

Matter as an Image of the Good: Ferdinand Ulrich's Metaphysics of Creation
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Abstract

At the center of Ferdinand Ulrich's metaphysics stands the radical claim that being is gift; Ulrich takes Thomas Aquinas's insight that created esse is *completum et simplex sed non subsistens* to be the key to understanding this claim. *Esse creatum* is the pure mediation of being to the world by God, and is thus the wealthiest of all created effects; it is also paradoxically poor, insofar as *esse creatum* has no subsistence in itself. It is then the very non-subsistence of *esse creatum*, Ulrich contends, that allows it on the one hand to contain, as it were, everything, and on the other hand, to give itself away completely. Thus esse's non-subsistence is central to understanding fully the claim that being is gift. However, the implications of this non-subsistence are difficult to identify since esse is in some sense nothing at all (i.e., *non subsistens*). Ulrich therefore points us to another metaphysical constituent of creation that images this very non-subsistence: matter. This dissertation seeks to highlight Ulrich's understanding of matter in order to explicate his metaphysics of creation.

In order to understand Ulrich's approach to metaphysics, one must understand Aquinas's, and the role *esse creatum* plays therein. Therefore Chapter 1 treats Thomas's metaphysics of creation or substance—which includes esse, essence, form, and matter—aided in large part by the work of John F. Wippel. The chapter concludes with a brief outline of the main contemporary debate about Thomas's understanding of matter. Chapter 2 treats Ulrich's creative development of Thomas's metaphysics, and both unfolds Ulrich's metaphysics of creation and explicates some of his terminology, including the *Subsistenzbewegung*, the *Durchnichtung*, and the ontological moments of reality, ideality, and bonicity. Chapter 3 then demonstrates that matter is an important aspect of metaphysics for Ulrich, because what is lowest will always be given to image something about what is highest. Using Ulrich's interpretation of Francisco Suárez and John Duns Scotus, the chapter shows that unless one understands being as Thomas does, one's understanding of creation and being will never be expansive enough to understand matter as *potentia pura*, that is, pure receptivity.