion […], the movement [associated with Barth-Gogarten-Thurneysen] represents a genuine rebirth of Protestantism. It is surely fitting, therefore, that the three friends regularly include selections from Luther in their new journal, Zwischen den Zeiten. Of all today’s Protestant groups, they [more certainly than any other] can claim Luther as their father.

But, of course, for Przywara, as a Catholic, this heritage is not necessarily something to celebrate. For inasmuch as dialectical theology abjures any relation between God and creation – to the point that the only relation between them is that of the

21 See Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel Barth-Thurneysen, vol. 2 (1921-1930), 190; see also 638, 651-4.
absolute “no” – it directly conflicts with the Catholic concept of God that we have just summarized in terms of the *analogia entis*. In short, the formal relation between God and creation is not analogy, but “negation.” As Przywara puts it, “Whereas the *analogia entis* proper to the Catholic concept of God entails a mysterious tension between similar and dissimilar, corresponding to the tension between God in us and God [beyond] us, in the Protestant concept of God the ‘similarity’ is utterly done away with. God is absolutely and completely ‘Other,’ as Otto puts it, or, in the formulation of Barth-Gogarten-Thurneysen, the ‘No’ – the No of a [God] who alone is real [*alleinwirklich*] and efficacious [*alleinwirksam*].”

In other words, what is at issue here from Przywara’s perspective is the *allein* in the Lutheran doctrine of God’s *Alleinwirksamkeit*, i.e., the same problematic *sola* – in this case the *sola* with regard to *gratia* – that defined the Reformation. To be sure, as Przywara himself points out, one can find anticipations of Luther in late medieval nominalism and German mysticism, inasmuch as the former emphasizes God’s absolute power, *Dei potentia absoluta*, and the other the nothingness of the creature’s ground to which, spiritually speaking, it should return in order to be reborn in God (such is the *particula veri* in Eckhart). But it remained for Luther to combine these separate emphases and to formulate as a matter of doctrine – that is, no longer simply as a matter of theological debate, a *quaestio disputata*, or a matter of salutary spiritual discipline – that God *alone* is at work in the salvation of human beings to the exclusion of any human cooperation. As Przywara observes, here following Troeltsch, the target of Luther’s polemic is “the self- and life-affirming productive power of reason, to which he opposes in the sharpest and most radical terms the idea of a pure and unconditional theonomy” – such that reason, moral excellence, and human spontaneity are reduced to expressions of the solely effective power and agency of God. The key point here, as Przywara sees it, is that for Luther and the dialectical theologians, God does not work as a primary cause within creatures as secondary causes, but instead works immediately and without them. To put the matter back into the terms of the *analogia entis*:

---

22 *Ringen der Gegenwart* II, 554.
23 Ibid., 550.
One side of ‘God in us and above us,’ namely, ‘God in us,’ is devalued. The result is a completely different concept of God: God, understood as ‘God above us,’ becomes, as it were, the essence of the creature: in that the creature is simply an essence-less apparition of the ‘God above us,’ who alone is real and efficacious. Transcendence and immanence are no longer bound together in a tension of opposites, but have become identical. To the extent that the hidden, incomprehensible God, the Deus absconditus, as Luther is so fond of saying, is not just “all in all,” but “everything alone,” God becomes the essence of the creature, and all creaturely agency, insofar as it is ‘essential,’ becomes solely His agency.\textsuperscript{24}

Whatever else in the way of historical accident may have precipitated Luther’s break from the Catholic Church, as far as Przywara is concerned Luther’s break and everything else – from his ecclesiology to his understanding of works – directly follows from his doctrine of Alleinwirksamkeit: “It is clear why Luther denies any representation of God in human beings, i.e., in the Church according to its fundamental principle. For God is only ‘God above us’ and is therefore essentially unrepresentable.”\textsuperscript{25} By the same token, it is clear “why no ‘works’ can have any religions significance. For there is only one divine work, the work of God himself, the work of ‘God above us,’ which precisely on this account can be nothing ‘created.’”\textsuperscript{26} Finally, it is clear why justification must occur sola fide, understood in a strictly passive sense (iustitia passiva) to the exclusion of any genuine act of cooperation on the part of the believer: “as a subjective act it is no laying hold of, but only an absolutely passive ‘being taken hold of’ [Ergriffenwerden], and only subsequently a laying hold of the covering righteousness [Heiligkeit] of Christ.”\textsuperscript{27}

But the reason we are dwelling here, with Przywara, on Luther is not just that the Reformer is the legitimate “father” of dialectical theology, but that he initiated a historical dialectic of which “dialectical theology” itself is simply a later manifestation.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 549.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 551.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 551.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 551.
As Przywara strikingly puts it, Luther represents “the decisive break with the past and the seed of all that is to come.”

We have already intimated above what Przywara means by this, but now we can be more precise. For if, he says, “God alone is everything and the human being is nothing, indeed, nothing but the ‘sin’ that inheres in the being of the creature qua creature,” we can see how we are led at first to “strictly pantheistic systems,” that is, how Luther leads to Spinoza’s substance and thence to Hegel’s dialectic (though, Przywara admits, Hegel was not possible until the “granite” of Luther’s doctrine of sin had been dissolved).

But then comes the dynamic reversal of this linear movement, and the dialectical shift from a one-sided transcendence to a one-sided immanence, which is to say, from the Reformation to the Enlightenment, and then back again:

Then this more linear [positiv] development [viz., from Luther to Spinoza to Hegel] gives way to a second that amounts to its actual reversal. For, as we have already said, the Lutheran doctrine of God is, so to speak, loaded with explosives. The human spirit refuses to be violated by a one-sided transcendence; immanence can be struck only at the cost of its violent return, but it is a return now no longer, as it was before, in the form of a dynamic unity [Spannungseinheit] with transcendence, but rather in the form of a radical overturning [Umschlag] of transcendence. Instead of the Catholic unity-in-tension between transcendence and immanence, we have, beginning with Luther, a transcendence that converts into immanence, only to convert once again into transcendence. At one point man is disenfranchised and everything is about God and God alone; at another, God is disenfranchised and everything is about man and man alone. In this sense Nietzsche is the most obvious consequence of Luther: for his Übermensch is nothing but man as God.

---

28 Ibid., 548. See 549.
29 Ibid., 555.
30 Ibid., 555f.
In other words, from Przywara’s perspective, rather than being part of the solution, dialectical theology is part of the problem, and the victim of its own game. In rejecting the sobriety of the *analogia entis*, and its preservation of a similarity within ultimate dissimilarity to God, and its corresponding ordering of human agency within a divine agency that graciously makes room for it, it only furthers and exacerbates the dialectics that have been the bane of modernity since the Reformation – and the bane, too, Przywara contends, of Protestant theology itself, which oscillates back and forth between liberal Protestant and neo-Orthodox theologies, between theologies that begin with the subjective datum of faith, and theologies that begin with the objective word of God, between *Glaubenstheologie* and *Gottestheologie*, between, that is, Schleiermacher and Barth.31

3. Przywara’s Engagement with Phenomenology: Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger

Around the same time that Przywara was deploying the *analogia entis* against dialectical theology, he was also deploying it on the phenomenological front in his first scholarly monograph, *Religionsbegründung: Max Scheler – J.H. Newman*, which was published in 1923.32 As the title would suggest, the work is concerned with the question of religion’s foundation and, more particularly, whether such a foundation is better provided by phenomenology than by psychology, transcendental philosophy, or metaphysics. And as the title would also suggest, Przywara is in conversation here, chiefly, with Scheler, whom he reads in light of Newman. *Religionsbegründung* is by all accounts an ambitious first work: not only does Przywara provide a thoroughgoing analysis of Scheler’s phenomenology up to that point, from his material ethics of value (1913-16) to his *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (1921) to his *Wesen und Former der Sympathie* (1923); he also seeks to bring phenomenology back into conversation with metaphysics by means of Newman, and, in particular by means of Newman’s distinction between implicit and explicit reasoning. While it is impossible to give a full accounting of this rich work, we

31 “Neue Theologie?” in *Ringen der Gegenwart* II, 669.

can at least indicate what Przywara valued in Scheler and in what respects he considered his philosophy deficient.

On the positive side, what Przywara values in Scheler and in phenomenology in general is its breaking-free from the prison, so to speak, of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, and its return “to the things themselves” – not as they are made to appear according to the categories of a transcendental subject, but as they freely appear in their givenness. Thus, speaking of the history of ideas, he takes phenomenology to represent (at least in its initial phase) a reversal of Kant’s Copernican revolution – thereby enabling a conversation between modern and scholastic philosophy after centuries of anti-scholastic prejudice since Descartes. And he values Scheler, above all, for having taken phenomenology in this direction, for whereas Husserl, subsequent to his revolutionary period marked by the Logical Investigations, “is able to unite phenomenology and transcendental idealism, for Scheler the ‘openness to the given’ leads logically in the direction of realism.” And Przywara values Scheler all the more not only for facilitating a renewed conversation with scholasticism, but also for breaking the spell of subjectivism in the philosophy of religion: “Today’s philosophy of religion is in the process of renouncing completely not only every explanation of religion in terms of ‘desire’ [Bedürfnis] or as a ‘postulate’ [of practical reason], but also Schleiermacher’s ‘feeling of dependence.’” But there was more: in addition to “energetically combatting Schleiermacher,” Scheler “confronted all modern psychological theories of religion about the origin of religion. In sum, Scheler is unconditionally committed to the objective validity and underviability of ethical and religious principles. In their essence, morality and religion are dependent neither upon the individual ego [Ich], nor on universal human drives and instincts; they are neither the greatest expression of subjective life and experience (Simmel), nor functions of wholistic biological or cultural relations (Spencer,

33 Religionsbegründung, vii.
34 Ibid., 4.
For all these reasons Scheler, therefore, was widely seen as a “beacon” of Catholic renewal.36

But, from Przywara’s more or less Thomistic perspective, his gift was not unqualified, because – on the downside – Scheler not only denies any foundational role to teleology in morality; he also separated the question of being (esse) from the question of value (bonum), denied the scholastic understanding of the convertibility of the transcendents, prioritized value over being, and therefore rejected metaphysics as a proper foundation for religion.37 Additionally, inasmuch as his phenomenological method aims directly at essences, it forgoes their discovery through and by abstraction from the senses, and so cannot easily be squared with the standard Thomistic understanding of essences being known per sensibilia. There was, therefore, from Przywara’s perspective, plenty to be concerned about – but perhaps nothing so much as Scheler’s positing of an immediate relation between the act and the object of knowledge. The problem, of course, was not that Scheler understood God objectively. On the contrary, this is what made his phenomenology so attractive as part of a larger movement that Przywara regularly refers to as a “turn to the object” (which includes not only Scheler, but even such otherwise disparate standpoints as those of Barth and Rudolf Otto).38 Rather, the problem, and from Przywara’s perspective the problem besetting phenomenology in general, was the supposed immediacy of this objective relation – whether to God or to other essences – even if one stipulates with Scheler that this immediate knowledge is given in love, which, as the essence of God, is the root of all essential knowledge.39

And so, for Przywara, precisely at the point where Scheler seems so attractive (with his objectivity of values and the primacy of love), we come back willy-nilly to the analogia entis, for which, as we have seen, the immediacy of love cannot be separated from the distance of reverence. But what is surprising is that, instead of opposing Scheler

35 Ibid.
37 Religionsbegründung, 4.
38 For a review of all the “turns” of this period, see “Die Fünf Wenden.”
39 Ibid., 42; cf. 53.
directly with the *analogia entis*, Przywara seeks to show that Scheler, too, is implicitly committed to it, indeed, that the *analogia entis* is secretly inscribed at the heart of his (and all) phenomenology after all. For love, as Scheler himself affirms, entails otherness, which is also why, for Scheler, all genuine mysticism is characterized by a minimum of intentional distance. And so Przywara concludes:

Taken altogether we can therefore say that Scheler’s phenomenological analysis of love as love, as well as of the religious act, does not allow one to speak of an ‘immediate contact’ with God-as-love [*Gott-Liebe*]. There remains even between ‘love’ and ‘God-as-love’ the essential distance between Creator and creature, the ‘inadequacy’ of all union, the ‘intentional distance of existence’ as Scheler puts it [*intentionale Daseinsdistanz*]. But this is nothing other than the ‘*analogia entis,*’ which is what we mean by the theological ‘mediation’ [*Mittelbarkeit*] of the knowledge of God: the creature is similar to God but is nevertheless also dissimilar, God in the creature, but also above the creature.  

In other words, even Scheler confesses a final “tension between ‘unity’ and ‘distance,’ ‘similar’ and ‘dissimilar,’ which is the essential characteristic of the *analogia entis* as the fundamental theological-philosophical relation between the creature and Creator.” And precisely for this reason, inasmuch as we find metaphysics at the heart of a phenomenology, Przywara argues, phenomenology cannot be posed against metaphysics – much less can it be presented, following Heidegger and *mutatis mutandis* Jean-Luc Marion, as the overcoming of metaphysics. Rather, as Przywara consistently shows, they go together.  

After *Religionsbegründung*, Przywara’s lengthiest treatment of phenomenology is found in an article published in 1928 in *Stimmen der Zeit*, entitled *Three Directions of Phenomenology* [*Drei Richtungen der Phänomenologie*]. The fact that Przywara returned

---

40 *Religionsbegründung*, 109.

to the topic five years later is not surprising. Heidegger’s *Being and Time* had appeared the previous year, and as Przywara observes, it “presents contemporary philosophy with choices of as much consequence as did previously Husserl’s *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology* and Scheler’s *Material Ethics of Value*. But the decision here may prove to be yet more consequential, since it leads to a decision within phenomenology itself.” In other words, the publication of *Being and Time* forced a choice among three possible directions within phenomenology, represented, respectively, by Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger.

Przywara’s reading of Husserl, whom he clearly admires, and with whom he had become acquainted through Edith Stein, is fairly straightforward, as he tracks the “inner problematic” of the shifting status of Husserl’s bracketing of existence from the *Logical Investigations* (1901) to the *Ideas* (1913). Whereas in the early work, the bracketing is more methodological, in the later work it becomes a systematic principle, to the point that pure consciousness assumes the character of “true being,” as opposed to the being proper to the sphere of existence. In other words, Husserl moves (as is obvious enough) increasingly in the direction of idealism – but an idealism that in the end, seeks to do justice to God’s transcendence, being characterized by “an almost Old Testament concern for the purity of the idea of God.”

Turning to Scheler, one might think that there is nothing more to say after Przywara’s thorough reckoning with him in *Religionsbegründung*. But by 1928 Scheler’s phenomenology had changed considerably, entering its final phase with the publication in 1926 of *Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*. And, on Przywara’s view, it was not just a change for the worse, but a change so tragic that he speaks of it as a “demonic drama,” in which the “pure values,” which formerly possessed an objectivity akin to Platonic forms are reduced to the “power of the drive of life” [*Triebgewalt des Lebens*] in a way that bears comparison to Nietzsche. What is worse, for Przywara, the late Scheler introduces the tragic contradiction into God himself: “In the beginning we have the radiant God of [self-] giving love, in the end the tragic God who is torn from the beginning [der Gott der

43 Ibid., 256.
And so, for Przywara, who perhaps had hopes of confirming Scheler in his erstwhile Catholicism, we are left with the personal tragedy of Scheler himself: lacking Husserl’s contemplative instinct for divine transcendence, Przywara laments, he never attained a proper distance vis-à-vis God and so was given to a tortured restlessness. In the end, however, for Przywara, the tragedy of Scheler’s phenomenology represents an “episode,” leading, finally, to the even more fateful philosophy of Heidegger.

While Przywara does not devote any single work to Heidegger, he is nevertheless quite aware of him and was troubled about what his philosophy entailed, firstly, as representing a kind of terminus in phenomenology’s gradual descent from Husserl’s ethereal contemplation of essences, which required the bracketing of existence, to the brute facticity of existence itself, in short, from Sosein to Dasein. As Przywara describes it, whereas for Husserl “the problem of truth was ultimately concentrated in the problem of consciousness, but with the emphasis on the being of consciousness [Bewußt-seins], so much so that he unabashedly spoke of ‘ontologies’ […] even though he never meant anything other than that ‘being’ that is the immanent noema of consciousness,” and whereas Scheler developed Husserl’s phenomenology of the being of the life of consciousness [Lebens-Sein], “for Martin Heidegger, the being of life becomes the fundamental problem.” Admittedly, Przywara says, this is “not easy to see,” because Heidegger hides his real motives, and gives the appearance of being concerned about being in the spirit of antiquity and scholastic ontology. Indeed, Heidegger presents “all ‘veritas in intellectu’ as the self-actualizing of ‘veritas ontologica,’” which is to say all “thinking, valuing, living, etc.” as a “‘self-expression’ [Sichselbstauussagen] of Being as it ‘appears through itself.’” But when all is said and done – after a penetrating analysis of Heidegger’s connection to Dilthey – Przywara contends that all of Heidegger’s talk of Being is really just a ruse, because what Heidegger means by Being is nothing but the being of the human being. In sum, Heidegger’s philosophy is not a hermeneutics of

44 Ibid., 258.
45 Ibid.
46 “Die Fünf Wenden,” 111.
47 Ibid.
being in its full dynamic range between essence and existence opening up to the Being of God, which Przywara’s own life’s work, summarized by the *analogia entis*, attempted to provide, but a hermeneutic of the being-in-the-world of *Dasein*. In other words, compared to the *analogia entis*, Heidegger’s ontology is at the end of the day a *truncated* ontology, which by reducing the question of essence to the question of existence finally reduces to anthropology.  

Przywara’s conclusion is thus an ironic one: the very thinker that is ostensibly concerned about the forgotten question of Being has in fact obscured it. And for Przywara, with the closure of the question of essence and of the genuine mystery of being between essence and existence, we also see the religious fate of phenomenology, in that with Heidegger the light of transcendence that glowed in Husserl and flickered in Scheler is finally extinguished: “with Husserl there was still a final openness to God; with Scheler we already see beginning of the fall into the patent tragedy of the creature that wants to be God, and then in Heidegger the cold-gloomy self-positing into [Nothing].”  

Such is the tragic fate of phenomenology as Przywara sees it in 1928: from the contemplative heights of Husserl’s *Ideas*, it plunges into the nothingness of existence – at which point, in the name of this nothingness, the world *eo ipso* becomes God.

In conclusion, therefore, Przywara appeals once more to Thomas and to the *analogia entis* (as he did previously vis-à-vis Scheler), suggesting that even Heidegger cannot escape it: inasmuch as the real distinction between essence and existence already implies the distinction between being and nothingness around which Heidegger’s own philosophy turns. Indeed, Przywara boldly claims:

Heidegger’s ontology, which tries to present existence, absolutely posited, as the “essence” of being, and thus tries to claim for the creature the essentially divine identity of existence and essence, is ultimately compelled [to return] to the patristic-scholastic doctrine of an ultimate tension between them. For the doctrine of the difference between essence and existence (whether in the Thomistic or the Molinist form) is […] simply the adequate expression for that tension, which I

---

48 Ibid., 263.
49 Ibid., 262.
have already described, between the “is” and the “is not” of the creature [according to Augustine].

And in this regard Przywara appeals, specifically, to the work of Hedwig Conrad-Martius, the phenomenologist and close friend of Edith Stein, whose phenomenology he sees as overcoming Heidegger from within phenomenology itself. For her phenomenology, too, is concerned with the being of life [Lebens-Sein], “but her gaze penetrates more freely and more keenly into the ultimate ‘openness’ of creaturely being to what transcends it. With Conrad-Martius the tragedy of phenomenology thus comes to an end, as it finds its way back to the essential doctrine of scholasticism: “of the ontological openness [Aufgebrochensein] of the creature to God, within the inner difference between essence and existence.” And so Przywara concludes his article in a hopeful spirit, seeing the possibility of a renewal via phenomenology of a genuinely Catholic philosophy:

It is thus clear how phenomenology can renew scholasticism: with the intrinsic humbling of evidence to truly creaturely evidence, for which every vision of truth, in the original spirit of Augustine, is a peering through to God, who alone is Truth, and with a final provisionality that is transparent to the divine vision that alone is definitive – and with, too, in keeping with this methodological humbling, a metaphysics of being corresponding to it […] as a metaphysics of becoming that breaks out of itself to God [Metaphysik aus-sich-zu-Gott-aufgebrochenen Werdens]: a metaphysics of the transparency of creaturely ‘becoming’ to the ‘being’ of God, i.e., a metaphysics of the analogia entis. Along these lines, the rich yield of phenomenology’s individual analyses in logic (Husserl), anthropology (Scheler, Heidegger), and ontology (Heidegger) betoken a genuine scholasticism in the spirit of Thomas Aquinas.

By 1930, however, in view of the brewing political circumstances, Przywara is less optimistic about phenomenology, at least as far as the rehabilitation of Heidegger goes.
Indeed, he is clearly troubled by this “third” direction in phenomenology – almost as if it signaled the coming of the Third Reich. In a series of articles published that summer in *Stimmen der Zeit*, entitled, respectively, *Die Neue Zeit* and *End-Zeit*, he views Heidegger’s philosophy with foreboding. In the first article, his assessment is more objective:

> From the beginning Heidegger’s objectivism of Being is therefore consciously ambiguous. On the one hand, we see the submission of all subjective knowledge and value to the purely objective [*sachliche*] ‘self-giving of Being.’ On the other hand, we see the cold, but heroic-defiant sobriety that leads away from every region of ideal objectivity into the finite region of care and death. The objectivism here is […] from the start a de-idealization [*Entidealisierung*]. It is from the start a conscious dynamism of the finite and evolving [*werdenden*] human being. It is from the start a dynamism in view of the unmasked reality of angst, guilt, despair, and death. […] The ‘nothing’ that was Scheler’s ruin, is for Heidegger an impetus: ‘to hold out in the void’ in order to ‘project’ oneself into the world…”

The second, however, is more apocalyptic, in which he compares Heidegger with Freud: “With the words ‘unmasking’ [*Demaskierung*] and ‘destruction’ [*Destruktion*] we have stated the names that are written over our time and into an unclear future: Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger. In Freud’s psychological analysis and in Heidegger’s metaphysics of finitude this new time is truly understood to be an end-time, i.e., a time that seeks what is ultimate beyond all provisional surfaces – an ultimate, however, that is proper to itself in its temporal unfolding. But what is this but ‘nothing,’ since the creature stands in itself and out of itself in ‘nothing’?” To be sure, by 1930 Heidegger had already begun to understand truth as *aletheia*, which lends his later work an aura of objective mystery; but, Przywara worries, what is it, really, that is being disclosed; what is it that is being uncovered? At this point Przywara’s reading becomes eerie, as if Heidegger’s apocalyptic is a doorway for darker things – things forgotten, hidden, and

---

51 *Stimmen der Zeit* 119 (1930), 278f.
unspoken: “The way to this forgotten truth is, consequently, the ‘destruction’ of all that lies above it.” And in this respect, Przywara suggests, what we see here is methodologically the same as what we see in Freud’s “everyday psychopathology”: “the uncovering of the secret depths.” And all of this is presented, moreover, as a kind of heroism. But it is not just about the heroism of the cold gaze into nothing; more horribly, it is about the heroism of finitude [Verendlichung], i.e., of wanting [...] to be nothing but finite.”

In other words, from Przywara’s perspective, Heidegger had furnished precisely the kind of philosophy that (in hindsight) could fuel the ideology of National Socialism and, however unwittingly, the death-obsessed ideology of the SS. As he prophetically put it in 1932 in an article entitled, Sein im Scheitern – Sein im Aufgang, which deals in part with Heidegger, critically addressing his immanent metaphysics of “Innerweltlichkeit”: “National Socialism has raised up a metaphysics and a religion of the ‘folk’ [des völkischen Menschen], of man understood in terms of nature and blood. It is evident, however, that psychoanalysis and National Socialism have unsealed the abyss. Demons are racing over the earth.”

It is also notable that this was year in which Przywara published the Analogia Entis as the metaphysical antidote for the metaphysical ills of the age. Of course, whether metaphysics alone could ever avert tragedy is another question. What is significant here is simply that Przywara considered modern philosophy (Scheler, Heidegger) and modern theology (Barth) to be in a tragic, even moribund condition (whereas the former forgot divine transcendence, the latter forgot divine immanence), and that a reorientation of philosophy and theology – and of modern European culture – around the God who is in-and-beyond creation was crucial to their renewal.

---

52 Ibid., 350.
53 Ibid.
54 “Sein im Scheitern – Sein im Aufgang,” in Stimmen der Zeit 123 (1932), 152.