

Sustained in Being

Like most people, I make plans for tomorrow and the next day, and the day after that. I have a calendar filled with appointments and plans. Even as a student of the Holy Gospel and a disciple of Christ, there is still a measure of presumption in my planning: I am quite sure that I will wake up to another tomorrow and, in some measure, conduct my life in the way I planned. I am, almost, equally certain that I will see the spring flowers and enjoy the warmth of a summer day when it finally arrives.

This form of presumption serves the necessity of being prepared if another day of life is granted, or if I am gifted with another spring and summer. Like everyone else, the days of my life are numbered. I do not know what will befall me and how my life will end; whether that end comes suddenly or after some period of suffering. The truth beneath the practical-presumption is that I will see tomorrow only if God wills it.

This sobering thought leads to another fascinating consideration which is the fact that I am, here and now, sustained in this life because of this Divine Will. The great doctor of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas, would say that there is an ‘essential causal series’ sustaining me in existence. This idea of “causality” isn’t just a matter of saying, “*God is the cause of everything and therefore God caused me.*” It is the fact that at any given moment of my existence, God is actively causing me to continue to be alive and to exist.

There is a linear notion of causes wherein I can identify my parents as my cause of being, and my grandparents as the cause of their being, and my great-grandparents as the cause of their being, and so on and so forth. This idea of being sustained does not factor in a separation in time between causes: I live because my heart beats. My heart beats because of electro-chemical signals. Electro-chemical signals exist because of conductive chemicals. Conductive chemicals exist because of atoms. Atoms exist because subatomic particles combine, and so forth. All of these elements, the heart, the signals, the chemicals, the atoms and the sub-atomic particles have derivative powers by which they can make some potential become actual.

The potential for me to continue living is actualized by a heart pumping oxygen rich blood through my veins. The potential for my heart to beat is actualized by electro-chemicals. The potential for chemicals to send electric signals is actualized by charged particles. The potential for particles to have a charge is actualized by subatomic particles, and so forth. Each thing derives the power to do what it does from that which precedes it.



Ultimately, however, if we go back as far as we can go in this “essential causal series” to the ultimate thing which is keeping me in existence, here and now, it must be one who has the power over existence itself. The ultimate cause of my existence, here and now, has no cause: He is the un-caused cause which we call God. Moreover, God must be unchangeable because to be changed from one thing to the next implies imperfection. And, unlike the heart or the chemicals or the atomic particles mentioned before, there is no potential in God which isn’t already actualized. God, by definition, simply “Is”.

The foregoing is one expression of the metaphysics which are implied in some of the most profound passages in Scripture:

John 1: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. Through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race.*”

John 8: “*Before Abraham came to be, I AM*”

Colossians 1:17 “*He is before all things and in him all things hold together*”