Introduction

This study attempts to address a doctrinal problem in theology. It is no longer common for theologians to address specific predicaments in doctrine. Theology has recently focused on the academic studies of figures or the relationship of theological issues to more general intellectual concerns. A working assumption of contemporary theology, at least in its position as a specifically academic discipline, is that questions of doctrinal coherence are treated either as already largely resolved or as having no important consequence for the work. I am convinced that these questions of doctrinal coherence persist in our own time and that they are of enormous importance not only for theology as an academic discipline but also for the life and mission of the church.

Perhaps the most salient instance of this incoherence of doctrine is in the continued division of Protestant and Catholic churches over the issues of human cooperation with redemption and final authority in matters of doctrine and discipline. I have focused on the problem of the unity of the doctrines of creation and grace because I am convinced that the more conspicuous of these confessional differences of doctrine are simply the presenting symptoms of the more cunning wiles we use to conceal from view the persistent and intransigent separation of these two doctrines. Recent theology has become much more attuned to this separation than in previous periods, for reasons I will discuss in more detail in chapter 1. Yet even where it is at the center of their theological reflection, as with Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner, or Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth, the division between the doctrines continues and in ways that elude detection of this separation.

I have been puzzled by the discontinuity of these doctrines since I began to read Augustine closely in my doctoral work. The Augustine scholar J. Patout Burns helped me to see that Augustine was not, in fact, the Augustine of the theologians. He was neither the monster that one half of the theological world repudiated nor the paragon of ontological participation that the other half championed. He was instead a much more complicated, honest, and passionate thinker than these caricatures allowed. Though certainly not immune to self-deception, he was the kind of thinker who relentlessly followed his convictions to their consistent conclusions, and he often abruptly and skillfully changed his mind, even in radical ways. He was a thinker who pursued and tackled the most

difficult of theological problems—*creatio ex nihilo*, grace, sacramental validity, freedom, election—and illuminated each one.

One of the most significant instances of Augustine's passion was the development of his theology of grace, which led Augustine to a position that simply did not cohere with his early doctrine of creation. This fact was particularly troubling to me, given that the theologians who influenced me most drew heavily on Augustine's doctrine of creation, in which grace was immediate and presupposed. But determined as I was to uncover a theological connection between the late theology of grace and the early theology of creation, I was eventually convinced that such a connection could be made only by suppressing Augustine's vital insights into the nature of the will. Consequently, I favored an approach much more like Augustine's own, which acknowledged the difficulties that the Pauline theology of grace posed to his Platonic illuminationism, faced them squarely, and required a rethinking of his position more than once over a period of years. I was left with an Augustine who was much less amenable to the purposes to which contemporary theologians wanted to put him but who was essential to understanding the subtle complexities of the relationship between the doctrines of creation and grace.

My treatment of Augustine on those questions in this study is indebted to the historical work of Robert J. O'Connell and J. Patout Burns. However, the original inspiration for the study was a remark made by David Tracy in his afterword to the collection *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*. Tracy states that additional work needs to be done on the ways that Augustine is the source for both Catholic theology's nature/grace paradigm and Protestant theology's sin/grace paradigm. This study is the result of the reflection that Tracy's comment inspired, though I have come to understand the relationship between these theologies of grace differently from Tracy.

This difference was the result of my close reading over the last two years of Gillian Rose, and particularly *Hegel contra Sociology*. I discovered much in that severe work that resonated with me deeply. Rose illuminates the set of issues I had been exploring from Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, de Lubac, Rahner, Schleiermacher, and Barth while connecting them to the cultural and philosophical influences of modern theology.[1] More importantly, I recognized in Rose the same kindred passion I had found in Augustine to run headlong toward the great problems of thought and to confront them with both gravity and uninhibited creativity. They were both *erotic* thinkers, writing from a hunger that "acknowledges a lack, but knows also that it can be filled."[2] Their positive visions developed within the striving to satisfy that hunger.

I learned from Rose to see Hegel's "Absolute" as a special reflection on the social determination of thought. Whether her reading of Hegel can finally be defended is of much less concern to me than the fact that I am convinced Rose was right. The use to which she puts the concept of the "speculative proposition," drawing it out of Hegel's *Natural Law* and *System of Ethical Life*, is itself a vital contribution to philosophy and social theory. I applied what I have learned from Rose's reading of Hegel, and especially her reflections on the nature of "speculative thought," to shed light on the true problem of theological coherence between the doctrines of creation and grace. Her work is vital for diagnosing the cause of the abstractness of contemporary philosophy, social theory, and theology as the unexamined assumptions of bourgeois social forms that surreptitiously condition our concepts of reality. With Hegel (through Rose), we can recognize the roots of the bourgeois self in Roman jurisprudence, but my study argues that even these legal origins are more fundamentally the expression of a confusion in the Western understanding of the metaphysics of the will, which comes to light in the development of the theological unity of grace and creation. I trace the results of that confusion over chapters 1–4 of my study before offering my own concluding reframing of the doctrine in chapter 5.

I set out in chapter 1 an interpretation of the unity of creation and grace as a problem of social relations. In this chapter, I show that contemporary theology is focused on the unity of creation and grace and that this emphasis is an attempt to respond to the challenges the modern division of the subject from nature posed to classical theology. I argue that the different ways contemporary Catholic and Protestant theologies have responded to these challenges are centered on the place of subjective human self-determination. I note that the young Dietrich Bonhoeffer is alone in contemporary theology in recognizing the importance of social relations for reconciling a transcendental and ontological starting point for theology, but that his concept of unity remains abstract in a way that unconsciously repeats what he seeks to overcome. In the light of Bonhoeffer's insight into the importance of social relations and his misrecognition of a solution, I turn to Hegel's critique of Kant and Fichte in *Natural Law* and *System of Ethical Life*, which I read in the light of Rose's thesis in *Hegel contra Sociology*. I argue that the Catholic position on grace and creation attempts an immediate unity of the doctrines in intuition and that the Protestant position appeals to the mediation of grace as a critical concept. Both proposals fail, as Hegel and Rose point out, because they resolve in an abstract and negative unity that ultimately reinforces the separation they seek to reconcile. I develop this basic juxtaposition of Catholic intuitionism and

Protestant conceptualism as the lens through which to view the continued separation of the doctrines of grace and creation—and, at least by implication, the continued division of Catholic and Protestant.

Chapter 2 looks more closely at the immediate, intuitive union of creation and grace in contemporary Catholic theology. I open the chapter by recalling the history of the development of the concept of the supernatural as it was studied by Artur Landgraf, and note that this development has largely been absent from the present theological discussions of nature and the supernatural. I recall Landgraf's claim that the idea of the supernatural developed in medieval scholasticism specifically to distinguish the gratuity of grace from the gratuity of creation. In that light, I compare the different positions of de Lubac and Rahner on the union of grace with creation and show that their common positions subsume grace into creation. I argue that this subsuming is due to their failure to recognize the distinction, noted by Odon Lottin and Bernard Lonergan, that Aquinas makes between the incoherent position on the will as an "intellectual appetite" in his early works and his later idea of the will as a distinct faculty of self-determination.[3] Because de Lubac and Rahner both assume that knowledge of the good correlates directly to the ability to do it, they are unable to conceive of grace as standing in a critical social relation to nature. Their unions of creation and grace are abstract. They preserve and reinforce the actually existing separation of grace from creation in the social relations determined by bourgeois property right.

Chapter 3 argues that Protestant theologies of grace are the development of the critical concept of grace as a social relation that is absent in the Catholic theology of metaphysical immediacy. However, the concept of the social is lost when the critical principle of grace gains ascendency. Though Luther and Calvin understood the doctrine of election as a complex proposition about the empirical union of grace and creation, orthodox Protestantism developed it into an abstract scheme of ontological identity between history and the eternal divine decree. I analyze Schleiermacher's and Barth's innovative doctrines of election in this light, through the lens of the important commonalities Matthias Göckel identified.[4] I note that they both understand grace as a concept extrinsically imposed on the subject, which reconciles grace with reality and reveals the truth of existence to be its eternal election to fellowship with God. I argue that, like the immediacy of Catholic grace, this concept of election is merely an abstract and negative domination of creation by grace. It collapses the social dimension of the Protestant theology of grace into a critical principle.

Chapter 4 links both of these trajectories to Augustine. Specifically, I argue that the metaphysical immediacy of the Catholic position derives from

Augustine's early theology of creation, whereas the domination of the concept in Protestant theology derives from the priority Augustine gives to the social in his mature theology of grace, especially in *City of God*. The link Augustine established in his early theology of grace between God's immutability and the material goodness of creation meant that his recognition of the difference between the intellect and the will, which came increasingly into view after his letter to Simplician, would force Augustine to attempt to preserve the goodness of creation by appealing to its domination by God's eternal will. The second half of the chapter argues that Aquinas resolved Augustine's metaphysical problems with his noncompetitive understanding of human self-determination. Despite resolving these problems, Aquinas was unable to sustain Augustine's concept of grace as a social relation, which Luther would take up and develop in an explicitly critical direction. Lacking Aquinas's metaphysics of the will, however, Luther was unable to understand human self-determination as anything more than a predicate of Christ's subjectivity. I conclude the chapter by noting that these very limitations point the way forward to a complete understanding of the union of grace and creation as an actually existing social relation.

Chapter 5 turns to that task. I argue that the social dimension implicit in the doctrine of creation ex nihilo must be given greater prominence and must be more fully developed explicitly to state that creation is God's positive constitution of the being of an other. With priority given to the social dimension of creation, grace can concurrently be understood as God's faithful binding of Godself to the being of the other. The priority of otherness in both the doctrines of creation and of grace brings into relief the social dimension of the doctrines while also providing a way to sustain God's prior act of grace and election together with the affirmation of the will's self-determination. I argue that the unity happens in a material social relation, which is a cooperation with the creative power that summons the other into being and directs it to its fulfillment in loving self-bestowal. I insist that in order to resist abstractness, the thought of this union must include an awareness of its social determination. This means that the thought of this unity as a social relation will be both apophatic and dialogical. It will conceive of the social dimension of existence in terms of Simone Weil's notion of "attendance," or waiting. We truly know being insofar as we apprehend it as a directive to serve and nurture the being of the other.

Though I am critical of some of the results of their work, I wish to register my deep and abiding admiration for the work of those Catholic theologians who made a study like this possible. I have in mind specifically the Dominicans

of Saulchoir, the Jesuits of Lyon-Fourvière, and the neo-Thomists who preceded and influenced them. They revived this question for twentieth-century theology and sparked a host of engagements between Protestant and Catholic theologians, the fruits of which we are only beginning to harvest. I hope that this study might be one of those fruits. Their work is a great gift to the church, and I hope that my work might merely carry theirs forward, albeit perhaps in some new directions.

I will conclude by pointing to my most important inspiration, the judicious Richard Hooker. Attentive readers will recognize that my theological commitments are unequivocally Anglican. In contrast to his image as a theologian of appeasement, the vision I have learned from Richard Hooker is of the church as a society ferociously committed to the exceedingly difficult and concrete demands of charity, unwilling to compromise the complex struggle that that commitment involves. The same erotic passion that animates Augustine and Rose is expressed in Hooker. His inflexible resolve to force confrontation with social demands of the command to love should not be obscured or diluted. That vision, its demands, and my ultimate aim in writing are better stated by Hooker himself:

> Far more comfort it were for us (so small is the joy we take in these strifes) to labour under the same yoke, as men that look for the same eternal reward of their labours, to be joined with you in bands of indissoluble love and amity, to live as if our persons being many our souls were but one, rather than in much dismembered sort to spend our few and wretched days in a tedious prosecuting of wearisome contentions: the end whereof, if they have not some speedy end, will be heavy even on both sides. . . . But our trust in the Almighty is, that with us contentions are now at their highest float, and that the day will come (for what cause of despair is there?) when the passions of former enmity being allayed, we shall with ten times redoubled tokens of our unfeignedly reconciled love, shew ourselves each toward other the same which Joseph and the brethren of Joseph were at the time of their interview in Egypt. Our comfortable expectation and most thirsty desire whereof what man soever amongst you shall any way help to satisfy . . . the blessings of the God of peace, both in this world and the world to come, be upon him more than the stars of the firmament in number.[5]

Notes

1. I have in mind a particular set of issues in modern German idealist and romantic philosophy that Sean Hayden brought to my attention in his work.

2. Gillian Rose, interviewed by Andy O'Mahony, "Dialogue," RTÉ Radio 1, April 9 and 16, 2005, http://www.rte.ie/radio1/podcast/podcast_dialogue.xml.

3. The early position dates prior to 1270 and is reflected in *De veritate* 22.12c; *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.72.7 and 3.26.21; and *Summa theologiae* 1.82.1–4. The later position dates after 1270 and is reflected in *De malo* 6 and *Summa theologiae* 1-2.9–10.

4. Matthias Göckel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5. Richard Hooker, *The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker: With an Account of His Life and Death, by Isaac Walton*, Arranged by the Rev. John Keble MA. 7th edition revised by the Very Rev. R.W. Church and the Rev. F. Paget (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 1:195–96.