

THE TRINITARIAN GIFT UNFOLDED:  
SACRIFICE, RESURRECTION, COMMUNION

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# Abstract

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Contentious unresolved philosophical and anthropological questions beset contemporary gift theories. What is the gift? Does it expect, or even preclude, some counter-gift? Should the gift ever be anticipated, celebrated or remembered? Can giver, gift and recipient appear concurrently? Must the gift involve some tangible ‘thing’, or is the best gift objectless? Is actual gift-giving so tainted that the pure gift vaporises into nothing more than a remote ontology, causing unbridgeable separation between the gift-as-practised and the gift-as-it-ought-to-be? In short, is the gift even possible?

Such issues pervade scholarly treatments across a wide intellectual landscape, often generating fertile inter-disciplinary crossovers whilst remaining philosophically aporetic. Arguing largely against philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion and partially against the empirical gift observations of anthropologist Marcel Mauss, I contend in this thesis that only a theological – specifically trinitarian – reading liberates the gift from the stubborn impasses which non-theological approaches impose.

That much has been argued eloquently by theologians already, most eminently John Milbank, yet largely with a philosophical slant. I develop the field by demonstrating that the Scriptures, in dialogue with the wider Christian dogmatic tradition, enrich discussions of the gift, showing how creation, which emerges *ex nihilo* in Christ, finds its completion in him as creatures observe and receive his own perfect, communicable gift alignment. In the ‘gift-object’ of human flesh, believers rejoicingly discern Christ receiving-in-order-to-give and giving-in-order-to-receive, the very reciprocal giftedness that Adamic humanity spurned. Moreover, the depths of Christ’s crucified self-giving and the heights of resurrectional glory, culminating in the Spirit’s eternal communion, convey sin-

bound creatures into the new creation, towards their deified end, through liturgical mediation which reveals true giftedness. The gift is thus no aporetic embarrassment but the means of entry into and – more significantly – the very texture of the new, eucharistic creation.

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Cyn llunio'r byd, cyn lledu'r nefoedd wen,  
cyn gosod haul na lloer na sêr uwchben,  
fe drefnwyd ffordd yng nghyngor Tri yn Un  
i achub gwael, golledig, euog ddyn.

Trysorwyd gras, ryw annherfynol stôr,  
yn Iesu Grist cyn rhoddi deddf i'r môr;  
a rhedeg wnaeth bendithion arfaeth ddrud  
fel afon gref, lifeiriol dros y byd.

Pedr Fardd (1775-1845)

# Abbreviations

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## Journals

<i>Communio</i>	<i>Communio: International Catholic Review</i>
<i>IJST</i>	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>The Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>

## Ancient and medieval works

<i>Conf.</i>	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i>
<i>DCD</i>	Augustine, <i>De Civitate Dei</i>
<i>DDC</i>	Augustine, <i>De Doctrina Christiana</i>
<i>DDI</i>	Cusa, <i>De Doctrina Ignorantia</i>
<i>DDPL</i>	Cusa, <i>De Dato Patris Luminem</i>
<i>In Ioan</i>	Aquinas, <i>Super Evangelium S. Joannis Lectura</i>
<i>In LDC</i>	Aquinas, <i>Super Librum de Causis Expositio</i>
<i>In Sent.</i>	Aquinas, <i>Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi</i>
<i>SCG</i>	Aquinas, <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
<i>ST</i>	Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
<i>Trin.</i>	Augustine, <i>De Trinitate</i>
<i>UEQN</i>	Cusa, <i>Ubi est qui natus est Rex Iudaeorum?</i>





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# Introduction

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## The gift's theological location

In this thesis I present a Christian theological reading of the gift against the particular perspectives of philosophers Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Jean-Luc Marion (1946–), anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) and philosophical theologians John Milbank (1952–) and Antonio López (1968–). Amidst myriad competing theories of the gift, I shall contend that only a theological perspective resolves non-theological aporiae, impasses concerning reciprocity, remembrance and the presence of a gift-object. I propose that the gift, understood theologically, offers a comprehensive account of creation, from its continual emergence through divine donation to its deified end. Nevertheless, I will not simply argue that creaturely experiences of the gift are merely related to God or understood as God's gifts; rather, I shall maintain that all gift-giving participates in the perfect trinitarian giving-and-receiving revealed in Christ and the Spirit. In short, the gift *is* God.

But how will this thesis expand theological scholarship in the field? Hitherto, dogmatic disputations on the gift have proceeded largely within a philosophico-theological mode and have yielded profound contentions that highlight Christianity's distinctive – specifically trinitarian – contributions. Whilst rooting my explorations firmly in these foundational insights established by Milbank and developed by López and others, I intend to expose an additional dimension by offering an account of the trinitarian gift through biblical exegesis conducted in dialogue with the rich tradition of dogmatic theology. This will not only confirm the distinctive, often provocative, insights of existing theological scholarship but show that key gift contentions find support through the fertile pages of scripture

which testify to believers' multifaceted experience of God's self-donating salvific action.

Nevertheless, theology's claims concerning the gift emerge against a fiercely contested academic field proffering bewilderingly diverse accounts. A single internet search on 'the gift' yielded scholarly articles proposing gift paradigms across widely differing disciplines: marriage transactions in renaissance Italy; anthropological dimensions of open-source software; recovery of ancient gift-exchanging behaviour among teenage mobile 'phone users; the perceived tyranny of sacrificial organ donation from live donors; theories concerning Fijian gift-giving in a particular socio-economic context; the impact of monetary and non-monetary gifts to employees vis-à-vis reciprocation to employers; understanding cooking among retired Swedish women as meaningful gift preparation; motivations for human blood donation; notions of gift-exchange in the west African slave-trade; rights-of-way in post-feudal British countryside; the inter-generational transfer of valued objects; impersonal capitalist societies underpinned by multivalent, personal, reciprocal exchange.<sup>1</sup> The gift, it seems, appears endlessly as a symbol for exchanges that speak of relationship, affinity and cohesion, though not necessarily in mutually life-giving ways.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This list could be extended, seemingly *ad infinitum*.

<sup>2</sup> Countless monographs and collections devoted to the gift have appeared in recent years, too numerous even to list. Some offer a multi-disciplinary approach – for example, Mark Osteen (ed.), *The Question of the Gift: Essays across disciplines* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002) and Harry Liebersohn, *The Return of the Gift: European History of a Global Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) – whilst others describe a particular field, such as economics – for example, Charles Eisenstein, *Sacred Economies: Money, Gift and Society in the Age of Transition* (Berkeley, CA: Evolver Editions, 2011) and James G. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013). There are also numerous historical perspectives – for example, Michael Satlow (ed.), *The Gift in Antiquity: Ancient World Comparative Histories* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (eds.), *The languages of gift in the early middle ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).



So, given that existing scholarship presents a diverse plethora of fruitful gift perspectives, why is an explicitly theological approach necessary? Three principal reasons emerge.

The first is that Christianity makes exalted claims about the gift, proposing concepts that are either immensely significant and absolutely necessary or else hopelessly misguided. Scripture is evidently permeated with gift language, from the very roots of creation *ex nihilo* to the pinnacles of eternity. Such terminology operates on multiple levels, yet is rooted in the New Testament's central salvific principle that God gave his only Son out of love for the world (Jn. 3:16) and that he bestows the Holy Spirit abundantly upon the receptive (Lk. 11:13).<sup>3</sup> Behind this crowning revelation we discover an expectant people constituted by divine gift: dwelling in the land pledged to Abraham, they sustain the promise of innumerable descendants. Adherence to the law entrusted to Moses – itself a gift – serves as a litmus test of Israel's gift fidelity: is the nation willing to believe and enact the premise that everything is ultimately gift? Primal, pre-patriarchal narratives depict creation as sheer, contingent gift, exemplified in Eden, yet fatally questioned as Adam and Eve imagine life *beyond* the gift. Tragically expelled from the garden through such destructive delusions, these forebears represent the fundamental human predicament of being gifted beyond imagination whilst possessing some self-negating propensity to deny or reject the gift, or simply remain oblivious to it. The events foreshadowing and precipitating the Babylonians' destruction of Jerusalem exemplify this ambivalence, whilst the experience of becoming exiled, bereft of the gifts of land, temple, sacrifice – and even the divine presence itself – sharpen awareness of giftedness. Yet the gift persists, as it is God's. Indeed, Scripture's opening symphony portrays the world's coming-to-be as dynamic gift-bestowal: God utters his powerful word to bring forth creation in richness and diversity, against the formless, primal void

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated scriptural quotations throughout the thesis, are taken from *The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version: Anglicized Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

over which the Spirit enigmatically hovers. Patristic writers discerned in Genesis 1:1-3 a veiled proto-trinitarianism and understood its “in the beginning” to denote not temporality but Christ, the eternal Word through whom all things come to be (Jn. 1:1-3; cf. Col. 1:15-20). Rather than being some *thing* ‘external’ to God, might the gift be intrinsic to the divine life? Might God himself be the gift?

This hypothesis yields the second rationale for gift theology, namely its claim to encompass and surpass particular theories shaped according to some other discipline. In particular, it can complete – and thus subvert – philosophical insights, providing a way through intractable aporiae. The famous insight of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) that God is being-itself means that creation has its own being solely through divine donation, existing through participation in God’s being according to divinely-determined measure. God alone simply *is*; all else flows from him through gracious beneficence. Moreover, Aquinas’s teaching that God’s inner life is constituted intrinsically by trinitarian processions and relations suggests that the divine life is seamless, mutual, ecstatic giving-and-receiving *per se*. So God is giver vis-à-vis creation but also giver (and receiver) in eternal blissfulness. This places the gift, in its fullest, purest sense, far beyond visible gift-giving practices whilst *simultaneously* claiming that everything that exists does so through receiving the gift, in appointed measure, at the most intimate level. Despite being habitually unrecognised, might the Trinity’s perfect giving-and-receiving undergird all gift-giving? Might it, moreover, expose creatures’ self-interested uncharitability whilst offering an alternative vision of redeemed relationships in the new creation?

For Augustine, the Holy Spirit in particular merits the name *donum* for he is “a kind of inexpressible communion or fellowship of Father and Son”<sup>4</sup>, or, “their

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<sup>4</sup> *Trin.* 5.12.

*sharing or mutual participation.*”<sup>5</sup> Whereas the notion of Spirit-as-communion appears most visibly as divine love outpoured (Rom. 5:5), this gift is not merely ‘external’ economic gift bestowed upon gift-deficient humanity but characterises God’s eternal ‘internal’ self-giving. For Augustine therefore, the Spirit is *donum* supremely as he is the gift of the Father and Son’s mutual self-giving (and self-receiving), that is, charity. Hence, whereas we might describe the entire Trinity as ‘gift’ (for example, in relation to creation), ‘gift’ refers eminently to the Holy Spirit as perfect love-in-communion.<sup>6</sup> Hence, creaturely reception of the Spirit entails participating in the divine life *insofar* as that divine life *is* complete mutual self-giving: truly to receive the Spirit is to give oneself in return. The gift is the gift of self-giving and self-receiving.

The final reason I present for a theological account of the gift involves responding to influential anthropological and philosophical gift theories riddled with seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Theology may reject such schemes; yet it must also engage with them and commend a different conception of the gift. I intend, therefore, to show that theology overcomes the gift’s philosophical impasse by offering an alternative, proposing an inherently divine locus through which ordinary, charitable human gift-giving may thrive. Without this theological underpinning, the gift may appear impossible, hopelessly entangled within self-negating cycles of indebtedness, or, less pessimistically, remain socially or politically expedient or simply become overlooked as mere brute, nondescript ‘given’. Simply ‘there’, such objects appear inert, suggesting no inherent giftedness whilst disclosing neither giver nor receiver. A fully fledged theology of creation, however, locates the world’s rich complexity within a vivid giver-gift-

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Kotsko, ‘Gift and *Communio*: The Holy Spirit in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*’, *SJT* 64:1(2011), 6; italics original. As a general rule throughout the thesis: italics in quotations are original unless stated otherwise.

<sup>6</sup> Witness Sarah Coakley’s unease when ‘gift’ is arrogated of the whole Trinity in her ‘Why Gift? Gift, gender and trinitarian relations in Milbank and Tanner’, *SJT* 61:2(2008), 224–235.

receiver scheme and lends creaturely giving-and-receiving an origin – and terminus – way beyond itself.

My elucidation of orthodox theology through the gift engages critically with contemporary non-theological / atheological theories that challenge or undermine Christianity's extraordinary assertions. Specifically, to claim a trinitarian foundation for all giving-and-receiving embeds *reciprocity* within the gift, a highly contentious claim that conflicts with certain philosophical premises which demand that the pure gift be sacrificial, self-depleting and non-returnable.<sup>7</sup> Whilst observed donation may be tainted by corrosive self-interest, magnanimous, yet receptive, *mutuality* will characterise God's new creation. Positioning the argument against wide-ranging controversies highlights theology's distinctive, sometimes provocative, contribution. But it does more than that: for in regarding the gift both as transcendent – constituting God's inner life – and immanent – intricately permeating creation, I will show that theology not only complements philosophy but consummates it, resolving its aporiae in the gift who is God himself, the Father and Son's mutual self-giving communion in the Spirit.

## Crucial contentions

Theological interpretations of the gift may therefore clash with readings within other disciplines. But what are these contentions? Here I mention five primary areas that emerge repeatedly throughout the thesis.

First, there is the tension between actual gift practices – such as Christmas rituals – and (possibly rarefied) ontologies of the gift: that is, the gap between *the gift as*

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<sup>7</sup> Milbank stands as the foremost advocate of the gift's mutuality, right across his sophisticated oeuvre, but most pointedly in two complementary articles: 'The Soul of Reciprocity Part One: Reciprocity Refused', *Modern Theology*, 17.3(2001), 335-391 and 'The Soul of Reciprocity Part Two: Reciprocity Granted', *Modern Theology*, 17.4(2001), 485-507.

*practised and the gift as it ought to be.* Whereas Marcel Mauss based his anthropological theories upon observed behaviour, the philosopher Jacques Derrida regarded such gift-giving as fatally ensnared. Derrida therefore imagines a gift so pure that it cannot even appear. Through re-presenting Aquinas's doctrine of God, I argue, however, that Christian theology spans this theoretical/tangible divide. The absolutely pure gift 'resides' within nonvisible trinitarian processions and relations, yet in Christ finds visible enfleshment and in the Spirit is given to creatures with an intensity far exceeding their former participation in God through the mere fact of existence. Indeed, Aquinas himself teaches that perceptible trinitarian missions translate eternal processions into time and space:<sup>8</sup> the timeless gift is revealed and received. Moreover, God's self-donation finds enduring expression in the Eucharist, relating the gift given through historical missions to contemporaneous, seemingly mundane, gift-giving and onwards to future fulfilment through intensified participation in the trinitarian life.

This yields the second issue, namely *reciprocity*. A love-struck admirer might dare to send red roses on St. Valentine's Day, hoping yearnfully for affections to be returned; yet, for Derrida, such action is no gift as it hopes for some counter-gift. So unlike Mauss' archaic societies constituted by interminable gift-circulation, Derrida's pure gift prohibits reciprocity. Theologically, Derrida is partly correct for no creature could ever repay, like-for-like, God's gift of being or salvation's unmerited treasures. However, this does not proscribe *any* return, for being 'in Christ' anticipates thankful worship, bold witness and ethical consonance, yet – crucially – on a radically different plane to the undeserved gift received. Nevertheless, these distinct levels of gift-giving remain analogically related: temporal, asymmetric human response to divine giving itself participates in the Father and Son's atemporal, 'balanced' mutuality in the Spirit.

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<sup>8</sup> *Summa Theologica* (hereafter, *ST*), Ia.43.2

My third contention, namely *remembrance*, ensues. Having received from him, the Church perpetually remembers the risen Christ (2 Tim. 2:8) in proclamation, celebration and, most strikingly, the eucharistic memorial, anamnesis that surpasses Zwinglian nostalgia by rendering worshippers strikingly present to Christ's paschal mystery. For Derrida such remembrance would constitute an outlawed counter-gift, meaning that gift-reception must be devoid of commemoration or even prior expectation, thus prohibiting Israel's anticipation of the Messiah and the Church's watchfulness for the *parousia*. Yet thankfulness for Christ's historical gift, the Spirit's perpetual renewal and hopeful eschatological vigilance constitutes the Church, fashioned through God's gift.

Fourthly, Christianity therefore *rejoices* in giftedness, whether that be the visible created order or the experience of redemption in Christ and sanctification in the Spirit. Here the giver-gift-recipient structure is unveiled and explicit. Jean-Luc Marion, whilst accepting Derrida's insistence upon non-reciprocity, nevertheless posits givenness as a valid phenomenological reduction according to which the gift might appear in superabundant brilliance, paralyzing response. For Marion, a painting gives far more than its visible features: unappreciated aspects such as the artist's constitutive personal influences, relationships and experiences are, nevertheless, *given*. The painting dazzles through *excessive* giving. Yet Marion's reduction to givenness requires the 'bracketing' or suspension of one or more elements in the giver-gift-recipient mechanism, demanding, for example, a painter (giver) absent from the art gallery. Christianity, however, eschews the giver's withdrawal: the Spirit gives abundant, tangible gifts without departing – giver, gift and recipient appear gloriously together.

Finally, this yields a fifth divergence, namely the presence of a *gift-object*. Whilst Derrida denied the gift's mere *appearance*, Marion avows its possibility, yet elevates true donation strangely *beyond* corporeality, an ultimately disembodied – yet curiously transformative – gift. So an (undoubtedly material) painting gives

something transcending materiality. Hence, for Marion, the eucharistic elements constitute the absolute gift, yet not to be adored but rather received as ‘iconic’ media for creaturely transformation. Nevertheless, shunning corporeality questions Christ’s embodied action both historically and eucharistically. Christianity cannot dispense with gift-objects any more than Mauss’ societies where lives and things are intertwined: the gift has physical specificity forever bearing the trace of the giver.

## **Reconstructing philosophy’s gift through theology**

So what might be the pillars for constructing a theological account of the gift? Philosophical readings which forbid reciprocity, anticipation, remembrance, materiality and gift-consciousness seem deficient for describing Christianity’s gift. What alternative philosophical infrastructure might prove more suitable? Equally, in arguing that only the theological gift adequately answers Derrida and Marion’s various objections, what framework is needed?

The Platonic concept of *participation* affords a vital model that allows my five gift contentions theological resolution, as well as providing an environment in which Christianity’s gift can flourish. Understood by Aquinas as imparting a limited share in something that belongs to another fully<sup>9</sup>, participation imagines the pure gift *both* residing intrinsically in God’s triune life *and* truly communicated to creation in predetermined measure. So whilst seamless reciprocity exists only in trinitarian processions and relations, creaturely gift-giving nonetheless participates in it, albeit imperfectly, and can aspire towards charitable, non-identical response to be perfected in the new creation. The Church’s on-going, Spirit-enabled remembrance of Christ, the gift incarnate,

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<sup>9</sup> See Cornelio Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation” in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 27:3(1974), 454.

constitutes participation in the trinitarian gift and is mediated through corporeal eucharistic sharing in Christ's historical, sacrificial self-giving. Such sacramental reception is a participation in Christ himself (1 Cor. 10:16) as physical elements offered to God are returned transubstantiated so that humanity – and creation itself – might be transformed. This transformation represents an embodied, ever-increasing, participation in the divine life, heralded here as charity prospers, awaiting perfection in deification.

Nevertheless, whilst human gift-giving represents faint participation in trinitarian gift-exchange, Christ incarnates flawless giving-and-receiving that not only *exemplifies* proper gift alignment but also *communicates* that gift gratuitously and salvifically. In Christ the gift is both manifested and given, through the Spirit's on-going mission. Hence, Christ bridges crucially between the pure, non-visible, trinitarian gift and imperfect, observable creaturely gift-giving. Moreover, his own gift-giving unveils otherwise unseen, trinitarian self-giving. In particular, his crucified, redemptive self-emptying (Phil. 2:5-11) manifests God's eternal, inward self-emptying, showing his incarnate kenosis to represent not divinity relinquished but *revealed*. Furthermore, inasmuch as the trinitarian gift is seamlessly reciprocal, so Christ's servant-like action inspires similar human self-giving (3:7-21), an asymmetric, non-identical counter-gift. This envisages *sacrifice* not merely as prescribed ritual action or agonizing renunciation performed for some 'higher good' but as uninhibited self-giving rooted in blissful, reciprocal, trinitarian love.

Yet Christ does not empty himself merely to provide an imitable paradigm. His kenosis is salvific for he empties *himself* and so bestows the divine gift – God himself – amid human deficiency so that humanity might be inconceivably enhanced: he becomes poor that human beings might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9), becomes sin so that they might become God's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), becomes a curse so that the blessing of Abraham might abound for the Gentiles



(Gal. 3:13-14). I shall show how the gospel narratives depict Christ graciously entering human poverty to enact unimagined, undeserved enrichment, a giftedness that fits recipients to become channels for the gift's on-going communication. So through improvised, non-identical response, creatures may offer a counter-gift that transmits and multiplies the gift, thereby manifesting more intently the trinitarian 'watermark' of transparent, reciprocal giving-and-receiving.

Two patristic soteriological principles underlie the theological vision I propose. The first is the belief that the incarnation involves a human-divine exchange: "the Son of God [became] the Son of man that he might make the sons of men the sons of God."<sup>10</sup> If sin is fundamentally gift-deficiency only the appearance and communication of that (divine) gift can overcome sin and allow humanity's progression to its deified end. But what is necessary for that gift to be transmitted? Whilst certain patristic soteriologies suggest that the very *incarnation* achieves this transfer I shall argue that only in encountering humanity's desperate *fallenness* is the gift truly 'delivered' to its needy recipients. Hence the second patristic tenet – "the unassumed is the unhealed"<sup>11</sup> – comes to the fore, a principle intimated in the gospels: the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies humanity, is given only *after* Jesus' crucified 'glorification' (Jn. 7.39). However, Hans urs von Balthasar's theology of the descent into hell proposes, somewhat provocatively, Jesus radically identifying with alienated creatures. Christ's exchange is extreme indeed: whilst humanity's 'gift' to Christ is frenzied, murderous elimination, Christ's gift to estranged humanity is his very self, to death and beyond, enabling humanity's salvific displacement into undeserved, deified giftedness.

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<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *In Johannis* 12.8 (*Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 11-27, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 36).

<sup>11</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle* 101, 32 and echoed in many other patristic writings.

## Methodology and structure

The methodology of the thesis is essentially simple, pitting various competing gift theories from anthropology and philosophy against each other in order to provide a canvas against which Christianity's distinctive understanding may emerge. Essentially, I will argue that only the trinitarian gift – manifested, conveyed, received, 'unwrapped' and 'absorbed' in Christ and the Spirit – addresses – and indeed surpasses – the aporiae evident in non-theological perspectives. In the introduction to each of the chapters, I will justify my choice of subjects to explore and scholars with whom to engage.

The thesis is subdivided into three parts. Part I locates the gift, contending that the shortcomings of purely anthropological-philosophical approaches are overcome and transcended in the trinitarian gift. Parts II and III effectively explore the gift's delivery and reception respectively and do so using the terminology employed by the late medieval mystical theologian Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). As shown in chapter three, Cusa, on the basis of James 1:17, understands creation as a descending divine gift, not merely 'extrinsic' to God but radically 'intrinsic', a non-pantheistic gift of God himself *unfolded* in Christ so that creatures might be *enfolded* into him as their end. Part II then recounts the gift unfolded in Christ and the Spirit, from creation's *ex nihilo* emergence to the new creation inaugurated through Christ's paschal mystery. Part III depicts the sacramental passage of receptive human creatures towards deification, arguing that through them all creation returns to its divine source.

Part I commences with an examination of Mauss's anthropological observations, Derrida's philosophical reading and Marion's phenomenological reduction to givenness, highlighting divergent perspectives on reciprocity, anticipation, remembrance and the status of the gift-object, each of which features prominently in Christian theology. I then assess these respective gift theories against

theological teachings, discovering that despite some compatibility, none is sufficiently aligned. Furthermore, I conclude that the aporiae exposed may be overcome theologically. In particular, I endorse Milbank's seminal insights that the gift is indeed reciprocal and may involve a gift-object, but always within a spiral that does not demand a return-gift indistinguishable from, or equivalent to, the original but rather innovates non-identically in *asymmetric* reciprocity. Creatures' 'best' counter-gift is their free gift-of-self, returning their very life to its divine source. Yet even martyrdom always exceeds Derrida's self-annihilating "gift-of-death" for it elicits God's immeasurably gracious response in resurrection. Human gift-giving thus participates imperfectly in the Trinity's perfect giving-and-receiving, awaiting consummation as participation in divine life reaches its intense *telos*. God's gift always exceeds its most marvellous observable instantiations, propelling us forward towards creation's end where all disjunction between the gift-as-practised and the pure gift is transcended, whilst maintaining proper creature-creator distinction.

So where does this elusive gift dwell precisely? Chapter Two shows how St. Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of God intimates the pure gift which underlies and constitutes creation *ex nihilo*. As self-subsisting being, replete in perfection, God grants creatures some share in that fullness, for without such largesse creatures simply would not be. Such divine donation, requiring no pre-existing matter and having a definite beginning, nevertheless permits creatures some secondary role as givers (for instance, through procreation) but only insofar as they have already been gifted themselves. Perfect, eternal giving-and-receiving, on the other hand, is found in God. Aquinas's minimalist descriptions of the processions of the Son and the Spirit envisage full, divine self-giving which remains forever within God and which is entirely reciprocal. Moreover, whereas human relations are incidental (John *might* marry Mary but would still be John even if he had never met her), trinitarian relations are not: the Father exists only inasmuch as he is Father of the Son and likewise the Son only as Son of the Father. In Aquinas's terminology,

trinitarian relations are real: whereas creatures have relations ‘superadded’, God *is* relation. This locates the real gift intrinsically ‘within’ God: a circle of eternal divine love that is the Holy Spirit, supremely fulfilling and exceeding Derrida’s suffocating axioms.

This then has profound implications for creation, forever suspended above the void of non-existence, continuously dependent upon God’s gift-of-being. Part II therefore offers my exploration of creation’s unfolding in Christ. In Chapter Three, I investigate creation’s status as divine gift, first establishing that creation is inscribed within the Son’s eternal reception from the Father, exploring creation’s emergence “in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1), “through” the Word (Jn. 1:3), “in”, “through” and “for” Christ, “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15-18). Creation’s “beginning” is Christ himself and its constitutive ‘words’ cohere in him. Cusa, in continuity with Aquinas, represents virtually the final classical expression of Neoplatonic participation within western Christianity, and so, aided by him, I argue, secondly, that creation is radically and continually dependent upon God’s gift, not merely another ‘thing’ existing alongside God but rather God’s gift-of-*self* which is, nevertheless, immeasurably *different* from God, proceeding non-pantheistically through contracted descent. Thirdly, I survey the teaching of the great Byzantine theologian Maximus the Confessor that the hypostatic union represents creation’s divine purpose: Christ incarnate *is* creation’s fullest gift. Placing this alongside Cusa’s insight that the Son is *forever* united with creation’s possibility demonstrates that creation is *unfolded* in the *incarnate* Christ, its end entailing being *enfolded* into him. Nevertheless, Christ does not emerge as some ‘out-of-the-blue’ extrinsicist revelation but from within Israel’s expectant story and its privileged, yet fractured, relationship with the gift. So, fourthly, I therefore outline the Hebrew cosmology enshrined within the Jerusalem temple’s physical structure, mirroring creation’s six-day materialization (Gen. 1). This, in turn, yields a theological anthropology predicated upon the responsibilities laid upon the temple’s chief custodians, namely Israel’s kings and

high priests. Such expectations are ultimately founded upon Adam, the original gifted being, called, as king and priest, to *return* creation to its divine source. Israel's story thereby roots the gift *within* history, making history subject to the gift rather than engulfing the gift within sinful humanity's viscissitudes. Yet in imagining existence *beyond* the gift, Adam pursues self-negating illusions. Only in Christ, the perfect king and high priest, does true humanity, in its gift-receptive, gift-giving glory, actually appear: it is the second Adam who defines – and refines – the first.

Chapters Four and Five therefore demonstrate how Christ exemplifies a perfect, vibrant gift-affinity whilst healing humanity's fractured relationship with the gift by bestowing that gift – which is God's very self – through his sacrificial, communicable self-giving unto death. He thereby truly reveals humanity, pristine in gift-responsive, gift-bestowing fullness, whilst allowing creatures sinfully confined 'in Adam' to become redeemed through transfer 'into Christ'.

Through examining gospel accounts of Christ's nativity, baptism, testing and transfiguration, alongside his teaching and miracles, I show in Chapter Four that in Christ a wholly new relationship with the gift is displayed: Christ receives perfectly in order to give perfectly. So Christ is not only the divine gift incarnate but also manifests and delivers the human return-gift. Moreover, he does not merely *exhibit* the giving-and-receiving that Adam evaded but also *communicates* a share in that giving-and-receiving. Through receiving his self-donation, gift-deficient Adamic humanity can enter into Christ and thereby inhabit a new 'setting'. That human transfer into Christ entails salvific displacement, a movement made possible because Christ has *already* been displaced into humanity's estranged location, not simply through dwelling among us in flesh but through deepening alignment with the predicament of the physically sick, mentally tortured, ethically unacceptable, spiritually complacent and religiously foreign. Crossing generously into those alienated places, Christ gives himself and

so overcomes these diverse manifestations of fallen creation's tragic imperfections.

But to what extent does Christ give? My exploration of this question in Chapter Five draws upon several theological principles. First, I consider Christ's affiliation with Israel's sacrificial system, observing that whereas legal precedent prescribed the sacrificial giving-of-*another* to regulate Israel's relationship to God, Christ fulfils the prophetic call to give *oneself*. Yet this is no intangible, 'spiritualised' self-offering, but an entirely *corporeal* giving-unto-death that is eminently *communicable* to willing recipients. So this surpasses Marion's disembodied, iconic giving and Derrida's unanticipated, unremembered gift through an intentional, physical, eucharistic self-giving that seeks response. Secondly, I shall show that Christ's sacrifice also fulfils the unfinished paradigm intimated in the near-offering of Isaac which mysteriously underlies Hebraic theologies of sacrifice. The canonical account (Gen. 22) emphasises Abraham's obedient giving-up of his cherished son, a pattern echoed in the New Testament's assertion that the Father gave up his Son for the world's salvation (e.g. Rom. 8:32). However, extracanonical material stresses Isaac's willing *self*-sacrifice, a commitment deepened as Christ gives *himself* unto death (e.g. Jn. 10:18). Hence, Christ's sacrifice discloses a trinitarian 'shape': both the Father's 'external' gift-of-his-Son and the willing 'internal' self-emptying of the Son himself, fulfilled "in the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14). Thirdly, I demonstrate how Christ's offering elevates the displacements of his pre-passion ministry to new intensity: Christ enters the condition of alienated humanity in order that it might receive a new location in him. Such sacrificial self-displacement consummates the patristic notion of human-divine redemptive interchange: Christ bestows his immeasurably rich divine gift-of-self whilst humanity gives its flawed, barren poverty. Such marvellous interchange, embracing the 'extremes', effects humanity's salvific transformation. This is implied in gospel crucifixion accounts – which anthropologist René Girard regards as depicting Christ as scapegoat *par*

*excellence* – alongside the invisible events of his descent into hell – considered by Balthasar as an inward trinitarian drama whose resolution effects creation's salvation. So Christ gives himself both 'horizontally' and 'vertically'. Yet this complete self-emptying does not deplete Christ (for his divine resources are infinite) but serves solely to enrich creatures.

In sum, then, Christ's sacrifice represents self-giving bearing a trinitarian stamp that allows gift-deficient humankind a renewed relationship with the gift. Moreover, his self-displacing gift has both 'magnitude' – the *full*, human-divine gift-of-self – and also 'direction' – being directed *towards* gift-deficient creatures who, through grace, are enabled to *receive* it for their unimaginable enhancement. God's giving in Christ is therefore 'vectored' in intention, fulfilling God's salvific purpose. But it is also vectored in *reception* for it displaces receivers into a new, redeemed situation, beckoning them onwards to give *themselves* in response and thus perpetuate Christ's mission, which is itself the time-space translation of his eternal procession from the Father. So Christ's gift of redemption (and ultimately deification) is *both* an entirely unmerited gift which *prohibits* any like-for-like counter-gift *and* a gift which *demand*s response within the Church's on-going priestly mission: in giving himself, God anticipates believers' responsive willingness to give themselves for the world's salvation, serving to return creation to its divine source.

Nevertheless, not even Christ's own sacrificial self-giving constitutes the purely one-way gift-of-death (the only gift Derrida deems possible) for it anticipates and elicits the Father's response in raising him from the dead. In Chapter Six, I show how the gospels depict the resurrection as a displacing gift for Christ and the first believers. The risen Christ, who seeks out his unsuspecting recipients, inaugurates the eschaton and shifts the focus of the gift towards fulfilment in deified existence. He again fulfils the principle of receiving-in-order-to-give, bearing resurrectional splendour to be shared. Displaced to his proper 'place' through the

ascension, Christ does not leave his creation bereft of divine presence but allows the promised eschatological Spirit to be given, constituting the Church as the gifted community, receiving not some inert possession but a gift which causes onward salvific displacement. Once again this does not represent a ‘new’ gift or something ‘external’ to God. No: as Augustine teaches, the Spirit is *the* very *donum*, the love-gift of communion between Father and Son. Building on this Augustinian inheritance, Yves Congar, moreover, develops a profound pneumatological anthropology and ecclesiology, understanding humanity’s purpose to become the Spirit’s temple, thereby fulfilling the communion to which Adam was called.

Part III explores how human subjects are enfolded into this gift fully displayed and offered in Christ and the Spirit. Chapter Seven thus charts the redemptive synergy between God’s absolutely prior gift of grace and believers’ response through desire reconfigured and belief aroused. This human ‘pre-gift’ is exemplified in the Virgin Mary’s representative, perpetual *fiat* and signals humanity’s final, full, embodied gift-of-self. Christ crucified and risen, God’s unique, incarnate manifestation, self-displaces into the realm of sanctifying signs – sacraments – which transport recipients towards their deified end. Following Augustine and Aquinas, I show how sacraments’ impermanent, yet efficacious, character maintains this mobility. Having passed through sanctifying waters and been nurtured by Christ’s sacramental self-gift, the Church offers the Spirit-enabled eucharistic memorial which renders Christ and his unique sacrifice intimately present so that it may, ultimately, offer its own gift-of-self: we consume Christ in order to be consumed by him into the trinitarian life. Remembrance, reception and anticipation cohere in the Eucharist’s physical gift-objects which truly convey the pure gift and awaken Christ’s thankful people to offer the return-gift that eluded Adam. Receiving-in-order-to-give and giving-in-order-to-receive, we discover that the true gift has an innate trinitarian ‘shape’ and that consummated participation therein constitutes our God-given end.



# PART I

## Locating the Gift

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How might we then give a lucid account of the gift, one that truly relates to the common experience of donation and reception whilst recognizing also that the humanly enacted gift may be beleaguered by contradictory, self-defeating perils? In this part, I survey the shortcomings of purely anthropological and philosophical conceptions of the gift, arguing that only the ‘inner’ trinitarian ‘experience’ of giving-and-receiving resolves and transcends non-theological difficulties. In showing how God’s gift, displayed and offered in Christ and the Spirit, fulfils the gift superlatively, the stage is set for the gift’s glorious ‘delivery’ and deifying reception, as set forth in Parts II and III.



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Contentious Gift

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### Introduction

In this chapter I seek to establish the ‘crucial contentions’ surrounding the gift outlined in the introduction, namely: (i) the relation between the ideal gift and the gift-as-practised; (ii) the reciprocity of the gift; (iii) whether the gift should be anticipated or remembered; (iv) the gift as a source of rejoicing, in its full, explicit giver-gift-recipient structure; and, finally, (v) whether the gift involves a gift-object. I will explore these critical areas through the gift theories of five eminent scholars, namely the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, the philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion and the philosophical theologians John Milbank and Antonio López. These diverse outlooks interact profoundly and critically (though not always intentionally) with the divine gift displayed and delivered in Christ and the Spirit. In each section I will examine that particular author’s fundamental insights, together with an exploration of both the affinity and discord thus generated vis-à-vis a Christian understanding of gift, thereby setting a foundation to hone a genuine theology of the gift, involving detailed examination of scripture and the wider systematic tradition. In subsequent chapters I will reconsider central theological doctrines from a gift perspective to demonstrate that Christianity both resolves the aporiae evident in these determinedly anthropological and philosophical readings and transcends them, offering a unique gift ontology that eludes non-theological evaluations. It is my hope that engagement with anthropological and philosophical debates will generate the essential grit in the oyster that allows Christianity’s distinctively theological pearl of great price to become manifest.

Nevertheless, why, amid the wide-ranging array of fashionable gift theories, focus on these scholars?

Whilst Mauss's theories emerge from observations of agonistic empirical gift-giving within highly specific socio-cultural contexts, their crucial assertions – that the gift has physical solidity, retains something of the giver and awaits reciprocity – have been translated far beyond their original setting, becoming markers both to assess actual gift practices and to conceive ontologies of the gift. Acknowledging such apparent ubiquity across disparate scholarly gift literature, including theology and philosophy, it seems almost vital to consider his legacy, particularly since Christianity affirms Christ as God's embodied gift, who, in the Spirit, inspires humanity's counter-gift, albeit on a distinct, yet analogically related, inherently peaceable plane.

Derrida is a fine sparring partner for Mauss, representing a radically different stance which outlaws all vestiges of mutuality, anticipation and remembrance and refuses to allow the gift-object actually to appear. He thus casts an ontology of a pure, remote gift hovering tantalisingly 'beyond' and contrasting markedly with Mauss' concrete, observable gift-exchanging patterns. Whilst theology's gift far exceeds visible practices, it is, nevertheless, rooted in the perfect *reciprocity* of trinitarian life, a life made *tangible* in the Word's enfleshment.

Although Marion's early work was broadly theological, he ultimately espouses a phenomenological approach to the gift that ostensibly legitimises theological readings, enshrining Derrida's prohibition on reciprocity whilst simultaneously imagining a horizon against which the gift might actually appear. Marion might conceivably mediate between Mauss's combative, unrestrained gift-exchanging and Derrida's arid stridency, potentially affording Christianity's gift a reputable philosophical basis. However, his phenomenology refuses to support an explicit

giver-gift-recipient structure and downplays the gift's corporeality, thereby failing to account for God's uninhibited, embodied giving in Christ and the Spirit.

Milbank subjects Mauss, Derrida and Marion to penetrating scrutiny from a philosophical-theological outlook, decrying attempts to imagine a 'pure', 'free' gift devoid of mutuality and physicality as incompatible with Christianity's inherent trinitarian, incarnational essence. Indeed, Milbank contends that divine life *is* perfect, blissful, reciprocal self-giving and that humanity's sharing in that eternal life is intimated proleptically in the praxis of charity. Through Christ and the Spirit the gulf between ontology and practice is bridged: temporal, observable giving-and-receiving can participate in God's eternal, invisible self-outpouring. Milbank thus proposes a thankful, joyful, embodied response to God's giving through endlessly improvised, asymmetric, non-identical counter-giving, effectively adopting Mauss' distinctive, gift-exchanging traits but within an underlying ontology of peace and selflessness, where even the martyr's giving-unto-death evokes a yet greater divine response in resurrection.

López's ontological reading affirms Milbankian reciprocity, relating the 'originary experience' of being born – and the host of events that flow therefrom – to the profound mystery of being: God himself, in the splendour of his mutually self-giving triune life. Being is not simply an inert, somewhat bland, backdrop to life – an easily unrecognised 'given', seemingly as 'giftless' as air – but rather the most extraordinary *gift*, unimaginably *positive*, having innate trinitarian 'dimensions', disclosed in Christ and the Spirit. Awakened, fitting Christian desire propels the 'concrete singular' towards her divinely-bestowed *telos* through Christ, the 'universal singular' whose unimpeded gift-of-self filiates believers, revealing in them the mystery of being which is being-for-the-other.

As López develops Milbank's decisive insights ontologically, I intend to expand that same trajectory through detailed engagement with scripture, interpreted

against the broader dogmatic tradition. Subsequent chapters will thus illustrate my essential alignment with the Milbank-López paradigms. Whilst charting the insights of neither in meticulous detail, I nevertheless intend to corroborate scripturally the legitimacy of their fundamental gift insights, exploring their rich ‘content’ through detailed examination of biblical narratives in dialogue with the wider theological tradition. I thereby seek to demonstrate that the scriptural and systematic theological witness supports the contention that the gift is indeed awaited, remembered and celebrated, and, as profoundly reciprocal, constitutes the Church, inviting it tangibly to participate ever more intensely in the divine, trinitarian life itself which is forever perfect giving-and-receiving.

## **Giving to receive: Marcel Mauss’ observation of agonistic gift exchange**

### ***The embodied, reciprocal gift***

In his seminal *Essai sur le don*, Marcel Mauss observes gift-exchange in archaic societies, discovering that the transfer of goods – whether objects, people, services or rituals – within and between communities necessarily demands a response.<sup>1</sup> Whilst having the outward veneer of magnanimous one-way passage, demanding no counter-gift, reciprocal return is in reality entirely compulsory, constituting a so-called *system of total services*, a fiercely competitive web of codified agonistic action and response forming a complex social hierarchy. As Mary Douglas writes in her forward to a recent translation of the essay, Mauss rejects any notion of a free gift, discerning instead the Hindu Vedic principle of *do ut des*, where sacrificial offering to the gods is believed to elicit a favourable divine response.<sup>2</sup> Far from being a meagre token of an absent donor, the gift-

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, trans. W.D.Halls (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 4ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, x. ff.

object is charged with the identity of the giver, thereby announcing not selfless gratuity but insistence upon recompense of yet greater order. Writing of his observation of Maori Polynesian culture, Mauss declares that the gift physicalises the giver's self-expression to the extent that

what imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him. Through it the giver has a hold over the beneficiary...<sup>3</sup>

Hence the gift itself is no mere *representation* of something greater resident elsewhere but actually *embodies* a real merging: 'souls are mixed with things; things with souls. Lives are mingled together...'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, no aspect of life, whether it be religious, mythological, economic, social or aesthetic, seems divorced from this process of 'impregnation'.<sup>5</sup> Hence Mauss emphasises the gift's true purpose to be *beyond* materiality whilst nevertheless maintaining the obligatory triple mediation of *actual* material giving-receiving-reciprocating, thus forging binding, enduring relationships where spirituality and culture are not rendered subservient to fiscal concerns.<sup>6</sup>

### ***A partial fit?***

Mauss's theories resonate somewhat with Christian teaching insofar as God's gift in Christ is manifestly corporeal, both historically and sacramentally. Yet this gift far exceeds a simple divine 'trace' through being God's unreserved gift-of-*self* in human flesh, not merely some (possibly arbitrary) gift subsequently imbued with

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. Here the reference is to the Andaman Islands.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 49. This encompassing of the *whole* of life within a ritualised exchange mechanism stands in stark contrast with the bare utilitarianism of 'Homo Economicus' in the modern west. See Karen Sykes, *Arguing with Anthropology: An Introduction to Critical Theories of the Gift* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Sykes, 74. Later (160), she suggests that such human consciousness within social relations might outwit capitalist mentalities that hallow economic infrastructures.

the divine giver's 'fragrance'. Moreover, the Spirit pours *God's very love* – rather than some vague sentiment – into human hearts (Rom. 5:5) and, although normally conferred invisibly, its gift-bestowing action in recipients' lives instigates tangible on-going effects. Like Mauss's archaic societies, Christianity's 'gift-object' is never inert or meaningless but of primary consequence, constituting the community in which it circulates, signifying meaning and enacting change. *Transformation* is crucial here, for truly to receive Christ – to be, in Pauline terms, 'in Christ' – entails being conformed to his image (Rom. 8:29; cf. Phil. 3:21) rather than former worldly desires (1 Pet. 1:14; cf. Rom. 12:2), an aspiration to participate intently and intensely in trinitarian giving-and-receiving. So to offer myself responsively discharges no debt – only the sinless Son can do that, as Anselm teaches – but signifies my becoming more Christ-like.

As I will argue in chapters six and seven, receiving God's gift-of-self in Christ and the Spirit, does indeed demand response, but clearly *not* akin to Mauss's frenzied cadences of ever-intensifying recompense: humanity could never return (or, under Mauss's model, progressively augment) God's gift of being in creation or of eternal well-being in deification. Rather, humanity replies with the best gift at its disposal, namely through lives poured out in thanksgiving, adoration and service, gifts inhabiting an 'exchange plane' distinct from the level of divine giving, yet, in the Spirit's relationality, mysteriously analogous. The human-human exchange of love commanded by Christ ensues from his own loving gift-of-self (Jn. 15:12-14; cf. 1 Jn. 4:7-21) but, unlike Mauss' combative, self-aggrandizing trading, eschews aggressive one-up-manship in "[loving] one another with mutual affection" and inciting 'competition' only through "[outdoing] one another in showing honour" (Rom. 12:10). Maussian agonistic gift-exchanging lacks a secure, undergirding ontology of uncompetitive peace, a constitutive, entirely mutual, 'desiring-the-best-for-the-other', and so its escalating rivalry imagines nothing like Christianity's harmonious *telos* in perfect rest and inexhaustible plenitude.



## Jacques Derrida's aneconomic amnesia

### *The gift unanticipated, unrecognised, unreturned, unremembered*

Derrida, however, remains preoccupied with the *pure* gift's inherent characteristics and denies its actual *appearance*. For him a gift must preserve the absolute freedom of giver and recipient, thus prohibiting *any* response – even the barest recognition or outright rejection, let alone thanks or a return gift.<sup>7</sup>

If there is a gift, the *given* of the gift (*that which* one gives, *that which* is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving ... It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic*. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, but it must *keep* a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible. Not impossible, but *the* impossible.<sup>8</sup>

So unlike Mauss's insistent exchanges, the gift's essential purity and freedom requires the parties to remain oblivious to their gift-defined status, with no gift-object manifested:

For there to be gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift.... For there to be gift, not only must the donor or donee not perceive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, no recognition; he or she must forget it right away and moreover this forgetting must be so radical that it exceeds even the psychoanalytic categoriality of forgetting.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Given time. 1. Counterfeit Money* [*Donner le temps. 1. La fausse monnaie*; trans. Peggy Kamuf]. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 14; italics original.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Thus Derrida's gift remains intact, preserved from reciprocity which would unleash corrosive, gift-negating snares.<sup>10</sup> Within temporal circularity, such astringent aneconomism constitutes *the impossible*, achievable only as time is ruptured.<sup>11</sup> So whilst maintaining a gift *ontology*, he stresses the impossibility of *appearance* as the gift would degenerate into a tradeable commodity, proffered unfreely. Agonizingly remote, Derrida's gift denounces Maussian cycles of time-delayed gift-transfer where restitution is neither instantaneous nor infinitely delayed.<sup>12</sup> Rejecting *quid pro quo* exchange, the pure gift tends towards excess, stifling all anticipation and compulsion,<sup>13</sup> whilst providing no pleasure for the donor, imparting no surprise to the donee and possessing no identifiable gift characteristics.<sup>14</sup> As *the impossible*, the true gift lacks intention, intuition and obligation: it is, in fact, the gift of nothing, "the radical nongift of time, the present moment .... Nothing .... but the nihilating passage of time from future to past, the dissolution of being in its manifestation as temporality."<sup>15</sup> As such, this non-gift of the present – given to no one, never owed, never longed for – constitutes "the impossible horizon of exchange, the utterly self-annihilating gift of the immemorial event", undermining any Christian sense of a divine maker who creates *ex nihilo* out of superabundant, selfless, overflowing love and bestows a genuine share in being-itself.<sup>16</sup>

The gift's sheer gratuity differentiates it from sacrifice which, for Derrida, seeks favour via propitiation.<sup>17</sup> Whilst diametrically opposed, the true gift – which may entail offering oneself to death – and *do ut des* sacrificial exchange may become

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-41.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 91; 122-3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-7.

<sup>15</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: the Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 261.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 262. As a contrast, see my comments on Milbank and López in this chapter, on Aquinas in the next and on Maximus and Cusa in chapter three.

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, *Given time*, 137. My reading of Judeo-Christian sacrifice offers a fundamentally different perspective.

perilously merged and contaminated.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, *obedient* sacrifice – putting to death “the unique, irreplaceable, and most precious” – may be demanded.<sup>19</sup> The near-sacrifice of Isaac, read by Derrida through Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, confronts Abraham with an existential quandary, torn between ethical, paternal responsibility and the divine promises predicated upon his son alongside duty to the ultimate good and the transcendent, hidden Other who demands all.<sup>20</sup> Fidelity to God thus severs ties to lesser obligations and “propels me into the space or risk of absolute sacrifice,”<sup>21</sup> absolute responsibility which overflows into my duty to others.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, once he is assured that Abraham “[renounces] calculation”, intending to give the gift of death “outside of any economy”, free from “exchange, reward, circulation, or communication”, God returns the child.<sup>23</sup> Discerning this absence of economic *savoir-faire* within Jesus’ teaching on attitudes to enemies, Derrida suggests that God’s children offer “a gift, a love *without reserve*”, an “infinite and dissymmetrical economy of sacrifice” contrary even to the Law itself,<sup>24</sup> a subversive transfer exemplified in Jesus’s loving sacrifice for the (infinitely) indebted.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Christianity’s gift: a tantalising mirage?***

But does Christianity actually measure up against Derrida’s exacting criteria?

The Hebrew scriptures are replete with gift allusions, beginning with creation itself as God’s willed, gratuitous, strictly *unnecessary* action to the promise, expectation and fulfilment of land, descendants, law and, eventually, Messiah.

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<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 30-1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-7; italics original.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

Indeed, Israel's story portrays a people's affiliation to – and frequent rejection of – divine gift. Whilst not a 'thing' in itself, the gift is represented in astoundingly material, perceptible terms: for whilst the law, for example, might be described in rhapsodic, almost transcendent, mystical terms (Ps. 119), believers' *reception* shapes the concrete holiness of everyday life. Eden poignantly unfolds the gift's intrinsic, almost tragic, ambiguity: here, an intimate, gift-centred, divine-human relationship is inaugurated as mere dust is animated with God's breath of life (Gen. 2:7), yet as Adam and Eve envisage and embrace life 'beyond' the given they are expelled from the garden and denied access to the tree of life (3:24). The ensuing narrative is fundamentally about Israel's complex rapport with the gift, which is, finally, neither territory, progeny nor precept, but God himself. Yet far from possessing Derrida's ever-postponed, aneconomic elusiveness, God's gracious provision, materially and spiritually, is proclaimed as 'gift' – perpetual donation that anticipates response so that the divine-human gift-economy may be sustained.

Derrida's gift precepts are transgressed even more flagrantly as the New Testament announces the Messiah's advent. Christ – explicitly described as 'gift' (e.g. Jn. 3:16) – has evidently *appeared* (e.g. Lk. 1:80; Mat. 2:11; 17:2, 28:9; Jn. 1:14; 19:5; 20:16; Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:6-8; 2 Tim. 1:10, 4:1, 4:8; Tit. 2:11, 3:4 etc.) and been portrayed through myriad linguistic and artistic media that *intensify* the memory of God's gift-of-self, rather than obliterating it. In particular, narratives of Christ's founding sacrifice persistently contravene Derridean gift-axioms: his death is explicitly described as '*gift*' (e.g. Rom. 8:32; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:2) and numerous eucharistic references depict him commanding repeated *anamnesis* of his death, a ritualised remembering through physical, edible gifts which, furthermore, institutes and sustains Christ's ecclesial body (1 Cor. 10:16-17). His death occurs with the *premeditated* intention of both Father and Son (e.g. Jn. 10:17; Eph. 1:3ff; Col. 1:20) and elicits believers' *awareness* – itself an immediate *counter-gift* – that receiving this gift constitutes salvation and the for-

give-ness of sins. Reception of this gift of love entails further *response* (e.g. Jn. 13:34-5; 15:12f.; 1 Jn. 4:10-11), prescribing ethical obligations founded upon ceaseless, abundant love.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, countless references and allusions to the gift of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:34; 4:14; 14:15ff.; 20:22; Acts 2:1ff; 2:38; 10:45; Rom. 5:5; 8:15 etc.) show giver and recipient *conscious* of the gift bestowed, calling those thereby blessed to manifest the return-gift of fruitfulness (Gal 5:22-3). Whilst emerging entirely from divine gratuity, such transformation requires human recognition, response and conscious co-operation to be effective. The *donum Dei* therefore seems to fall desperately short of Derrida's rigorous standards: lack of recognition, forgetfulness of the gift and the impossibility of response are all woefully (or gloriously?) breached.

Convinced that the gift's aporiae can only be resolved theologically, Milbank suggests that Derrida's strictly philosophical conception of the gift is self-destructive: "a true gift would be from no-one, to no-one and of nothing .... a gift [that] both requires, and seeks to escape from, a giver. Therefore there is no gift and not even a *meaning* for 'gift.'"<sup>27</sup> As *the* impossible Derrida's gift incites enthralling, asymptotic desire, alluringly near but never presenting itself: "it is a participation in a particular kind of messianism where the messiah is always to be anticipated but never actually arrives."<sup>28</sup> Longing for such manifestation – thereby epiphanising the otherwise impossible gift – requires infinite love to become finite

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<sup>26</sup> This is not a strict *exchange* but rather *relay*, as the love of Jesus for his disciples/Church compels love *for one another*, this on-going circulation being, nonetheless, the visible sign of gift-responsive love for God (1 Jn. 4:20-21; cf. Mt. 25: 35,40). Hence responding lovingly to the one who has loved us first (1 Jn. 4:10) initiates not simple reciprocation but arrays of transformed and transforming relationships.

<sup>27</sup> John Milbank, 'Can a gift be given? Prolegomena to a future Trinitarian metaphysic', in Gregory Jones and Stephen E. Fowl (eds.), *Rethinking Metaphysics*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 130.

<sup>28</sup> Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as gift: Marion, Derrida and the limits of phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 200.

and be yielded unto death.<sup>29</sup> Yet within a messiahless, giftless universe, such yearning remains as *désir de l'impossible, désir de Dieu*.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, scriptural accounts of the gift's appearance, donation, remembrance and transformative power persistently forsake Derridean criteria for they are predicated upon the Messiah's *actual* enfleshed arrival and his self-bestowing redemptive action, achieved supremely in crucifying, kenotic disappropriation. Hence, the formidable (for Derrida, unnegotiable) divide between abstract ideal and empirical phenomenon is traversed through God's historical, unique gift-of-self in Christ and in continuing, ceaseless, pneumatological self-communication: through the gift God does what only God can.<sup>30</sup> Belief in such gratuitous self-donation would, however, seem to Derrida like the tantalising *mirage* of clear, cool water for a parched traveller, 'appearing' on an ever-receding desert horizon, only to 'disappear' cruelly as the thirsty one approaches to slake his thirst.

## **A new horizon? Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological gift**

Yet might we establish a non-hallucinatory horizon where the gift is possible? Marion seeks such a context, ultimately affirming human giving-and-receiving independent of any ever-prior, all-encompassing divine donation, suggesting that phenomenology can sanction theology without being constrained by it.

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<sup>29</sup> Derrida, *Given Time*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>30</sup> John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.) *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 11-12.

## ***Overcoming onto-theology***

Nevertheless, Marion's early work is explicitly theological, depicting the gift with respect to *God's* gift-giving. He opposes metaphysics that allegedly imprisons God within humanly-devised ontological categories, contending from Exodus 3:14 that "Being says nothing about God that God cannot immediately reject"<sup>31</sup>, whilst asserting that the fundamental divine self-revelation as love (1 Jn. 4:8) makes being subservient to love: rather than God 'attaining' being he proposes "the possibility of Being's attaining to God."<sup>32</sup> Thereby Marion partially extracts the gift from Derridean aporiae, rendering it theologically axiomatic:

Because God does not fall within the domain of Being, he comes to us in and as a gift ..... For the gift does not first have to be, but to pour out in an abandon that, alone, causes it to be; God saves the gift in giving before being.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, whilst allowing God to 'save' the gift, Marion upholds its non-appearing, non-circulating character. He proposes *distance* as fundamental, both within the Trinity ("alterity without opposition") and between God and humanity, separation that marks both the dependence of *ex nihilo* creation on its maker but also the unholy, sin-infected, human-divine gulf.<sup>34</sup> In this distance, divine love gives being to humankind by the boundless outpouring of love, "abandoning itself, ceaselessly transgressing the limits of its own gift."<sup>35</sup> Thus, "God gives Godself to [humanity], where man receives himself from the hands of God"<sup>36</sup> and within such holy human-divine spacing grace abounds, making possible

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson; foreword, David Tracy. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 45

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 3

<sup>34</sup> See Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: a Theo-logical introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 51ff.

<sup>35</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 47

<sup>36</sup> From Marion's 'Distance et louange', quoted by Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 55.

receptivity to God and participation in him.<sup>37</sup> Hence, unlike a visual or conceptual *idol* which represents merely human appropriation of the divine – an “invisible mirror [that] admits no beyond”<sup>38</sup> – an *icon* regards Christ, the *eikōn* of the invisible God (Col 1:15), as its measure, not triggered *by* a vision but *instigating* a vision, “letting the visible .... be saturated little by little with the invisible.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the gift involves not “grasping God” but “being grasped by God”<sup>40</sup>, and, as the icon possesses profundity absent from the idol – constituted by “an origin without original ... which pours itself out”, it draws us into the ambit of an *already transformed reality*, the threshold of theotic encounter intimated in the Orthodox liturgy.<sup>41</sup>

Yet this revelation – love itself – demands a modicum of self-emptying love from the prayerful recipient for “only love will be able to welcome it,”<sup>42</sup> hinting that even the purest gift necessitates some kind of ‘pre-gift’ (or return-gift?) which defies the absolutely indifferent Derridean gift.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Marion maintains that charity is ultimately trinitarian, “[revealing] that the Father gives himself in and as the Son”<sup>44</sup>, discerning thereby an iconic prototype for tangible love/gifts. The irreducible giver-givee spacing allows the giver’s self-withdrawal whilst nevertheless consenting to be ‘read’ in the gift,<sup>45</sup> so that in divine giving, God may be recognised but never *seized*.<sup>46</sup> Whereas the prodigal son desires his father’s substantial property (idolised *ousia* dissociated from the gift; Lk. 15:12), the father longs to bestow unimagined restored filial identity under a “profoundly

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<sup>37</sup> See Horner, 57. She detects Augustine’s influence on Marion here.

<sup>38</sup> Marion, *God without being*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 58

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, quoted by Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 67.

<sup>43</sup> See chapter seven for consideration of the Virgin Mary’s representative, immaculate gift-reception.

<sup>44</sup> Marion, *La Croisée du Visible* trans. and quoted by Graham Ward, ‘The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion’ in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 231.

<sup>45</sup> *God without being*, 104.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.



iconic gaze” (15:20), revealing materiality’s gift-negating capacity.<sup>47</sup> *Ousia*, that metaphysical pillar – and, for Marion, conceptual *idol* – is overcome by the pure gift: dissociated from all commerce in things, prior even to being/Being,<sup>48</sup> and emphasising neither donor nor donee but the very *act* itself.<sup>49</sup>

## ***Givenness***

Even in *God without Being* Marion shies away from physical donor-gift-donee structures in favour of the donating *event*, as both prior to, and constitutive of, being. His early theological foundation subsequently cedes to phenomenology, imagining donation independent of a divine giver.<sup>50</sup> Marion thus follows Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who, whilst asserting consciousness as the context for all experience, claimed it eluded straightforward description. Through bracketing assumptions and prejudices which conspire to veil pure consciousness – the so-called ‘principle of presuppositionless’ – Husserl sought attentiveness solely to what is actually *given* through phenomena, getting “back to the things themselves.”<sup>51</sup> Employing the Greek term *epochē* to denote such purposeful deactivation of natural attitudes, Husserl’s attempted return to consciousness’ obscured domain happens through ‘reduction’, literally a ‘leading back’ facilitated through withholding.<sup>52</sup> His ‘phenomenological reduction’ suspends interpretive and integrative natural attitudes (such as common sense), thus allowing things to appear starkly simply as experiences. For Husserl, consciousness is no mere abstracted inner state but always consciousness *of something*, a decisive act

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 103

<sup>50</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 9.

<sup>52</sup> See Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 49.

correlated with a specific object, an *intention*.<sup>53</sup> Such intentions may be *filled* – focusing on something present to consciousness – or else *empty* – geared towards something absent or merely anticipated.<sup>54</sup> *Intuition* is the process whereby intentions become filled through having the target presented.<sup>55</sup>

Echoing Heidegger, Marion defines the phenomenon as “what *shows* itself in and from itself” and claims that “this *self* can be attested only inasmuch as the phenomenon first *gives itself*.”<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, whilst applauding the insight that being is given, he criticises Heidegger for approaching being via *Dasein* – that naming of the individual insofar as she seeks to relate her own being to Being-as-such.<sup>57</sup> Marion, however, claims that being can be *overcome* via an additional reduction to *givenness*, a term used by the early Husserl in the notion of ‘being given’ (*Gegebensein*). Arising at the coincidence of intuition and intention, givenness is thus the ultimate reduction – beyond Husserl’s reduction to objectness and Heidegger’s to beingness – constituting a phenomenological horizon, which makes possible absolute self-giving.<sup>58</sup> Quoting Husserl, Marion thus maintains that

*every originally giving intuition is a source of right for cognition – that everything that offers itself originally to us in intuition (in its fleshly actuality, so to speak) must simply be received for what it gives itself, but without passing beyond the limits in which it gives itself.*<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 4; italics original.

<sup>57</sup> See, further, Moran, 238-9.

<sup>58</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 17, 53. See also Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion ‘On the Gift: a discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion,’ in Caputo and Scanlon, 54-78, esp. 56.

<sup>59</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, p. 12; italics original.

For Marion, such reduction to givenness preserves the gift's Derridean exchange-free integrity,<sup>60</sup> valid both for presenting *manifestations* and the *inapparent*<sup>61</sup> as well as things which give themselves without objectivity (for example time and life) or without being (such as death and peace).<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, givenness remains polysemic, unfolding as the act of giving (*donner*), the gift itself (*le don*), the giver (*donateur*) and the mode of the given (*donné*) interplay.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Bracketing the gift***

Moreover, Marion affirms that, under givenness, Derrida's unanticipated, unremembered, unreciprocated, aneconomic gift becomes *possible* through *bracketing* donor, donee and gift in turn: "always there is a gift, there is a giver and a receiver, but rarely the two at once. And in a true gift ... there is no gift-object."<sup>64</sup> Suspending first the givee excises any prior demand or return-gift,<sup>65</sup> displaying giving as economy-free, non-recompensible loss, possessing even eschatological dimensions, as signified in Christ the universal, but unknown, recipient (Mt. 25:31-46).<sup>66</sup> Secondly, a giver disconnected, for instance, through leaving a bequest, "acts perfectly because he disappears perfectly"<sup>67</sup>, rendering any resultant indebtedness impossible to repay and yielding "givenness now pure since purged of any transcendent giver."<sup>68</sup> Finally, bracketing the gift itself might be illustrated by the ceremonial bestowal of power on a leader through presenting an observable sign-object whose visibility subsequently fades as the true gift

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<sup>60</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Reason of the Gift' in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 101-134; esp. 104-5, 112.

<sup>61</sup> Horner, *Rethinking God*, 85.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-2.

<sup>64</sup> Marion's 1996 Sorbonne interview, quoted by Horner, *Rethinking God*, 128.

<sup>65</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 85ff.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 91-2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 97

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

conferred becomes apparent.<sup>69</sup> Marion thus ventures that gifts are most precious as ‘no-thing’ when “what they give belongs neither to reality nor to objectivity.”<sup>70</sup> Under such phenomenological, non-transcendent reduction, a *divine* (and, for Marion, non-reciprocal) gift could be regarded in terms of revealed, rather than rational, theology<sup>71</sup> and God’s self-giving – grace, which for Derrida is aporetic – becomes possible under the giver-gift-givee bracketing.

### ***Overwhelming gift: the saturated phenomenon***

Within the metaphysical framework of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) asserted four conceptual categories for regarding phenomena, namely (i) quantity, (ii) quality, (iii) relation and (iv) modality. Marion’s self-styled ‘saturated phenomenon’ surpasses ordinary phenomena in one or more Kantian category: something that (i) “cannot be aimed at” (thus rendered “*invisible*”);<sup>72</sup> or (ii) “cannot be borne” due to its dazzling intensity;<sup>73</sup> or (iii) intrudes as an absolute, without relation;<sup>74</sup> or (iv) lacks analogy, incapable of being gazed upon.<sup>75</sup> Such saturation – “where the intuition ‘[gives] *more, indeed immeasurably more*, than the intention would ever have aimed at, or could have foreseen” – represents sheer excess, glory and joy, exploding all horizons, even givenness.<sup>76</sup> Thus bedazzled, the phenomenon’s relation to the ‘I’ is inverted: “far from being able to constitute this phenomenon, the ‘I’ experiences itself as constituted by it.”<sup>77</sup> So Marion discerns staggering surplus, an overwhelming, silencing, generative glory, whereas Derrida senses only fruitless, insatiable

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>70</sup> See Horner, *Rethinking God*, 131.

<sup>71</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 114

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 199ff..

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 202ff.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 206ff.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 209ff. See also Kevin Hart, *Postmodernism: a beginner’s guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), 178-9.

<sup>76</sup> *Being Given*, 197ff; italics original.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

longing for the impossible.<sup>78</sup> Yet this is less esoteric than we might imagine. Marion considers the Battle of Waterloo as saturated phenomenon – a complex, multivalent event whose intuition exceeded even the chief protagonists’ receptive capacities.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, in being observed penetratingly by another, the human face presents an unsummonable, unmanipulable, inexhaustible surplus. Before such superabundance, I am the one stunned and overtaken (*l’interloqué*), the gifted (*l’adonnée*), radically constituted by the saturated phenomenon’s self-giving.<sup>80</sup>

Marion considers that a phenomenon superexcessive in all Kantian categories is phenomenologically *defensible* and merits the term *revelation*, even though its *actuality* belongs to *theology*.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Scripture unfolds the necessary fourfold saturation, sustaining phenomenologically the prospect of Christ being God’s revelation.<sup>82</sup> Christ’s unprecedented advent (Mt. 24:27), “escapes all preparatory anticipation in the past”, a paradox “perfectly unforeseeable because intuition saturates every prior concept quantitatively.”<sup>83</sup> With respect to quality, Christ’s words surpass receptibility (Jn. 16:12), whilst his transfiguration presents unbearable radiance (Mk. 9:3) and astounding pronouncement (Lk. 9:34-5), an alien incursion climaxing in the resurrection, “[passing] beyond what this world can receive, contain or embrace.”<sup>84</sup> Christ proclaims an unearthly kingdom (Jn. 18:36) and eludes depiction (21:25), “[appearing] as an absolute phenomenon, one that annuls all relation because it saturates every possible horizon into which relation would introduce it.”<sup>85</sup> Finally, Christ is that iconic phenomenon who

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<sup>78</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, 8.

<sup>79</sup> See Hart, 175.

<sup>80</sup> See Robin Horner, ‘Jean-Luc Marion and the Possibility of Something Like Theology’ in *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 52(2-3), 335-350; here, 344.

<sup>81</sup> *Being Given*, 235-236.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 236ff.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

regards and (re)forms me, “[constituting] me its witness”<sup>86</sup>, a transformation inverse to every idolatrous gaze that would diminish God to human proportions.

Nevertheless, Marion contends that phenomenology merely endorses faith’s *possibility*: to believe – as he does – entails crossing theology’s threshold. Whereas for Derrida the Messiah is the *never given*, for Marion he is the *already given*<sup>87</sup> and whilst Derrida insists upon ‘le don *sans* la donation’, Marion proposes ‘le don *dans* la donation’<sup>88</sup>: “for Marion the gift is a matter of hypergivenness; for Derrida it is a matter of never-giveness; for Marion it is a matter of bedazzlement, for Derrida of blindness.”<sup>89</sup> Caputo thus considers Marion as extending *beyond* being and knowledge to the *agathon*, that beauty and majesty revealed in the saturated phenomena, whereas Derrida seems resigned to the *khōrā*, that prior wasteland devoid of splendour or glory *beneath* being and knowledge, of *non-gift*, where only longing for the *never-given* gift, the eternally delayed Messiah, sustains.<sup>90</sup> So whilst Derrida consigns the dehydrated desert explorer to a ceaselessly futile gift-quest, Marion elevates her gaze towards the magnificent horizon of an infinitely satisfying oasis.

### ***Christianity’s response: three counterclaims***

So might Marion’s phenomenological reduction save the gift from its Derridean torments and provide philosophical validation for Christianity’s avowedly theological claims? I shall contend that theology uncovers flaws that severely undermine such hopes, through three related counterclaims.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>87</sup> John D. Caputo ‘Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion’, in Caputo and Scanlon, 185-222; here, 186.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 215.

First, Marion's insistence on what Caputo dubs the 'partial blackout'<sup>91</sup> achieved through bracketing giver and/or receiver, raises immediate theological difficulties. The gospels persistently record explicit, uninhibited, joy-provoking giver-gift-receiver structures as Christ teaches, physically heals, exorcises, grants forgiveness, bestows new identity and raises from the dead. Even in healing the centurion's servant remotely, Christ's miracle is predicated upon face-to-face encounter which astounds (Mt. 8:5-13). Similarly, whilst the 'kenotic' widow appears bracketed through her ostensibly anonymised offering she is observed and applauded by Jesus (Mk. 12:41-44).<sup>92</sup> Most strikingly, Christ's quasi-sacramental, superabundant feeding of the multitudes and his foot-washing and eucharistic self-donation at the Last Supper become inconceivable if either giver or receiver is removed. Indeed, the Eucharist, as both gift and sacrifice, depict both God and the assembly having roles of both giver and receiver:

Lord,  
accept our sacrifice  
as a holy exchange of gifts.  
By offering what you have given us  
may we receive the gift of yourself.<sup>93</sup>

Eucharistic prayers reinforce this complex interaction: sacramental/sacrificial elements are presented to the Father, transubstantiated under the Spirit's overshadowing and then, as Christ's body and blood, offered in the memorial prayer, to be subsequently received thankfully as food. More widely, Judaism maintains that humanity's reconciliation to God is fulfilled through sacrifice, embodying *conscious* giver-gift-givee relationality that expresses *desire* for communion,<sup>94</sup> an unbracketed giving-and-receiving that Christianity finds *fulfilled*

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>92</sup> One might argue, further, that her offering expects some return through maintaining sacrificial gift-exchange from which she benefits.

<sup>93</sup> Prayer over the Gifts for the Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time. *The Sunday Missal: The Order of Mass for Sundays* (London: Collins, 2006), 440.

<sup>94</sup> See Matthew Levering, *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

in Christ. To parenthesise any party would diminish and dismantle the sacrificial edifice: blackout causes washout.

Secondly, Christ's historical and sacramental actions become unimaginable when Marion insists that his reduction to givenness is best served when the gift is 'no-thing'. Unease with donation's physicality seems embedded within the saturated phenomenon for its subject-constituting luminosity somehow transcends materiality. Indeed, in bypassing Husserlian objectness he treats a saturated phenomenon such as a painting as merely "an instance of radiance, an excess of givenness which the painting merely instances, or provides a site for."<sup>95</sup> Thus the painting's human observers stand before – and are constituted by – an excessive gaze within radically dematerialised space where the gift so resists physical confinement that it persists as 'no-thing'. However, whilst the painting is deemed to give *beyond* or even *despite* its materiality, the viewer remains entirely physical and therefore presumably has to transpose the intangible gift back into corporeality via some 'counter-reduction'.

Marion's trepidations concerning materiality influence his sacramental theology, rejecting devotional practices which might be deemed idolatrously to confine Christ. As saturated phenomenon, the Eucharist constitutes "the absolute gift" whose dazzling perfection constitutes us<sup>96</sup>, a scintillating revelation that does not so much appear *in* the present but rather *defines* the present, set between the historical revelatory Christ-event and the eschatological future which bestows an as yet unrealisable identity.<sup>97</sup> Yet Christ's sacramental advent entails more than remote, transformative splendour but also his shocking, salvific arrival in adorable flesh. As Graham Ward observes, Marion alters objects into signs and invests signs with spiritual significance, loftily transcending the physical, too slickly

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<sup>95</sup> Andrew Rawnsley, 'Practice and Givenness: The Problem of 'Reduction' in the work of Jean-Luc Marion' in *New Blackfriars*, 88.1018(2007), 703.

<sup>96</sup> *God without Being*, 174.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 172



shifting “from the concrete, the *réelle*, into the metaphoric, where objects continually lose their specificity” and causing the word ‘body’, in its threefold eucharistic connotation, to “[dissolve] .... [become] metaphorical, .... [become] iconic.”<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, the closeness of believers’ encounter with Christ make Marion’s apprehensive aloofness seem unreal: whilst distance/difference from God is humanly unbridgeable, God willingly spans sin’s unholy, unintended divide through the *enfleshed* Christ so that *in him* an intimacy squandered through Adam’s primal gift-rejection can be restored. Insisting on iconic, disembodied (and disembodifying) purity presents a gift “*only* of the subjective other, *only* of distance and not of the transference and content-filled ‘in between’ which alone makes that distance.... to be given *only* what is held at a distance is to be given ... nothing.”<sup>99</sup>

Though Christ’s non-objectifiable gifts in teaching, healing and liberating might be deemed exceptional instances of ‘no-thing’ their *full extent* is always enfleshed: truly receiving Christ’s words yields not only astonishment (Mt. 7:28) but *action* through intensified ethics (7:24); Christ’s healing renews afflicted bodies, reanimating them by and for love; acquiring a new, unwilled, undeserved name anticipates specific embodied behaviour (e.g. Mt. 16:18; cf. Jn. 1:42, 21:17-18).

These examples announce my third counterclaim, namely that receiving Christ’s enfleshed gift involves enfleshed response. Evidently, such return-gifts cannot ever represent crude like-for-like reciprocation: we have no capacity to give as Christ gives and there is no lack in him that requires such giving. Yet through (re-)offering my entire life, in its renewed, inescapably bodily, form “as a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1) – a return-gift is not only possible but demanded. The gift exceeds the immediate change effected but presents *ongoing consequences*:

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<sup>98</sup> Ward, ‘Theological project’, 233.

<sup>99</sup> Milbank, ‘Can a gift be given?’, 133.

Lazarus “comes out” from the tomb instantaneously (Jn. 11:42-3) but then receives his subsequent life as perpetual, miraculous gift for further embodied exchanges (12:2). So Christ’s gift is real, intimate, enacted, corporeal – and even reciprocal – leaving recipients not merely bedazzled – as *l’adonée, l’interloqué* might be – but gifted to become *channels* for the gift’s enduring transmission: being forgiven entails ongoing forgiveness (Mt. 6:14-15), being loved by Jesus generates love (Jn. 13:34). Embodied, non-bracketed giving-and-receiving thus multiplies gift-bestowal without becoming ensnared in corrosively self-regarding, trade-like economies. Indeed, from Christ’s conception, humanity is embraced within immaculate Mary’s ready, representative assent (Lk. 1:38), signalling sin’s cancellation, creation’s restoration and the possibility that human beings might participate again in love’s wonderful exchange.<sup>100</sup> This ‘pre-gift’ of receptivity is itself gift: both *from* God – in Mary being granted unprecedented freedom from Adam’s all-pervading gift-rejection – and *to* God – as she willingly offers her body as Christ’s shrine, manifesting divinely-intended responsiveness, returning love for love.

Marion himself regards the incarnation as the Son “[playing] humanly the Trinitarian game of love”, his sacramental body “[incarnating] the Trinitarian oblation.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, Christ’s gift-giving cannot merely epiphanise an iconic, matter-transcending *one-way* phenomenon, but is, rather the trinitarian (and thereby *reciprocal*) gift-of-self mediated through historic and sacramental enfleshment, offering its recipients participation in that life. Thus, gospel depictions of Christ’s self-giving suggest always-prior giving-and-receiving, or, as Thomas Aquinas states crisply, the Son’s economic mission is the incarnate translation of his eternal procession from the Father.<sup>102</sup> For Marion to propose that God, characterised inwardly by eternal *mutual* self-donation, gives outwardly with overwhelming intensity that inhibits response seems theologically inconsistent.

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>101</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 177-8

<sup>102</sup> See chapter two.

## Love's spiralling: John Milbank on gift-exchange

Developing these three counterclaims to Marion's models, I now survey John Milbank's crucial philosophical theology of the gift, in order to extract three theological gift principles, each related to reciprocity, that subsequent chapters will confirm according to scripture and tradition. In essence, I will argue that God's gift to humankind, rooted in trinitarian gift-exchange, revealed in Christ and given in the Spirit, seeks response, requiring reception, perpetuation and transmission that subvert all notions of sacrifice as self-consuming one-way gift, locating all giving within the ever-greater divine response of resurrection which is itself rooted in eternal trinitarian giving-and-receiving.

### ***God's gift: radically unreturnable, asymmetrically reciprocal***

First, I wish to establish that God's gift, unique and superabundant, is radically unreturnable whilst simultaneously evoking asymmetric reciprocity of an entirely different order, through the giving-of-self. The inherently reflexive gift resists enthroning absolute, potentially self-annihilating, responsibility to the other (as in Lévinas) as rationale for all human intersubjectivity. Such one-sided self-expenditure might unconsciously endorse inverted, self-aggrandising ethicism and erode genuine intra-human charity: unashamedly reciprocal and inextricably directed towards a mysterious, transcendent good.<sup>103</sup> For Milbank, charity withstands even death's limitations, representing "proleptic participation in the *eschaton*."<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, it also undergirds solidly political aspects, heralding a

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<sup>103</sup> John Milbank, 'The Soul of Reciprocity Part One: Reciprocity Refused' *Modern Theology*, 17.3(2001), 342-44.

<sup>104</sup> John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Norwich: SCM Press, 2009), 200. Milbank notes a significant decline in celebratory charitable exchanges in the Calvinist Reformation, mirroring the Reformation's theologically-driven emphasis upon the univocal gift of grace and the similarly univocal love of God (which even the non-elect were bidden to give). See *ibid.*, 205, 361. "Only love can desire that there *should be* unlimited association in the true sense: a society of unlimited reciprocation, a society of friends." (*Ibid.*, 363).

*polis* both inescapably monarchic, with Christ as uncontested head, and simultaneously democratic, in radical inclusivity and kingly resolve to act only through his body, *ecclesia*.<sup>105</sup> The church should thus aspire towards responsive kenotic living, embodying the infinite-finite asymmetrical exchange re-inaugurated in the Incarnation as God deigns to receive human praise, as well as bestowing unmerited gifts.<sup>106</sup> Such gifts are returnable only insofar as the church's renewed existence embodies the divine charity it has already – and ever will – receive. God's gift is therefore *both* unreturnable *and* reciprocal but on distinct degrees of causality:<sup>107</sup> gift-exchange is thus neither “a straight line”, nor “a closed circle”, but “a spiral or a strange loop.”<sup>108</sup>

Milbank argues that true intersubjectivity cannot occur through Cartesian elevation of thinking as the new, independent ‘ontology of selfhood’ for this both denies any common absolute good and precludes reciprocity.<sup>109</sup> Instead, it is the soul, regarded by both Aristotle and Aquinas as the meta-form and principle of human motion, which directs the human person outwards from the point of deepest interiority.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, rather than exalting self-possession somehow *independent* of gift, the Gospels, in affirming the need to lose life in order to gain life, claim that there is *no* self prior to gift, exposing ostensibly sacrificial one-way gifts as deeply unreciprocal gifts-to-self.<sup>111</sup> Apparently disinterested love of God, unconcerned with one's own salvific end, depersonalises God into unbearable abstraction, disdaining the human-divine ontological divide and eroding divine lovability.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Reciprocity Part One’. 355ff.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 336

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 370-1.

Whilst Kant relegated love to raw moral duty and deemed beauty a brute, uninspiring given, Milbank regards the sublime and beautiful as the frame for reason and understanding, in necessarily two-way correspondence.<sup>113</sup> Creation *ex nihilo* is the primordial gift, rich and replete, infused with the prospect of humankind's *response* to God.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, the appearance of creation's very principle in human flesh instigates the possibility that sacraments could represent the incarnation's non-idolatrous prolongation, transmitting grace and constituting participants inasmuch as they are gifted in and through decreed liturgical corporeality.

Prior to Duns Scotus' fatal reconceiving of being as indifferent, whether ascribed to finite or infinite beings, divine-human exchange was considered genuinely reciprocal, resembling not Derrida's outlawed circle of gift-annulling trade but a spiral of innate *asymmetry*, marking a proper divide between creator (inherent giver) and creature (inherent recipient).<sup>115</sup> Only thus is preserved the cherished bond between temporal human love – expressed in relationship and liturgy – and eternity's supremely loving trinitarian exchange.<sup>116</sup> Ultimately, the relation of souls depends upon God's inner, inherent, loving relationality, making true donation “not merely the empty gift of one-way sacrifice, but rather the gift of reciprocity .... [disclosing] .... transcendent otherness that is itself personal exchange: eternal spiralling, not an eternal and impersonal unity.”<sup>117</sup> As David Bentley Hart affirms:

truly, only when a giver desires a return, and in some senses desires back the gift itself, can a gift be given as something other than sheer debt; only the liberating gesture of a gift given out of desire is one that cannot

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 378

<sup>114</sup> Milbank, ‘Can a gift be given?’, 134

<sup>115</sup> John Milbank, ‘The Soul of Reciprocity Part Two: Reciprocity Granted’, *Modern Theology*, 17:4(2001), 486.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 486

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 505.

morally coerce another, and so can reveal the prior, aneconomic rationality of giving that escapes every calculation.<sup>118</sup>

### ***Boundless trinitarian giving***

The second gift-principle that I discern in Milbank is that the gift is grounded in blissful trinitarian exchange which gives substance to human beings' experience of forgiveness and redemption, participating again in love's to-and-fro. Within such 'trinitarian' Christian giving, the giver, far from being disinterested to the point of self-annihilating destruction, has *desire* as his necessary constituent motive: "it is a love always of recognition and delight, desiring all and giving all at once, giving to receive and receiving to give, generous not in thoughtlessly squandering itself, but in truly wanting the other."<sup>119</sup> Moreover, for Milbank, the incarnation makes sense only against the Trinity's ever-prior perfect gift-exchange, whilst also making possible both human-human and human-divine reconciliation. He follows Augustine in denying evil any positive, substantive reality, regarding it as privation of being, an immensely negative lack,<sup>120</sup> "radically without cause ... not even self-caused, but ... rather the (impossible) refusal of cause."<sup>121</sup> Adam's fall is less conscious, willed rebellion than a shift to the *illusion* that there is an alternative to our divinely-appointed end, namely participation in the infinite.<sup>122</sup> Consequently, grace's miracle involves restoring human desire for God, despite Adam's woefully clouded vision and inhibited God-bearing appetite.<sup>123</sup> Unlike Scotus, who understood forgiveness negatively, untethered from Christ's incarnate liberative practice, Milbank favours Aquinas's positive *gift* (as implied in *par-donner*, *ver-geben*, *for-give-ness*). Furthermore, he

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<sup>118</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: the Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 264-5.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>120</sup> John Milbank, *Being reconciled: ontology and pardon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 6ff.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. See, further, chapter three.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 8f.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 9f. See, further, chapter seven.

regards Christ as “sovereign victim” who, uniquely, undergoes hurt and suffering with active receptivity that renders such extraordinary acceptance as gift itself.<sup>124</sup>

Forgiveness is therefore participation in the ecstatic overflow of God’s eternal inner self-giving, whilst redemption – viewed as the hyperbolic consummation of our God-given, God-imaging humanity – is less about God forgiving us than our being granted the capacity to for-give, thereby (re-)discovering the reflection of God’s eternal self-giving in us.<sup>125</sup> Although God could forgive without the Incarnation – for *he* is always reconciled to *us* (Aquinas) – it is, nevertheless, through God’s enfleshed life that forgiveness is *mediated* to us, initiating us into the process of deification that is salvation’s essence.<sup>126</sup> We learn to forgive as a consequence of Christ’s perfect, ever-prior forgiveness and so are drawn towards charity’s perfect eschatological fulfilment in union with God, through the Holy Spirit, “the bond of exchange and mutual giving within the Trinity.”<sup>127</sup> Humanity not only *receives* God’s forgiveness but also *gives* forgivingly, transmitting God’s transforming gift onward towards creation’s entire reconciliation. Moreover, eucharistic liturgy announces the sacramental incursion of ‘eschatological imagination’, reconstituting time insofar as it signifies sharing in God’s life: “rather than past and present being linked ‘horizontally’ across historical time, past, present and future are linked ‘vertically’ by participation in the eternal ‘liturgy’ of the Trinity.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 61

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 66

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

<sup>128</sup> William Cavanaugh, ‘Eucharistic Sacrifice and Social Imagination in Early Modern Europe’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31(2001), 599.

### ***Sacrifice subverted***

The final gift-principle gleaned from Milbank's *oeuvre* is that such a trinitarian gift-ontology overthrows notions of sacrifice as purely altruistic one-way gift, repositioning all self-offering against the ultimate, radically unearnable, hope of resurrection-deification and inaugurating an ethic of charitable, eucharistic mutuality. Whilst driven to self-giving's death-crowned extremities, Christ's sacrifice does not fulfil Derrida's pure, aneconomic, amnesic gift for this seemingly marginal event evokes the divine response of resurrection, endowing this particular death with unique power to engender reconciliation centuries later, a 'hyper-event' which generates immense, lasting response in thanksgiving and discipleship.<sup>129</sup> In radical, corporeal self-offering, Jesus redefines donation and becomes himself "the very heart of all transition as really loving gift", rejecting all violent retaliation in "absolute kenotic impotence" and allowing his entire paschal experience to constitute genuine gift-exchange.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, through the Spirit's in-spiration, humanity recognises the trinitarian watermark of Calvary's deathly exchange and is enabled to render God an otherwise inconceivable return-gift within charity's embodied, endlessly improvised, uninhibited circulation, being thereby raised towards participation in divine, ecstatically reciprocal, life.<sup>131</sup>

Sacrifice is thus subverted: requiring no extrinsic victim, God goes on giving, despite blatant rejection, revealing amid dereliction's depths the very threshold of humanity's incorporation into trinitarian gift exchange. At Calvary, human refusal and divine extravagance intersect salvifically, as God overwhelms and transcends human obduracy with incomparable, superexcessive self-giving:

Only God himself can receive this refusal, which he does, on the cross, so manifesting the refusal, as, after all, the reception of a gift. Here, however,

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<sup>129</sup> Milbank, *Being reconciled*, 95

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-101.



infinite return is realized as perfect return, God's return of himself to himself, and it is disclosed to us that the divine created gift, which realizes an inexorable return, is itself grounded in an intra-divine love which is relation and exchange as much as it is gift.<sup>132</sup>

Christ's submission to death's violent clutches mirrors heaven's perfectly peaceful self-giving, offering to "a death-dreaming cosmos ... that utter ecstatic self-giving which is eternal life itself."<sup>133</sup> What is seen within history is the deadly, bloody – and eventually glorious – outworking of the life-flows eternally hidden in God. Christ's *kenosis* happens, however, without loss to his own inner depths but "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14), that is, in the power of the mutual gift of Father and Son, the love-bond that is the Holy Spirit.<sup>134</sup> Through participation in divine life thus revealed, Christ's utterly self-emptying love finds non-identical replication as we learn, in obedience to Gospel imperatives, "to live ecstatically through exchange, losing our lives in order to gain them."<sup>135</sup>

However, the eventual focus is on teleological, beatific blessing, our full sharing in the joyous feast of the kingdom. Hence, contrary to the other-regarding, self-obliterating altruism demanded in the moral stringency of Lévinas, Derrida and others, Milbank argues powerfully that the ethical can subsist only where return-gift is not merely permitted but somehow expected amidst asymmetrical and non-identically repeated exchange.<sup>136</sup> Hence, far from enthroning death without hope of resurrective, eternal recompense as self-giving's definitive, nihilistic gesture, he maintains direct correspondence between eternal trinitarian relations of perfect mutuality and the possibility of genuine ecclesial community where – supremely

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<sup>132</sup> John Milbank, *The Word made Strange: theology, language, culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 135-6

<sup>133</sup> Milbank, *Being reconciled*, 100.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 101

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

in the Eucharist – the Church continually receives itself within a web of reciprocal, loving action.<sup>137</sup>

## **Being, eternity and mercy: Antonio López on the positivity and permanence of the gift**

Drawing on myriad sources, most particularly Claude Bruaire (1932-86)<sup>138</sup> and Luigi Giussani (1922-2005)<sup>139</sup>, López develops Milbank’s reciprocal gift within an avowedly *ontological* frame, arguing for the profoundest *unity* between observable beings’ wondrous, temporal existence and the Trinity’s perfect, eternal being. Thus, whilst upholding the fundamental creature-creator distinction, he denies any unbridgeable *divide*: the gift-as-experienced in humanity’s ‘ordinary’ existence is one with God’s timeless, ‘inner’ gift, an intense unity-in-difference that propels the desirous, reoriented human being towards its appointed ontological fulfilment.

### ***Originary experience***

López examines gift-being from the tangible “originary experience” of the “concrete singular”, as the mystery of birth in its biological, ontological, spiritual and theological dimensions heralds our divine, gratuitous origin through which we

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<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 157f. Milbank does acknowledge, however, the unresolvable biblical tension between the synoptics’ apparently univocal ‘external’ giving (e.g. Lk. 6:32-5) and the Johannine community’s seemingly ‘internal’ mutual love, in imitation of Jesus’s own ‘externalised’ sacrificial love which reflects the ‘inner’ love of Father and Son. See also John Milbank, ‘The Gift and the Mirror: on the Philosophy of Love’ in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, edited by Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 312.

<sup>138</sup> Primarily in his *Spirit’s Gift: the metaphysical insight of Claude Bruaire* (hereafter, *SG*) (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

<sup>139</sup> In López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (hereafter, *GUB*) (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013). Unless noted otherwise, quotations belong to López.

receive our very selves.<sup>140</sup> More than mere product of parental procreation, the newborn represents another purposeful *being-of-spirit*:<sup>141</sup> “born into a communion that precedes [her]”, she is called to discern that her “‘to-be’ owes itself most deeply to another”, participating corporeally in God’s intrinsic, trinitarian, unifying gift-ness.<sup>142</sup> Eternity represents “the permanence of the gift proper to God” which guarantees the permanence of the developing concrete singular,<sup>143</sup> persisting in being through God’s constant, gratuitous, miraculous self-donation.<sup>144</sup> Christ “discloses that eternity is the Triune God”<sup>145</sup> and expands his own eternal filiation to embrace human beings who desire fullness of being.<sup>146</sup> Consequently, they bear the memory of being both *from* and *for* another and radiate beautifully the truth and goodness of being, both recapitulating and transcending the cosmos through their God-given capacity for the infinite.<sup>147</sup>

Mature humanity understands its existence as derived from an inexhaustible plenitude<sup>148</sup>, affirming God as creation’s *telos* and being not as a mere theoretical concept but as a living, non-fabricable presence, addressing it from beyond and instilling the memory of a shared creaturely origin which establishes communion.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, such finite being-gift is an intelligible revelatory sign, both dependent upon and disclosing “the presence of the transcendent [touching] the flesh”<sup>150</sup>, that endlessly generative source-mystery which constitutes the concrete singular’s very *telos*.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> *GUB*, 1-2.

<sup>141</sup> *SG*, 108-111.

<sup>142</sup> *GUB*, 3.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>145</sup> López, ‘Restoration of Sonship: Reflections on Time and Eternity’, in *Communio*, 32:4(2005):690.

<sup>146</sup> *SG*, 27.

<sup>147</sup> *GUB*, 12.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-4.

<sup>150</sup> Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [cited in *GUB*, 26]

<sup>151</sup> *GUB* 26.

God's perpetual Fatherhood represents humanity's constituting reality – its 'given' – bestowing in and beyond birth his astonishing gift-of-being.<sup>152</sup> Without such spirit-consciousness, humanity is denuded, mesmerised by materialistic, technocratic illusions of automous, giftless sovereignty<sup>153</sup> that obliterates all memory of birth.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, the home nurtures gift consciousness, establishing communion through the parents' asymmetrically reciprocal difference-in-unity which expresses anthropologically the (ultimately trinitarian) gift in generating a third person, called to realise his own profound giftedness, in trustful, fruitful reliance upon the Father-source.<sup>155</sup> Humanity seeks a plenitudinous totality through awareness of its disclosive finite being, reconfiguring time according to its longing for unity in communion with the divine source.<sup>156</sup>

### ***The positivity of being***

Human existence is thereby galvanised through that desirous "active search for the unlimited being."<sup>157</sup> Whereas Derrida allows being to dissolve amid the radical, nihilistic 'non-gift' of time and rejects alignment of being (*ousia*) with the unifying presence (*parousia*) of God, López affirms being's joyous *positivity*, heralded in birth and realised in one's divine end. God's positive donation in fashioning, sustaining and completing beings shows divine fullness transforming human poverty.<sup>158</sup> Indeed Christ's *excessive* giving reveals God "[giving] himself to himself and to the human being"<sup>159</sup>, flooding creaturely deficiency through a gift-of-self eternally established within the "complete diffusion of the divine

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<sup>152</sup> *SG* 89-90.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-94.

<sup>154</sup> *GUB*, 26-9.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-50.

<sup>157</sup> *SG*, 19.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

being in the eternal Son.”<sup>160</sup> Summoned into being *ex nihilo*, creatures receive their singular being from God’s unchangeable, undepletable gratuity and are called to respond freely to their divine source.<sup>161</sup> Recognising such overwhelmingly positive ‘being-gift’, the human spirit expands to desire its eternal origin as its final destination.<sup>162</sup> Such self-communicating goodness reveals God’s ‘externalised’ love as rooted in his own inter-personal trinitarian love and prevents the gift from being merely some arbitrary transactional exchange.<sup>163</sup> Relating his ontological theory of gift-being as love to Balthasar’s dramatic trinitarian theology, López concludes that “the essence of being is love .... Divine love is an ever-new gift of himself to himself (*Hingabe*) and an undeserved gift of himself to us (Eph. 2:4; Rom. 8:32). God is an *event* of love.”<sup>164</sup>

Moreover, love is both oblation (*agape*) and desirous (*eros*). *Eros*, aroused by another’s beauty and yearning for spiritual oneness therewith, understands perfection to lie beyond oneself, ultimately desiring God alone.<sup>165</sup> However, *eros*’s ‘upward’ longing for self-reception is properly balanced by *agape*’s ‘downward’ sacrificial self-giving.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, such *eros-agape* might collapse unless fruitful in communion (*koinonia*), a third term which intimates the gift’s trinitarian ground.<sup>167</sup> Whilst Christian theologians have generally followed Origen in regarding *eros-agape* in directional analogical-katalogical terms, Dionysius the Areopagite speaks of trinitarian *ek-stasis*, that non-depletory standing-beyond-self that perfects creaturely *koinonia* whilst maintaining

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<sup>160</sup> Bruaire, “Profession de foi” [cited in *SG* 62]

<sup>161</sup> *GUB*, 60-1.

<sup>162</sup> *SG*, 112-13.

<sup>163</sup> *GUB*, 64.

<sup>164</sup> López, ‘Eternal happening: God as an event of love’, *Communio* 32(2005): 214. See also my account of Balthasar’s trinitarianism in chapter two.

<sup>165</sup> *GUB*, 66.

<sup>166</sup> *GUB*, 67.

<sup>167</sup> *GUB*, 68.

ontological difference.<sup>168</sup> Through willed self-diffusion, God, the necessary, ‘surpasses’ his plenitudinous life to bring-into-being and finalise-in-being the strictly *unnecessary*.

For a creature, existence (*that* she is) and essence (*what* she is) are distinct; yet God, whose essence and existence are identical, bestows genuine, fractional participation in the divine *esse*, aligning existence and essence in an asymmetric relationship to be perfected by grace.<sup>169</sup> Nevertheless, each concrete singular exists not through freestanding self-subsistence but perpetual *gift*, possessing bodily ‘solidity’ that is intrinsically ‘plastic’, perfected only in divine communion.<sup>170</sup> Creatures become themselves through gratitude to the one who forever creates *ex nihilo* and in self-donation to others.<sup>171</sup> “Given in order to give”, human beings are thus granted capacity both to receive themselves and give themselves, reciprocating God’s gift-of-being creaturewise.<sup>172</sup> Such freedom is ‘inhabited’ through being divinely (re-)oriented, discovering one’s gratuitous divine origin,<sup>173</sup> whilst desiring an equally undeserved end.<sup>174</sup> López thus proposes gift-being as radically unreturnable like-for-like, yet asymmetrically reciprocal in on-going kenotic living. ‘Vertical’ human response to the original giver involves ‘horizontal’ giving to other recipients, thereby elevating ‘ordinary’ gift-giving through connection to the divine source.<sup>175</sup> Conversely, non-recognition of giftedness means repudiating God’s enduring Fatherhood and forsaking his generous provision for thankless, memory-less, unreal self-

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<sup>168</sup> *GUB*, 69. My reading of the gift (particularly chapters 4-6) shows how Christ’s salvific work expresses God’s ek-static desire to communicate divine fullness amid human privation.

<sup>169</sup> *GUB*, 77-85.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-96.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>173</sup> *SG*, 20.

<sup>174</sup> *GUB*, 115.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

sufficiency (cf. Rom. 1:21), an “irruption of nothingness” that constitutes evil itself, usurping desire for final, ecstatic, gifted communion for the illusory void.<sup>176</sup>

### ***Merciful self-giving***

Such negativity betrays both originary experience and, more fundamentally, trinitarian self-disclosure. Set against Israel’s ambiguous gift-rapport, Christ confirms being’s magnificent, mysterious positivity, disclosing humanity and divinity mutually indwelling, thereby “[accustoming] man to receive God, and God to dwell in man.”<sup>177</sup> Christ’s filiated, anointed humanity both *receives* divinity perfectly and *transmits* it, in appointed measure, to other desirous human creatures, as transformative “sacrament of the Father’s love.”<sup>178</sup> With human and divine self-awareness co-existing perfectly<sup>179</sup>, Jesus exalts the Father as his bountiful ‘centre’, receiving everything from him and giving everything in loving return, opening through the unifying Spirit, “the space for a finite other to be.”<sup>180</sup> Jesus is thus not simply ‘in’ the Father but ‘for’ the Father through unstinting availability, bestowing salvific consequences for humankind.<sup>181</sup> Unshielded from anguish, he corrects humanity’s gift-denial, outpouring from divine superabundant depths and affirming being’s lavish positivity through transforming others.<sup>182</sup> Beneficiaries of his kenotic love enjoy unprecedented communion, learning that being means being-for-the-other, a radical “*pro-existence*” stemming from Christ’s *pre-existent* filial procession.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>177</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.20.2, quoted in *GUB*, 149.

<sup>178</sup> *GUB*, 151.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 166, echoing Bulgakov.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-4.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-6.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-2.

In Christ, the concrete universal, God bridges the abyss between himself and the concrete singular through unprecedented hypostatic union which embodies the analogy of being, thus recapitulating creation and allowing finite being to attain its *telos*.<sup>184</sup> Disclosing being and love intersecting perfectly (1 Jn. 4:8), he demonstrates this love through crucified self-donation (4:10), inviting participation therein through mutual human-divine indwelling (4:16), thus perfecting the *imago Dei*.<sup>185</sup> Unlike Marion's contradistinction, López aligns being and love, for love is "the very form of being."<sup>186</sup> Through dynamic human-divine union, Christ's temporal mission stems from his eternal procession, instigating a nuptial mystery (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 21:9-10) of unrestrained self-giving to enrich unimaginably the receptive (Marian) Church of which he is head (Col. 1:18).<sup>187</sup>

As "unprecedented giver" and unbegotten "absolute person" from whom all divinity flows, the Father fulfils himself as life's source through letting another be, showing 'spirit' (Jn. 4:24) to mean "being-for and being-open-to another".<sup>188</sup> Such *absolute* spirit, eternally manifest in uttering the Word, constitutes the origin from which finite spirit derives and towards which it aspires, according humanity the astounding privilege of "being spiritual without being God."<sup>189</sup> In begetting, the Father manifests love supremely (Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 10:17), a being-for-another superexceeding human generative self-donation, for his self-gift forever 'contains' another and envelopes even crucifying self-offering within inherent positivity.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, it is "the Son [who] perfects (*consummat*) the Father"<sup>191</sup>, for only through perfect filial reception and response can the Father 'be', in the Holy Spirit of unity-in-distinction. This mysterious, mutual, ek-static self-donation and self-

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-4.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7; 158-159.

<sup>186</sup> *SG*, 228

<sup>187</sup> *GUB*, 162-4.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>189</sup> Bruaire, 'L'être de l'esprit et l'Esprit Saint', cited in *SG* 86.

<sup>190</sup> *GUB*, 199-200.

<sup>191</sup> St. Hilary, *De Trinitate* 7.31, cited in *GUB*, 212.



reception (*perichoresis*) constitutes the divine hypostases, revealing God's being-love (*eros-agape*) as *koinonia* which "lets the other *be in* oneself and lets oneself *be in* the other."<sup>192</sup> Creation thus becomes possible, moreover, allowing human fulfilment through participating adoptively in Christ's own sonship and filial Spirit.<sup>193</sup>

As person-gift, the Holy Spirit represents God's eternal 'internal' "second difference"<sup>194</sup>, manifested 'externally' in enlivening Jesus's entire incarnate existence and through liberal Pentecostal outpouring.<sup>195</sup> The outpoured Spirit renders the ascended Christ forever present, conveying his redemptive gift (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13), whilst exposing gift-denying falsehood (16:8-11). As both "love" (1 Jn. 4:7-16) and "gift" (Jn. 4:7-14), the Spirit animates eternal mutual indwelling (Jn. 17:21) and temporal bestowal (Rom. 5:5), an 'inward' and 'outward' ek-stasis that discloses divine *perichoresis* as unceasingly 'hospitable' and boundlessly fertile.<sup>196</sup> To be a 'person' involves maximal possession of being; thus the Spirit who perfects trinitarian personhood also allows human beings to become persons, attaining the apex of being *qua* creatures.<sup>197</sup> As the 'excess' of eternal self-giving, the Spirit represents God's delightful, ek-static fecundity<sup>198</sup>, instigating memory of God's 'past' fruitfulness and nurturing trust in abiding 'future' donation, thereby "[revealing] that there is absolute being (*summa caritas*) rather than nothing because God's gift *is his eternal, ever-fruitful beginning*."<sup>199</sup> Christ and the Spirit reveal creation's ultimate truth as communion and human freedom as adherence to being unveiled through divine gratuity,

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<sup>192</sup> GUB, 223; italics original.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>194</sup> Milbank's term; see his 'The Second Difference: For a trinitarianism without reserve', *Modern theology* 2:3(1986), 213-234. In Bruaire's self-styled 'ontodonology', the Father's hypostasis is characterised by donation, the Son's by reception of all that he is in reciprocal gratitude (*reddere*) and the Spirit's as confirmation of the mutual gift of Father and Son. See López, *Restoration*, 693 and SG, chapter 7.

<sup>195</sup> GUB, 228-31.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 236. See, further, my discussion of Augustine's pneumatology in chapter six.

<sup>197</sup> GUB, 237.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-245.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 247; italics original.

enabling creatures' self-realization through unenviously celebrating each other and engendering a grateful, prayerful, shared availability.<sup>200</sup>

Humanity thus awaits renewal so that its gift-rejecting past may find an ultimate 'future' as temporal being participates in eternity, that perfect, simple, trinitarian self-donation 'exteriorised' in the economy.<sup>201</sup> Both *surprising*, in overwhelming gratuity, and *necessary* for creatures' completion, human transformation depends upon divine *mercy*, that "victory over the spirit's death, over man's denial"<sup>202</sup> which surpasses merely pardoning misdemeanour but is, rather, that "gratuitous and powerful 'for-giveness' that restores the broken relation with the eternal."<sup>203</sup> Spanning the mystery in which everything is originated, sustained and completed, mercy is profoundly apophatic, yet unveiled in Christ.<sup>204</sup> Fulfilling the finite gift, it allows "definitive and gratuitous participation in the eternity of being"<sup>205</sup>, thus reawakening Adam's illusion-enchanted race to permanence through restoring capacity to receive and to give transparently.

Mercy overcomes ignorant ingratitude through the Father's zealous, jealous love which delights in unity with his beloved creatures, chastising only to restore freedom and giving superabundantly, transcending the suffering negativity of Christ's crucifying rejection with fruitful, resurrective positivity.<sup>206</sup> Christ's unequivocal "yes" (2 Cor. 1:18-19) transforms humankind's "no", establishing the Church to convey this mercy corporeally and revealing the gift's breathtaking novelty through inaugurating the *new* creation, exhibited and communicated in

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-258.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>202</sup> Giussani, *La libertà di Dio*, cited in *GUB* 261.

<sup>203</sup> López, *Restoration*, 702.

<sup>204</sup> *GUB*, 261-2.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-6.

Calvary's self-giving, which perfects the original ontological donation through Christ's transformed – and *transforming* – humanity.<sup>207</sup>

As mercy means ultimately “the *embrace of the other*”<sup>208</sup> the human being perceives itself wholly (re-)enfolded in divine hospitality and called to affirm “what is true, just, good and beautiful in the other's being.”<sup>209</sup> Rescued from ungrateful introspection through beholding the Father's loving, transformative gaze, he recognises the horror of giftlessness and becomes a father-like reconciler as his purified desires generate prayerful reciprocation.<sup>210</sup> Foretasting eternity, he discerns his past to be redeemed through mercy's plenitude and his future shaped not by anxious acquisitiveness but “the unexpected arrival of the faithful giver”, thus rediscovering in the present eternity's inexhaustible beauty.<sup>211</sup> Time therefore signifies the passage into life eternal, that transparent participation *qua* creatures in the perfect trinitarian gift-of-self.

## Conclusion

The glorious, mysterious, positive and merciful gift thus characterises being itself and invites humanity's profoundest participation through gratitude for being given and anticipation for fullness awaited, practising in the here-and-now the gift's charitable, embodied reciprocity. In resonant harmony, Milbank and López thus extricate the gift from Derrida's impossible constraints by asserting that the axioms demanded – of non-appearance, instantaneous amnesia and lack of acknowledgement or return – become inverted to acknowledge a radically ‘new’ paradigm, of purified gift-exchange in mutual, erotic-agapic love. In Jesus Christ, the love of God *has* appeared in its glorious, ek-static positivity and has been

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 287-8.

<sup>208</sup> Giussani, ‘*La Dives in misericordia*’, cited in *GUB*, 293; italics are López's.

<sup>209</sup> *GUB*, 294.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 295-7.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

received, remembered, celebrated and returned in lives consecrated, sometimes to martyrdom, though always within the gracious hope of eternal, undeserved, superabundant return in filial beatitude. Embodied human consciousness of being-given from conception/birth contains the temporal memory of giftedness, which, through Christ and the Spirit, is recast as the ‘original’ trinitarian superabundant giving that is eternity itself, a ‘remembrance’ which, through proper desire, becomes the electrifying dynamism that spurs us onwards into our divine end.

Only theology can therefore overcome the aporiae starkly evident in purely philosophical readings of the gift. Even Marion’s desire to found theology upon gift, rather than being, proves, at last, inadequate for even the most brilliant saturated phenomena represent hollow, joyless donations. The donee remains just that, drenched in an intensity that cannot be transmitted or returned, thus inhibiting a ‘horizontal’ ethical response and prohibiting the ‘vertical’ possibility of genuine communion with God, an intimacy which is not merely unlimited one-way receptivity but a reflexive giving-of-self, which, paradoxically, generates the perpetual receiving-of-self. Being, as both Milbank and López demonstrate, means being-for, a ‘pro-existence’ that is immeasurably rich, not simply in self-giving but self-*receiving*. At its profoundest, ontological level, the gift is reciprocal.

By rooting the true nature of gift within neither Derrida’s impossible asymptotic longings nor Marion’s promising, but finally unsustainable, phenomenological horizon, Milbank and López robustly align the gift with biblical, patristic and Thomist teaching. Regarding salvation as a full sharing in the ek-static, self-giving love of Father and Son in the Holy Spirit, God’s inner life and its concrete, economic ‘exegesis’ form the basis of our understanding of what gift is. God’s eternal perichoretic exchange overflows in Jesus Christ, expressed climactically in Calvary’s radical kenosis and the consequent response of unprecedented life-giving power in the resurrection. It is, therefore, the timeless mutual interaction of

Father and Son in the Spirit that defines gift, including, for us, being itself, received from the Trinity as gracious, extraordinarily positive, gift and perfected only in our divine *telos*. Indeed, Derridean fears that the gift become implicated in a self-destructive circle – which, in human terms, would degenerate into *giftless* commerce in manipulable *things* – disintegrate before trinitarian self-giving, for in such total, ek-static ‘selflessness’ – that disappropriation through which the ‘self’ is eternally given – the gift-circle persists eternally. In its economic outworking, the gift-circle unfolds into a spiral in which Christ’s incarnate self-giving may trigger woeful reactions of cold indifference or violent rejection but equally may inspire glorious, receptive responses in lives lovingly rededicated, a counter-gift which is no *quid pro quo* return but a wholehearted, thankful, asymmetric offering-of-*self* which embodies the trinitarian ‘trace’ imprinted from conception.

We return, therefore, to a pattern of gift-exchange which bears some resemblance to Mauss’s system: purified of all agonistic desire for self-promotion and subverting sacrifice from within, the enfleshed outworking of divine life nevertheless defines the *ecclesia*, looking both to this-worldly ethical engagement consistent with the call of reciprocal, relayed love and onwards towards completion within endless, ecstatic participation in God. In its anamnestic-anticipatory dual focus the Eucharist provides both the physical solidity of the gift in tangible, adorable, edible form and the iconic gaze from beyond that perpetually defines the Church, bestowing its identity in acts of trustful donation and receptivity. To respond unreservedly to this gracious gift is to receive eternal life in the ceaseless human-divine asymmetric reciprocation of mutual erotic-agapic love and to become a channel for this tremendously positive, intensely merciful, divine donation, cascading divine fullness into creaturely poverty: neither nothing nor no-thing, but everything.



## CHAPTER TWO

# The Trinitarian Gift

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### Introduction

Fears that the gift be contained – and thereby annihilated – within the *circle* of indebtedness and restitution haunt Derrida and Marion’s gift theories. Milbank, discerning a certain reciprocity in Christianity’s gift, regards the *spiral* as more apposite, suggesting that humanity’s response to God’s gift of existence, redemption and deification – themselves wholly unmerited and absolutely unreturnable – resides on a different plane, endlessly improvised through non-identical repetition within charity’s ongoing exchange. In this chapter I will argue that circle and spiral are not distinct, for the perfect circle of reciprocity forever pre-exists in God’s blissful inner donation-reception and humanity’s true end is to discover that divine-human mutuality restored by grace, experienced proleptically in charitable human relations. In short, the spiral participates in the circle.<sup>1</sup>

My reasoning draws primarily on the highly significant doctrine of God of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas is an excellent guide, for his comprehensive theology reveals reciprocal giving-and-receiving as both inherent to the triune life and derivatively imprinted within upon creation in its emergence from – *and return to* – God. Occurring on distinct ‘levels’, Aquinas’s use of the concept of participation allows the pure gift *both* to reside innately in God alone and to be given, in some appointed share, to creatures. Indeed, creation’s visible giving-and-receiving participates in trinitarian gift-exchange, heralding humanity’s ever-intensifying share in God’s own life, perfected in deification.

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, as subsequent chapters illustrate, having creation’s bedrock within transparent, delightful giving-and-receiving establishes gift-*denial* – that is, *sin* – as an unsettling prospect: a deadly maelstrom threatening creation’s flourishing and completion.

Thus, unlike Derrida, Aquinas associates the pure gift with the gift-as-observed in its final *actuality*, allowing reciprocity and materiality their place within donation's unfolding account.

I contend therefore that Aquinas's theology grants the gift its definitive 'architecture' that shapes all gift-giving. My argument proceeds according to five broad, clustered sections, essentially recasting his doctrine of God in categorical gift language.

Aquinas's seminal insight that God is self-subsisting being itself, enjoying all perfections pre-eminently and granting some specified, pre-determined share to creatures, provides my starting point. Hence, with respect to creation, God is intrinsically giver and creatures are inherently recipients.

Secondly: requiring no pre-existing matter and flowing from a single giver who grants participation in being to varying degrees, creation's gift structures have definite beginning, continuously sustaining creatures in being through divine donation. Creatures are granted some derivative creative role, becoming givers only insofar as they are already recipients. Creation's end entails return to God, allowing those who are intrinsically recipients to offer response through their gift-of-self. Here is creation's fullest gift-exchanging spiral as creatures receive, transmit and offer their being to God.

The third insight derived from Aquinas is that giving-and-receiving characterises God's own inner life. My interpretation of Aquinas's account of the processions of Son and Spirit demonstrates the giver-gift-receiver structure embedded in the trinitarian relations to be not some 'added extra' but entirely intrinsic. Such perfectly reciprocal trinitarian gift-exchange shows that Derrida's elusive aneconomic circle is thereby found in God alone: the true gift is gloriously theological.



Aquinas teaches that the visible and invisible temporal missions of Son and Spirit manifest the eternal trinitarian processions and transform the receptive creature. Hence, my fourth theme examines how God's invisible, replete giving-and-receiving is translated through divine missions into time and space. This notion is important for Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), whose daring soteriology forms a pillar of chapter five and so a brief account of his extension of Aquinas within explicit gift language is included here.

Finally, I observe that the gift's trinitarian locus is imprinted within creation for only in the Son and Spirit's respective processions does creation find its possibility: the spiral subsists in the circle. Moreover, Aquinas teaches that humanity's end is to enjoy mutual friendship with God, though tragically that reciprocity is hindered by sin's gift-denying allure: so rather than being drawn up more fully into the circle's loving exchange the spiralling gift-cycle may plummet, degenerating into a self-destructive vortex.

As subsequent chapters illustrate, this circle-spiral-vortex interplay provides the dramatic tension for the gift's resolution in the epic of redemption and deification.

## **God as being-itself: giving without receiving?**

Whereas Marion criticised so-called 'onto-theology' for constraining God within the allegedly idolatrous, humanly-fashioned category of 'being', Aquinas discerns no prior universalizing ontological canopy under which God 'resides'. Rather, God *is* simply *being-itself*, from whom all other creatures derive their being. Hence, God is strictly necessary whilst creation is intrinsically unnecessary. That God enjoys all perfections pre-eminently, whilst creatures possess a share, through participation, illustrates this abiding dependence. Participation thus describes creation in fitting separation from God, without imposing an

unbridgeable, gift-resistant gulf: creation is both *connected* to God (for otherwise it could not be) but also *separated* (possessing only a fraction of being). In short, God alone gives from inherent, inexhaustible plenitude, whereas creation can give only inasmuch as it has received.

### ***Being-in-motion and being-as-such***

To corroborate these claims from Aquinas's theology, I shall first observe how Aquinas distinguishes between being-in-motion and being-as-such. David Burrell perceives that Aquinas makes but two assertions about God: (i) nothing can be said of God except (ii) that to be God is to-be.<sup>2</sup> So whilst the assertion "God exists" makes a claim about God, the statement "to be God is to be to-be" does not.<sup>3</sup> Recognising God's revelation to Moses (Ex. 3:14) as pure *given*, Aquinas seeks, in his celebrated 'Five Ways',<sup>4</sup> less rational philosophical proof of God's existence than means for demonstrating the *intelligibility* of the question, excluding from God all that is inappropriate, such as compositeness, imperfection, limitedness and changeability.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Five Ways proclaim created things' radical dependence, showing them to be strictly *unnecessary*, inherently *gift-constituted* (for otherwise they would not be), *proceeding from* a replete *giver* (who is dependent upon nothing and thereby *necessary*) and *returning to* this giver, their true end. Aquinas's fivefold examination identifies the giver with God in each case: God is truly the ground of all being and all creatures are contingent and thereby gifted. Aquinas here diverges from Aristotle who sees little

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<sup>2</sup> David B. Burrell, C.S.C., *Aquinas: God and Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>4</sup> *ST*, Ia.2.3.

<sup>5</sup> Rudi A. te Velde, *Aquinas on God: the 'divine science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), 38. See also Burrell, *Aquinas*, 14ff.

distinction between a thing-as-it-actually-is and its being.<sup>6</sup> So rather than accepting Aristotle's assumption that there are certain uncaused 'natural necessities', Aquinas built on Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence to affirm a *necessary active cause*.<sup>7</sup> Hence, being is no mere *given* (characterised by substance) but conscious, gratuitous *gift*, "an *esse ad creatorum* (an existing in relation to the creator)." <sup>8</sup>

But are there 'levels' of being – and hence of gift? Aquinas's *prima via* introduces Aristotle's concept of act and potency: whilst fire is inherently (*actually*) hot, it can make wood, which is *potentially* hot, to become *actually* hot, through motion and change.<sup>9</sup> Defined by Aristotle as "the actualization of what potentially is, *qua* potentiality,"<sup>10</sup> motion entails transformation, whether spatial transportation or alteration effected by growth, learning or acquisition. Within the same quality, a thing cannot simultaneously be in actuality and potentiality, both mover and moved. This necessitates a first mover, himself unmoved, who is pure act (*actus purus*) having no potency whatsoever. Existing therefore entails motion for the *creatum* but not the Creator: being-in-motion (*ens mobile*) cannot coincide with being-as-such (*ens in quantum est ens*).<sup>11</sup> Physics – the study of being-in-motion – must therefore yield to metaphysics – being-as-such.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R, "Aristotle and Aquinas" in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 45-46.

<sup>7</sup> David Burrell, C.S.C., 'The Act of Creation with its Theological Consequences' in T. Weinandy, D. Keating and J. Yocum (eds), *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. *ST*, Ia.45.3

<sup>9</sup> *ST*, Ia.2 3.*responsio*.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* III.I.201a.

<sup>11</sup> Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 51ff.

## ***Perfection and participation***

The next building block in observing the implicit gift structures of Aquinas's doctrine of God is the distinction between perfection and participation. That God is simple (not composite) is axiomatic for Aquinas: whilst things are constituted by the Aristotelian composition of matter/form (or, ontologically, by potency/act<sup>13</sup>), God, in unique simplicity, lacks such distinctions.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as beings intrinsically in-motion, can we ever talk meaningfully of God, who, as pure act, both transcends and causes motion? Aquinas steers cautiously between negative theology's austere scepticism<sup>15</sup> and medieval belief in the identity of language and reality,<sup>16</sup> helpfully distinguishing between identity and predication. Whilst goodness might be deemed to *pertain to* a particular individual, we can rightly affirm that God *is* good and thereby describe God as *goodness itself*: "to be good belongs pre-eminently to God."<sup>17</sup> Hence, goodness is identical with complete actuality<sup>18</sup> and, as perfection, subsists only in God, who is *the* good, whilst nevertheless being conveyed partially to creation. Thus Aquinas mediates between apophatic reticence and positive (over?-)attribution: goodness belongs to God alone *per se*; all human attribution and possession of goodness transpires through *participation* in divine goodness in strictly one-way correspondence.<sup>19</sup> Through participation, creation receives an improper share in being-itself, "a part of what belongs to another fully."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Burrell, *Aquinas*, 50, for a fuller discussion of how Aquinas employs and goes beyond these correspondences, taking the potency/act couplet as primary.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 65.

<sup>16</sup> Burrell, *Aquinas*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *ST*, Ia.6.1.*responsio*, cf. Mk. 10:18, Lk. 18:19.

<sup>18</sup> Burrell, *Aquinas*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> *ST*, Ia.13.3. See also Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 107 and Burrell, *Aquinas*, 76.

<sup>20</sup> *In I Boeth. de Hebd.*, 1. 2, n. 24; quoted by Cornelio Fabro, 'The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 27:3(1974), 454; cf. John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 96.

Aquinas's perception of being might be deemed to satisfy Derrida's demanding gift-criteria: non-appearing (at least for those unconcerned with ontology), entirely beyond exchange and imbued with forgetfulness, whilst exemplifying Marion's saturated phenomenon – unmanipulable, iconic, self-constituting, superexcessive gift, the epitome of no-thing that frames everything. Nevertheless, whilst utterly unreturnable, God's gift of being affords creation solid, inescapably *material*, 'content'. Moreover, the *Summa*'s overarching *exitus-reditus* arrangement shows that creation both *emerges from* God and *returns to* God, suggesting that participation in being mysteriously has response ingrained within through sharing in some primordial giving-and-receiving: creation's spiral might participate in an ever-greater, always-prior circle.

Identifying the good with God illustrates how creaturely subject-predicate distinctions do not pertain to God. Differentiating between *what* a thing is in essence (*essentia*) and the fact *that* it exists, having being (*ens*), proves superfluous, for God *is* his own essence or nature<sup>21</sup> and that essence is identical to existence:<sup>22</sup> "the quiddity of God is 'to be' itself."<sup>23</sup> So, in God, being and doing are identical, with no distinction between the actions of creating, loving, willing, knowing etc, for were God's existence and essence distinguishable, some external cause would be needed.<sup>24</sup> Whereas human action is always limited by potency and therefore motion, God, as *actus purus*, has neither potency nor motion,<sup>25</sup> his essence and existence indistinguishable.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, God alone exists *per*

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<sup>21</sup> *ST*, Ia.3.3.*responsio*: 'since God then is not composed of matter and form, He must be His own Godhead, His own Life, and whatever else is thus predicated of Him.'

<sup>22</sup> *ST*, Ia.3.4.*responsio*.

<sup>23</sup> *Commentary on the Book of Causes* {47} (*Super librum de causis expositio*), trans. and annotated Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, Richard C. Taylor; introduction by Vincent A. Guagliardo (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 52. (Hereafter *In LDC*; numbers in square brackets specify pages in translation).

<sup>24</sup> *ST*, Ia.3. 4.*responsio*.

<sup>25</sup> See Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 57, 69.

<sup>26</sup> *ST*, Ia.3.4.*responsio*.

*essentiam* whilst all existent things do so *per participationem*.<sup>27</sup> So God is not a particular being among others, the pre-eminent, greatest being;<sup>28</sup> rather, He is self-subsisting being-itself, in whom all perfections reside, not by participation but by essence: he is *ipsum esse per se subsistens*.<sup>29</sup>

Creatures participate in *esse* through the *actus essendi* (“ground-laying first act”<sup>30</sup>) which alone accounts for something’s very existence. As act is deemed to be “perfection or affirmation of *esse*”<sup>31</sup> and potency the “capacity to receive perfection or as negation or privation”<sup>32</sup>, creatures are constituted through receiving a gift which the giver has as perfection, intrinsically derived from, and, for rational creatures, perpetually ordered to him.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, lest the conferral of being be deemed pantheistic, Wippel relates how Aquinas distinguishes between *actus essendi* (the creature’s own act of existence), *esse commune* (being in general) and *esse subsistens*, which is one and is God alone.<sup>34</sup> All creatures rely upon *esse commune* for it represents their respective, appointed share in *esse subsistens*.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, whereas the processions of Son and Spirit from the Father communicate the *fullness* of divine essence, the production of creatures does not. So God remains clearly distinct from creatures, communicating not *esse* itself but a likeness thereof and constituting humanity’s difference from God as gift.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* See also Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995), 100.

<sup>28</sup> *ST*, Ia.3.5.*responsio*.

<sup>29</sup> *ST*, Ia.4.2.*responsio*. Burrell, (*Aquinas*, 62) observes that this marks the limit of proper speech about God. *Esse* itself is thereby shrouded in mystery for “our understanding finds itself knowing God most perfectly when it knows that the divine nature lies beyond whatever it can apprehend in our present state.” (*Exposito super librum Boethii de Trinitate* 1.2.1, quoted by Burrell, *ibid.*).

<sup>30</sup> Fabro, 463.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* See also John Rziha, *Perfecting Human Actions: St. Thomas Aquinas on Human Participation in Eternal Law* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Only those endowed with the potential to know and love God are ordered towards him (*De Veritate*, XXII.2.5; *ST*. IIae-IIae.2.3.)

<sup>34</sup> Wippel, 110ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>36</sup> *Commentary on the Divine Names*, c.II, lect.3, cited by Wippel, 120.

### ***Separated and connected***

Aquinas denies that we can ever have access to God as he is, but firstly knowledge of what he is *not*, for God and his creation are necessarily *separated*, as cause and effect.<sup>37</sup> However, he is not entirely sceptical, for every negative statement is counterbalanced by God's free, overwhelmingly positive, action: God truly *is* the cause of all things.<sup>38</sup> As both *simple*<sup>39</sup> and *perfect*<sup>40</sup>, God's being is being in its highest, most determined possibility. So unlike certain caricatures of classical theism, God is not some kind of 'super-being' acting as first principle for other beings, whilst sharing their common 'genetic' make-up.<sup>41</sup> God is therefore *both* fundamentally separated from his creatures *and* intimately connected to them as cause.

Dionysius's so-called *triplex via* affords Aquinas an elegant balance to uphold such difference and association, maintaining, first, that God is the cause of all things; secondly, that creatures differ from God inasmuch as he is not one of the effects; and, finally, that God's difference stems not from some lack or imperfection in God but that he possesses all perfections pre-eminently.<sup>42</sup> This precarious tightrope – simultaneously affirming causality, remotion and eminence – avoids apophaticism's over-guardedness, whilst countering critics of so-called onto-theology, such as Marion: God is *not* idolatrously delimited within a constraining, transcendence-compromising category (being, *ens*) as if being were something 'over-and-above' God.<sup>43</sup> For Aquinas, the exact reverse is true: God *is* being-itself, utterly simple, replete in perfection, separated from creation *and yet*

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<sup>37</sup> See Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *ST*, Ia.3.7.*responsio*.

<sup>40</sup> *ST*, Ia.4.2.*responsio*.

<sup>41</sup> *ST*, Ia.3.5.*responsio*.

<sup>42</sup> Te Velde (*Aquinas on God*, 75) observes the *triplex via* in several sections of the *ST*, the clearest being Ia.12.12. See also *Participation and Substantiality*, 120f.

<sup>43</sup> Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 86.

truly its cause. So there is a unique focus and source of being, namely God himself.

God's being is fully established, free of creatures' motion-inscribed potentiality. As *actus purus* "the divine being is *not a being received in anything*" for "He is His own subsistent being .... infinite and perfect".<sup>44</sup> As self-subsistent being, perfect in aseity, independent of causality, God alone gives without needing to receive.<sup>45</sup> Bestowing being as his fundamental, creation-constituting gift, God is no "supreme being', a nameless deity .... ultimately in charge of everything" but "is *maxime ens* ... [enjoying] being in the highest possible degree. Utterly simple ... in the 'concrete' sense of perfection ... God is *self-diffusive goodness*, the *abundant source of all the good gifts which creatures receive from him*, among which the gift of 'being' occupies the first place."<sup>46</sup>

## **Constituted through giving: creation's participation in being**

We exist, therefore, by divine donation. Creation is profoundly contingent, whereas God, being-itself, is wholly necessary: creation is because God wills it, a fundamental, unconcealed, constitutive action, in which creation might rejoice, thus overcoming the donation-impeding reserve of Derrida and Marion.

But what is the 'gift texture' of creation? Here I further interpret Aquinas through donation's 'lenses' to establish creation's key gift principles, contending that creation emerges *ex nihilo*, requiring no 'pre-gift' yet having a definite beginning through the willed action of just one giver. Consequently, innumerable

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<sup>44</sup> *ST*, Ia.7.1, *responsio*; italics added.

<sup>45</sup> This does not *preclude* reception (such as creation's return gift-of-self) but he is never *dependent* on any gift.

<sup>46</sup> Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 84-5; italics added.



beneficiaries participate in being to varying divinely-determined degrees, requiring God's ceaseless outpouring, thus rendering creation and conservation one continuous gift-event. These principles highlight creation's utter reliance, implying one-way, entirely unreturnable, divine donation. Nevertheless, Aquinas teaches that dependent creatures can act as secondary causes, becoming givers insofar as they are always-already recipients and, furthermore, showing their reception to be fulfilled only through their counter-gift of complete self-giving as creation returns to its divine source. Hence, whilst no creature could ever return God's gift like-for-like, secondary *transmission* of being is granted, alongside rational creatures' *self-donating counter-gift* to God in friendship, the pinnacle of human reciprocity.

### ***No pre-gift***

Creation's coming-to-be requires no antecedent matter – any semblance of 'pre-gift' – an aetiology quite different from Plato's mythic cosmology, *Timaeus*. Hebrew ambiguity in Genesis 1:1 yields divergent judgments on the world's out-of-nothingness,<sup>47</sup> but Aquinas nevertheless maintains that whilst generation and corruption require pre-existent matter, creation "presupposes nothing in the thing which is to be created."<sup>48</sup> Indeed, matter itself "began to exist, not through generation from something but from absolutely nothing"<sup>49</sup> whilst God, without material cause, causes all things to be, granting participation in being: "nothing, apart from God – who is self-subsistent being – exists without this giving: it represents an inescapable priority of nature."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Margaret Barker, *Creation: a Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 131 and Steven E. Baldner and William E. Carroll, *Aquinas on Creation: Writings on the Sentences of Peter Lombard 2.1.1* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1997), 1.

<sup>48</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.2.*solutio*, trans. Baldner and Carroll, *Aquinas on Creation*, 74. References hereafter note the relevant page in Baldner and Carroll's translation in square parentheses.

<sup>49</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.5.ad 1 [97]

<sup>50</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.2.*solutio* [74-5].

As non-being is prior to being in the created order, the creature is *nothing* inherently, a dependent, gift-constituted thing.<sup>51</sup> Affirming creation's beginning, he considers the created thing emerging *ex nihilo* both in originating "not from something pre-existing" and "naturally [having] non-being prior to being."<sup>52</sup> Creatures are recipients intrinsically, acquiring everything from one who is giver intrinsically. Moreover, as Aquinas' theology of creation's conservation illustrates (see below), the world *constantly* emerges from God *ex nihilo*, suspended perennially above the void of non-being through continuously participating in God's being.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Creation's gifted beginning***

However, does belief in *creatio ex nihilo* imply that creation has a beginning? For Aquinas, "being created" is *not* contrary to "eternal past duration" for creation's innate dependence on divine causality proves neither eternity nor temporality. Being's superiority over non-being entails priority according to *nature*, not duration: whereas God does not derive being from another, all else would be non-being unless it received being as God's gift.<sup>54</sup> Creation's motion implies no prior motion (and hence eternal creation) for creating involve change for the thing moved but not the mover,<sup>55</sup> or, in gift terms, the bestowal of the gift means transformation for the recipient (from non-being to being) but not for the giver. Creation is thus "a certain relation of having being from another following

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<sup>51</sup> Baldner and Carroll, *Aquinas on Creation*, 44.

<sup>52</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.2.*solutio*, [42]

<sup>53</sup> As López observes, gift-exchanges within creation thereby participate in the original divine gratuity that brings creatures into being. That is, *contra* Derrida, the observed gift shares in the pure gift. Moreover, *creatio ex nihilo* maintains recipients' radical difference from the giver whilst instigating the expectation of a free response. See López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 59-61.

<sup>54</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.5.*sed contra* 2 [102-3]

<sup>55</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.5.*ad* 8 [98].

upon the divine operation”<sup>56</sup>, a relation necessary for creatures but superfluous for God.<sup>57</sup> Creation remains entirely contingent and *unnecessary*, a free, divinely-willed act as being is poured into non-being and *something* emerges from *nothing*.<sup>58</sup> Fully actual, God’s willing and action are identical and entail neither motion nor change.<sup>59</sup> God is necessary, self-subsistent, actual and eternal whilst creation is contingent, divinely-constituted, potent and temporal.

### ***One giver***

Yet amid countless competing protologies, maintaining a *single* donor demanded justification. Whilst Gnostics considered creation to derive from a lower heavenly being, Manichees proclaimed both a divinely-created spiritual realm and a material world due to the evil principle, implicitly bolstering certain Christians’ anxiety about physicality, exemplified in Albigensian abhorrence of things material. Moreover, the twelfth-century Latin translation of the anonymously-authored *Book of Causes* exerted influence, presenting Neoplatonic emanation through hierarchy as plausible.

Countering Manichean assertion of two ultimate principles alongside multiple first principles, Aquinas affirms one principle alone, creation’s plurality presupposing and implying unity, both in source and end. Creation’s movers display one order, such harmonization impossible “unless the parts are aimed at

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<sup>56</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.2.ad 4 [77]. For the creature, creation is passive: ‘both the activity that [he] is constantly receiving in order to exist and the result of that activity, which forms part of the essential make-up of the creature.’ (Baldner and Carroll, *Aquinas on Creation*, 46-47).

<sup>57</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.2.ad 5 [77]. Yet whilst lack of real relation with creation is needed to maintain divine immutability, the trinitarian life *is* relation in itself (see next section).

<sup>58</sup> Burrell contends that whilst Aquinas favoured emanation as metaphor for creation’s emergence, Western fears regarding pantheism trigger its eschewal, thereby over-caricaturing the rightful Creator-creation distinction as *separation*, thus unwittingly reducing the Creator to “the biggest thing around.” (David B. Burrell, C.S.C., ‘Aquinas’s Appropriation of *Liber de causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being’ in Fergus Kerr OP, *Contemplating Aquinas: on the varieties of interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 77.

<sup>59</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.5.ad 11 [100]

one goal”, necessitating “one supreme final good .... desired by all .... the first principle”<sup>60</sup>, ‘first’ signifying not merely ontological primacy, but absolute, unique primacy.<sup>61</sup> Creation’s innate hierarchy of being is caused by the first principle,<sup>62</sup> the divine source necessary in-and-of-itself, for whom being and essence are identical.<sup>63</sup> Living things, however, receive being as commonly-held gift, the existence-essence distinction for a rock being indistinguishable from that of an angel. As no single creature can possess the fullness of being which is God’s alone, creatures are multiple, constituting complex signs of genuine participation in trinitarian unity-in-distinction.

Unique and replete, creation’s donor bestows existence directly, without mediation, preventing unending cause-and-effect: “natures must....have being from something [else], and there must be ultimately a nature which is its own being, otherwise there would be an infinite regress.”<sup>64</sup> This single giver is at the apex of completion and actuality, preceding all that is partial and limited within potentiality.<sup>65</sup> Being-itself is the sole, primary and perfect source of being and of multiple, secondary, imperfect beings, “[producing] a thing into being according to its entire substance”<sup>66</sup>, that act which constitutes creation’s very meaning. This model neither contains nor constrains God within being’s hierarchy, for whereas

the theistic God looks more like *a* being, a ‘self-contained substance’ above and apart from the world, than the pure actuality of *subsistent being* itself....for Thomas, God is not ‘separated’ from the world as a subsistent entity conceivable apart from his causal relationship to created beings; it is as cause of all beings that God ‘separates’ himself from all his effects by distinguishing those effects from himself.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.1.solutio [66].

<sup>61</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.1.solutio [65].

<sup>62</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.1.solutio [66].

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.1.solutio [67].

<sup>66</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.2.solutio [74]

<sup>67</sup> Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 85.

### ***Many recipients***

So how do creation's countless gift-dependent creatures relate to this single divine giver? Aquinas teaches that God holds all perfections pre-eminently and plenitudinously, and, in gracious donation,<sup>68</sup> constitutes creatures through pure, unrequitable gift. Never considered as some 'lowest common denominator', being is the 'perfection of perfections', establishing reality's mysterious, differentiated unity, in utter dependency upon God.<sup>69</sup> Having divinely-determined fractional shares in divine perfection which is being-itself, creatures' being (*ens*) and essence (*essentia*) are distinguished. Te Velde postulates that Aquinas innovatively fuses Platonic notions of participation – assuming causal connection between the one idea and the many instances thereof – and Aristotle's belief that all things, by virtue of their substance (*ousia*), exist as self-sufficient, independent of the separated forms.<sup>70</sup> Following both Geiger and Wippel, he furthermore discerns "a double participation, one participation by which a finite essence is constituted formally as something which can exist, and another participation by which a possible essence is brought into actual existence."<sup>71</sup> Whilst this raises the spectre of *possible*, yet *non-existing*, beings,<sup>72</sup> Velde observes Aquinas's use of Pseudo-Dionysian causal participation by which creatures participate not in the cause itself but rather *a likeness thereof*, a similitude which allows diversified creatures to bear the likeness of being-itself in distinct, yet restricted, manner.<sup>73</sup>

Aquinas holds that God creates by *unnecessary, willed* emanation,<sup>74</sup> and, affirming creation's goodness, avoids Platonism's 'ontological fall', regarding creatures' multiplicity as demonstration that God's simple perfection necessitates

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-5.

<sup>69</sup> Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 116-118.

<sup>70</sup> See his *Participation and Substantiality*, *passim*.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>72</sup> David Burrell, 'Act of Creation', 36.

<sup>73</sup> Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 94.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 102ff.

diverse representative effects.<sup>75</sup> Creaturely differences arise according to the measure of being granted, demonstrating a “diversity of reception [in] accordance to the diversity of the recipients”<sup>76</sup> and imposing creation’s divinely-bestowed *order*.<sup>77</sup> Velde argues that God gives being (and its convertible transcendentals, namely goodness, truth and beauty) to each creature through the form that participates (Platonically) in *esse*, whilst by virtue of its (Aristotelian) substance it can truly be said to exist and be good in-and-of-itself.<sup>78</sup> God wisely grants measured, intentional shares in *esse*, that which the eternal Son alone receives in limitless plenitude.<sup>79</sup> This expresses simultaneously “the intrinsic value and meaning of a creature which is a *being* as well as its essential imperfection inasmuch as it has only a part of being.”<sup>80</sup> Hierarchically bestowed, being orders and stratifies creatures<sup>81</sup>, whilst uniting them through their common continuous reception. Although inescapably finite and gift-dependent, creatures have exceptional significance, bearing some divine likeness through intrinsic connection to the One who contains all perfections and generously causes to be that which otherwise would not be.

The notion of analogy of being sets the genuine creature-Creator *similitudo* within underlying *maior dissimilitudo*. However, following Duns Scotus’s insistence that existence could be predicated of God and of creatures *in the same sense*, a gulf opened between ontology and theology.<sup>82</sup> Asserting being (and its convertibles) to be ever fully established and universally applicable, it then becomes an overarching category ‘inhabited’ equally by God and creatures. Furthermore, Milbank observes that Derrida imbues Scotus’ univocity of being with a

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<sup>75</sup> *ST*, Ia.3.3.ad 2.

<sup>76</sup> In *LDC*, 123 [137].

<sup>77</sup> Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 115.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-226

<sup>79</sup> *De potentia Dei*, 3.16.ad12.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Catherine Pickstock, “Duns Scotus: his historical and contemporary significance”, *Modern Theology* 21:4(2005), 543-574.

“nihilistic twist” as creatures’ stratified participation in being yields to “the absolute diversity of every *ens* as such,” reducing being to a mere *given* (rather than *gift*), thereby eliminating creation’s giftedness and, indeed, any need for God.<sup>83</sup> For Aquinas, however, God is not enthroned at the pinnacle of Scotus’s continuum-of-being, but is being-itself, granting creatures genuine participation therein. Creaturely being remains pure gift, both in foundation and ongoing maintenance, whilst, nevertheless, enabling real subsistence and derivative autonomy: being is forever given, creation is forever gift.

### ***Preserving the gift***

So being is no one-off gift but requires uninterrupted donation. Aquinas regards creation and conservation as one for *esse* is indivisible and God’s continuous holding-creation-in-being prolongs the creative act, as a single gift. God preserves creatures “by *ever giving them existence*” and so, building on Augustine, Aquinas contends that if God “took away His action from them, *all things would be reduced to nothing*.”<sup>84</sup> Hence “the creature is always *of itself literally nothing* and therefore is *in constant need of being created out of nothing*.”<sup>85</sup> As the “on-going, complete causing of the existence of whatever is”<sup>86</sup> creation represents perpetual giftedness, “the permanent condition of any form of existence in the world.”<sup>87</sup> Developing Averroës, Aquinas claims that the universe has a divinely-enabled tendency to persist<sup>88</sup> and, although the creature is inherently nothing, by God’s gift it possess its own being and certain autonomy.

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<sup>83</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 306.

<sup>84</sup> *ST*, Ia.9.2.*responsio*; italics added.

<sup>85</sup> Baldner and Carroll, 42-3; italics added.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 126.

<sup>88</sup> *De potentia Dei* 5.3 *sol*, quoted by Baldner and Carroll, 49.

God's non-constraining giving brings recipients into existence in true freedom, including a divinely-bestowed procreative vocation that permits recipients to become givers themselves. But in what sense? In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas rejects the opinion that the first cause creates the first effect and allows all others to flow from it, for this idolatrously bestows upon creatures honour and creative power due to God alone. The second option – that no creature can create – and the third (due to Lombard) – that creaturely creativity is possible but not granted – both command consideration. However, Aquinas subsequently discards the latter, for to create requires infinite (divine) power,<sup>89</sup> whilst acting instrumentally – through another's delegation – ultimately provides insufficient power.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, elsewhere he concedes that creatures may become *instrumental* causes in *conserving* being, although God alone gives being itself.<sup>91</sup>

### ***Becoming givers***

But does this divine causation preclude others acting as causes? Aquinas rejects both the view that “God immediately does all things such that nothing is the cause of anything” and the opposing belief that God is the immediate cause of the first created thing alone.<sup>92</sup> His conciliatory *via media* maintains that God alone creates all things immediately whilst allowing creatures their own operations, namely those things possible by motion or generation.<sup>93</sup> Divine causation is more intimate, however, for secondary causation, reliant on divine power, merely “[specifies] that being”<sup>94</sup>, providing “the determinations of being ... [causing] *this* form to be in *this* matter, by bringing the form into actuality from the potency of

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<sup>89</sup> *ST*, Ia.45.5 *responsio*. See also *De potentia Dei*, 3.4.

<sup>90</sup> *ST*, Ia.45.5 *responsio*.

<sup>91</sup> *SCG*, 2.20-1.

<sup>92</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.4.*solutio* [83].

<sup>93</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.4.*solutio* [83-4].

<sup>94</sup> *In Sent.*, 2.1.1.4.*solutio* [85]



matter.”<sup>95</sup> Secondary causation does not diminish God’s creative influence, but rather signifies divine goodness, imparting to creatures the freedom to act.

In his *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, Aquinas refines his model within a Platonic-Aristotelian framework. Its concept of *infusion* (from the Latin *infundere*, ‘to pour in’<sup>96</sup>) inspired Aquinas’s assertion that “every primary cause infuses its effect more powerfully than does a universal second cause.”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, whilst the second cause possesses legitimacy and efficacy, the first cause nevertheless has the more powerful infusional effect, recedes later, and reaches the effect first.<sup>98</sup> The second cause derives both substance and power from the first, rendering its (entirely real) action dependent and subservient.<sup>99</sup> Only God can *give being by himself*,<sup>100</sup> creating *ex nihilo*, whilst secondary causes *transmit* being received from the primary cause.<sup>101</sup> Creatures may therefore become givers inasmuch as they are *already* recipients, possessing some *derived* creative role from God the *inherent* Giver.

### ***Counter-gift?***

Intrinsically *recipients*, creatures exist solely through participation in the being of the One whose essence is to-be. However, might creation’s participatory structures epitomise the *one-way* gift, unwittingly corroborating Derrida’s rigorous gift axioms? Indeed, being is supremely aneconomic and unreturnable, potentially unrecognised as gift by source-ignorant creatures and immediately ‘forgotten’ by God in inexhaustible extravagance. Equally, might creation be

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<sup>95</sup> Baldner and Carroll, *Aquinas on Creation*, 49.

<sup>96</sup> See translators’ footnote 2 [5] to Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Book of Causes*.

<sup>97</sup> *In LDC*, Prop.1, 4[5].

<sup>98</sup> *In LDC*, 5[7].

<sup>99</sup> *In LDC*, 7[9]. Cf. *De Pot.*, 3.7: “the higher a cause, the more universal and powerful it is. And the more powerful it is, the more deeply it enters into the effect and brings it from a more remote potency into act.” (Quoted by Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 166).

<sup>100</sup> *De potentia Dei*, 3.1; 3.7. (*Ibid.*, 176).

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3.7.

viewed as pre-eminent saturating phenomenon, overwhelming creatures with constitutive giving so luminous that all return is precluded? Either way, *like-for-like* exchange is clearly impossible. However, that does not inhibit *any* response. As Milbank demonstrates, return happens via *non-identical*, spiral-like repetition: hence, the secondary *transmission* of being represents counter-gift as gift-constituted creatures fulfil their divinely-bestowed procreative vocation, relaying God's gift onwards.

For Aquinas, creaturely participation in being encompasses desire for perfection achieved through *returning* to the divine giver, making creation inherently *ordered*, both through ontological hierarchy and in final reorientation to source.<sup>102</sup> Specifically, human life aspires towards the divine life of self-giving mutuality: “the reason and will are naturally directed to God, inasmuch as He is the beginning and end of nature.”<sup>103</sup> Human beings, made in God's image and likeness, participate in God's plan to communicate his goodness and, inherently full of possibility, journey towards God, their end.<sup>104</sup> Creation has a divine beginning *and end*, yet humanity's conscious, willed *consent* to that return mysteriously constitutes its counter-gift to the One who lacks nothing. That such return is necessary is apparent, however, only on examining the gift's profounder basis in God's inner life.

## The gift's trinitarian paradigm

For Derrida and Marion, however, any inherently *reciprocal* gift is self-contradictory, unravelling immediately within indebted, asphyxiating exchange. Yet Christianity affirms not simply the *possibility* of aneconomic exchange, but its eternal foundational *necessity* through avowedly *trinitarian* theology. For

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<sup>102</sup> Burrell, *Liber de causis*, 80.

<sup>103</sup> *ST*, Ia-IIae.62.1.ad 3.

<sup>104</sup> *ST*, I.93

Aquinas, God does not give merely to creation but also gives – and receives – in his own triune blessedness.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, it is only ‘within’ the eternal processions of Son and Spirit that creation emerges from – and returns to – God, impressing a trinitarian watermark thereupon.

By examining Aquinas’ teaching on trinitarian processions, relations, Persons and reciprocity, I intend to demonstrate that gift-exchange represents the divine ‘grammatical’ order in which creation shares, its spiral participating in the always-prior circle of perfect donation-reception. Specifically, I will claim that Aquinas’ teaching on the Trinity discerns a gift structure within the divine life through describing the respective *processions* of Son and Spirit as entirely inward actions, the trinitarian *relations* – paternity, filiation, and procession – not as some ‘added extra’ but constitutive of God’s life and the divine *persons* as thereby characterised by integral donation-reception. Indeed, God’s self-sufficient life is perfectly and endlessly reciprocal, possessing an inner dynamism akin to motion in which creation’s motion-inscribed gift-cycles find their place and, ultimately, their rest.

### ***Processions***

The notion of procession is foundational within Aquinas’ trinitarianism, a concept witnessed in gospel accounts of Christ’s coming-forth: “I came from God” (John 8.42); “I came from the Father” (16.28). The *Summa Theologiae* reflects on divine processions following consideration of God’s intellect which, in its perfection, reveals God as “consciously joyful ... the object of his joy [being] first himself

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<sup>105</sup> So whilst *ex-* combined with *sistere* (‘to be’) implies that existence involves an origin – for creatures, a radical *dependence* – so, too, for God’s eternal interpersonality. See Rik van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 143.

and secondarily himself as creator and preserver of the universe.”<sup>106</sup> Divine processions are purely immanent, unlike creation’s transitive material processions which involve physical movement or transfer from cause to exterior effect, like heat conducted to an object.<sup>107</sup> Whereas Arius and Sabellius heretically imagined an *outward* action, the processions of the Son and Spirit are actions of the highest order which *remain wholly in God*.<sup>108</sup> Divine processions involve no separation between origin and result for “the more perfectly [something] proceeds, the more closely it is one with the source whence it proceeds.”<sup>109</sup> Hence, there is, in God, a self-expression so replete that “the divine Word is of necessity perfectly one with the source whence He proceeds, without any kind of diversity.”<sup>110</sup> Yet, as Karen Kilby stresses, divine processions remain impenetrably mysterious and so, with due apophatic reserve, remain deliberately undefined by Aquinas.<sup>111</sup>

Following Aristotle, Aquinas asserts that such immanent operations happen through processions based upon either intellect or love.<sup>112</sup> However, whereas for Aristotle intellect and will ‘produce’ nothing, for Aquinas these actions are inwardly fruitful.<sup>113</sup> Processions establish trinitarian difference, inscribing giving-and-receiving within the divine life:

God lives as *verbum* because God is eternally already in motion, in self-differentiation. There is no primordial singleness. The Father conceives the Word or generates the Son in the eternal act of recognising his own action of self-giving, bestowal of what he is .... The Father generates the Son in the act of knowing that he (the Father) is already actively giving

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<sup>106</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘What does love know? St. Aquinas on the Trinity’, *New Blackfriars* 82(2001), 261.

<sup>107</sup> *ST*, Ia.27.1.*responsio*.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *ST*, Ia.27.1.ad 2.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. *SCG*, IV.11.11

<sup>111</sup> Karen Kilby, ‘Aquinas, the Trinity and the Limits of Understanding’ in *ISJT*, 7(2005), 414–427.

<sup>112</sup> *ST*, Ia.27.1.*responsio*; Ia.27.3.*responsio*.

<sup>113</sup> Gilles Emery, ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity in St. Thomas Aquinas’ in T. Weinandy, D. Keating and J. Yocum (eds), *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 52.

what he is to another .... What the Father knows is neither the divine essence as some abstraction from the actuality of the divine life, nor ‘himself’ as a divine individual: he knows himself in generative relation to another.<sup>114</sup>

Remarking on John 5:20 (“the Father loves the Son”) Aquinas writes that “the Father has shown [the Son] everything and has communicated to him his very own power and nature”<sup>115</sup> and discerns in John 6:57 (“I live because of the Father”) that the divine Son “is from the Father in such a way that he receives the entire fullness of the divine nature, so that whatever is natural to the Father is also natural to the Son.”<sup>116</sup> Moreover, Aquinas relates the Father’s complete gift-of-self to the dual procession of the Spirit. The Father “gives to Christ the power and might to bring forth (*spirandi*) the Holy Spirit, who, since he is infinite, was infinitely given to him by the Father: for the Father gives it just as he himself has it, so that the Holy Spirit proceeds from him as much as from the Son. And he gave him this by an everlasting generation.”<sup>117</sup> In an explicit giver-gift-recipient distillation, the Word might be imagined to be the perfect, unrestricted, self-communication of the Father yielding no separation or distinction between giver and recipient other than the designations ‘unbegotten’<sup>118</sup> and ‘begotten’.<sup>119</sup> Just as Aquinas’ concept of divine procession utterly transcends creation’s processions<sup>120</sup>, so such a profoundly theological giver-gift-recipient unity confounds empirically-based gift models.

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<sup>114</sup> Williams, ‘What does love know?’, 262-3.

<sup>115</sup> Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Joannis lectura* (hereafter, *In Ioan*), 5.3, n. 753 (*Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, ed. and trans. James A. Weisheipl and Fabian R. Larcher (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

<sup>116</sup> *In Ioan*, 6.7., n. 977.

<sup>117</sup> *In Ioan*, 3.6, n.543. See also Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 138.

<sup>118</sup> The Father “is known by the fact that He is not from another” (*ST Ia.33.4.responsio*).

<sup>119</sup> “The Son can be known as begotten by another.” (*ST Ia.32.3.responsio*).

<sup>120</sup> Kilby, 420.

Furthermore, the Word's perfect intellectual procession complements the Holy Spirit's coming-forth by means of love.<sup>121</sup> For Aquinas, knowledge is never static – simply 'there' – but possesses inherent, dynamic, ecstatic attraction: we 'incline' to what is known, questioning whether it prospers our true end.<sup>122</sup> As what is known by the intellect dwells in us – and pre-eminently so in God – so "the object loved is in the lover"<sup>123</sup>; that is, the procession of the Spirit, like the Word, is wholly immanent. The object of divine willing is nothing less than God's own goodness, his very essence,<sup>124</sup> manifested in love's 'gravitational pull' towards the other:

God loves God, loves what is understood in the eternal Word, loves the always pre-existing self-giving of the Father .... God is a movement towards God, God's wanting of God so that God may be fully and blissfully God, may enjoy the natural 'good' proper to the divine nature. Insofar as the most fundamental thing we can give to another, give in the sense of pure gratuity, is the unqualified wanting of another's good, and insofar as love is the ground of such wanting, then the Spirit is as rightly called 'gift' as 'love'.<sup>125</sup>

The processions of the Word and Spirit and the associated 'notional actions' by which the persons come to be, are identical to the persons themselves for in God there is no distinction between person and act, thus showing the gift, giver and the act of giving/receiving to be coterminous: God *is* that superabundant act of self-bestowal in himself.

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<sup>121</sup> *ST*, Ia.27.3, *sed contra*.

<sup>122</sup> *ST*, Ia.27.4. See also Simon Oliver, 'Trinity, motion and creation *ex nihilo*' in Burrell *et al* (eds.), *Creation and the God of Abraham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 138-9.

<sup>123</sup> *ST*, Ia.27.3

<sup>124</sup> *ST*, Ia.19.1.ad.3.

<sup>125</sup> Williams, 'What does love know?', 265.

## ***Relations***

The notion of divine relations refines this. Unlike creatures, for whom relations represent accidents, God, being utterly simple, lacks all accidents. Hence, relations are not things ‘added’ to the divine Persons; rather, God *is* relation, or in Aquinas’ terms, relations in God are *real*, utterly intrinsic and equivalent to the divine essence.<sup>126</sup> Real relations distinguish between Persons whilst maintaining divine unity, thereby implying ‘relative opposition’ in God: “there must be real distinction in God, not, indeed, according to that which is absolute – namely, essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity – but according to that which is relative.”<sup>127</sup> So whilst internal processions maintain perfect unity, relation *alone* allows distinction-in-unity: “the Father is denominated only from paternity; and the Son only from filiation.”<sup>128</sup>

Aquinas discerns four internal divine relations, paired according to relation:

- (1a) paternity (constituting the Father’s relation to the Son);
- (1b) filiation (the Son’s relation to the Father);
- (2a) spiration (the relation of Father and Son to the Holy Spirit); and
- (2b) procession (the Spirit’s relation to the Father and Son).<sup>129</sup>

Aquinas calls paternity, filiation and procession ‘personal properties’ for they signify the persons themselves: “the three relations — paternity, filiation, and procession — are called personal properties, constituting as it were the persons; for paternity is the person of the Father, filiation is the person of the Son, procession is the person of the Holy Ghost proceeding”.<sup>130</sup> Hence, in gift-terms,

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<sup>126</sup> *ST*, Ia.28.2.*responsio*

<sup>127</sup> *ST*, Ia.28.3.*responsio*.

<sup>128</sup> *ST*, Ia.28.1.*sed contra*.

<sup>129</sup> *ST*, Ia.28.4.*responsio*.

<sup>130</sup> *ST*, Ia.30.2.*ad. 1*. Spiration is not a personal property for it is an act of Father and Son together, whilst constituting neither.

the Father is revealed as giver eminently<sup>131</sup>, the Son as both receiver (by being begotten) and giver (in co-spiration) and the Spirit as receiver of the Father and Son's mutual outpouring. Within the divine life, essence and relation are one: "the *esse* of the divine relation is the very being of the unique essence of divinity. Under the aspect of its existence, the relation is identified purely and simply with the substantial being of God, since there is not accidental being in God."<sup>132</sup> Thus, it appears that Aquinas proposes what contemporary theologians term integral, constitutive, trinitarian 'gift-exchange'.<sup>133</sup> As being-itself, this inward giving-and-receiving is the foundation of creation's gift-constituted coming-to-be and the basis of human redemption and sanctification.<sup>134</sup> God's mysterious life is both utterly *different* in unimaginable perfection, and yet the very *ground* of our being: we truly *participate* in a life *not* our own, established and sustained through receiving God's gift-of-being which is itself gift *in se*.

## ***Persons***

How do these eternal relations relate to divine personhood? Aquinas builds upon Boethius's celebrated definition of a person as "an individual substance of a rational nature,"<sup>135</sup> that "individual substance which possesses its own being in and through itself, having complete purchase on the exercise of its own act of existence."<sup>136</sup> Whilst, humanly speaking, 'person' implies a generic nature individualised, "a divine person signifies a relation as subsisting."<sup>137</sup> Consequently, the personal properties (paternity, filiation, procession) cannot be

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<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, lest this trinitarianism be deemed monarchical, note that the subsection on reciprocity establishes that *each* person gives *and* receives.

<sup>132</sup> Emery, 'Doctrine of the Trinity', 54.

<sup>133</sup> See below for Aquinas's account of the gift's innate *reciprocity*.

<sup>134</sup> See A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 55ff.

<sup>135</sup> See, e.g., *ST* Ia.29.1.

<sup>136</sup> Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105.

<sup>137</sup> *ST*, Ia.29.4.*responsio*.



abstracted beyond personhood.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, whereas human relations follow the notional acts (e.g., fatherhood follows generation), for God, “the relations *distinguish* and *constitute* the divine hypostases,”<sup>139</sup> both actively (paternity, spiration) and passively (filiation, procession). Hence, considering the Father’s personhood, we say not “because He begets, He is Father” but “because He is Father He begets.”<sup>140</sup>

Thus, trinitarian gift-exchange is not something ‘additional’ to persons already fully established; rather, it is the Father’s *very nature* to give, the Son’s to receive and the Spirit’s to be the blissful delight of that perpetual dynamism. Whereas for Richard of St. Victor divine persons are distinguished through action – the Father through begetting, the Son through being-begotten and the Holy Spirit through procession – Aquinas inverts this: the Son is distinguished not by begottenness but by *filiation*.<sup>141</sup> Hence, it is *relation*, rather than some passive notional action, that constitutes the persons and the divine essence itself. As Rowan Williams reminds us, orthodox responses to fourth-century trinitarian controversies avoided any narrative of generation: “what it is for God to be God in grammatical or abstract terms is actually and concretely the act of giving and receiving and loving that giving and receiving. There is nothing that is *not* trinitarian in God.”<sup>142</sup>

### ***Reciprocity***

However, unlike creation’s (initial) *one-way* ontological giftedness, trinitarian donation–reception is eternally *reciprocal*. Echoing patristic ideas of perichoresis/circumincession Aquinas demonstrates how each divine person is

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<sup>138</sup> *ST*, Ia. 40.3.*responsio*.

<sup>139</sup> *ST*, Ia.40.4.*responsio*.

<sup>140</sup> *ST*, Ia.40.4.*ad* 1.

<sup>141</sup> See, e.g., *ST*, Ia.40.2.

<sup>142</sup> ‘What does love know?’, 263, 268.

intrinsically *in* the other.<sup>143</sup> He considers John 14:10 – “do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” – through the triple lenses of essence, relation and origin/procession, thereby proposing inherent mutuality within God’s inner life.<sup>144</sup> First, as the Father begets the Son through communicating the *fullness* of divine nature, the Son gives himself entirely to the Father, meaning that “the Father has no other existence than in his relation to the Son.”<sup>145</sup> Enjoying intrinsic consubstantial union, the Father-Son extrinsic distinction comes only through the person-constituting relations. Secondly, the perichoretic reciprocity of trinitarian relations means that Father and Son are in one another according to the distinguished and non-interchangeable personal properties of filiation and paternity, interpreted by Aquinas through gift language: “the same essence and dignity ... exist in the Father by the relation of giver, and in the Son by relation of receiver.”<sup>146</sup> Transcending all opposition and difference, the Holy Spirit sustains loving unity: “as Love, the Holy Spirit implies a relationship of the Father to the Son, that of the lover to the beloved, and that this is reciprocated.”<sup>147</sup> Thirdly, as trinitarian processions are truly immanent, the Father is ever present in the Son as originating principle and the Son is in the Father as the one who originates.<sup>148</sup>

Consubstantiality, relation and procession all affirm thereby that exchange represents the divine nature *intrinsically*. Aquinas regards God’s inner donation-reception in eternal, perpetual circulation as something *akin* to motion:<sup>149</sup> an eternal, unchanging ‘event’ having no endpoint outside itself and meriting

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<sup>143</sup> Aquinas’s emphasis on relation as fundamental sits uneasily with contemporary social trinitarianism which regards the persons as essentially established (and distinguished) *prior* to relation, only subsequently bound in perfect unity by matchless loving self-giving. See Karen Kilby, ‘Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity’, *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000), 432-445. Emery (*Trinitarian Theology*, 304) stresses that perichoresis follows from consubstantiality, lest it be deemed the ground of divine unity.

<sup>144</sup> *ST*, Ia.42.5.responsio.

<sup>145</sup> Emery, *Trinitarian Theology*, p. 304.

<sup>146</sup> *ST*, Ia.42.4.ad.2. Likewise the spiration and procession proper to the Spirit manifests the giver-receiver pattern.

<sup>147</sup> *ST*, Ia.37.1.ad.3

<sup>148</sup> Cf. *In Ioan.* 16.7, no. 2161.

<sup>149</sup> *SCG*, IV.19.8.

supremely the Aristotelian term *energeia* (actuality), like a sphere spinning at infinite speed which nevertheless appears stationary. Within the “circular dynamism of the divine life”, the Father’s role as lover and the Son’s as beloved are immediately and eternally inverted in the reciprocal love that is the Holy Spirit<sup>150</sup>, thus overcoming Derrida’s pure aneconomic gift through timeless, superabundant *circular exchange* and intimating that creation’s end entails participation in (an otherwise unrealisable) reciprocity. Aquinas’s trinitarianism regards *intellectual* – rather than *physical* – motion as “the activity of the perfect .... a complete return upon self, in fact, motionless motion”<sup>151</sup>, placing God beyond notions of motion and rest. Moreover, the Holy Spirit both *unites* – overcoming the relative Father-Son opposition – and *moves outwards* – ecstatically bestowing graces upon creation and demonstrating creation’s dynamic *exitus-reditus* to originate within divine processions, inwardly and eternally complete.<sup>152</sup>

As trinitarian ‘motionless motion’ signifies the purest motion, so might inner-trinitarian donation represent ‘giftless giving’ and ‘receptionless reception’, for the gift is sheer possession and dispossession, complete, concurrent self-giving and self-receiving? Rather than transferring some *tertium quid*, such giving simply *is*:

Love knows divine life as bestowal and self-emptying: it knows a bestowal and self-emptying so complete, in the relation of Father and Son, that it knows there can be no ‘terminus’ to the act of self-giving. Its perfect reception in the Son is the ground of its overflow and excess in the Spirit. The Spirit as love is what comes from seeing that the Father’s understanding of the Son or of himself in the Son is not an enclosed

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<sup>150</sup> See Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 114. See also his ‘Trinity, motion and creation’, 140.

<sup>151</sup> Wayne J. Hankey, ‘*Theoria versus poesis*: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas’, *Modern Theology* 15:4(1999), 405.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 406-7.

mutual mirroring, a fixed self-reflection, but the understanding of a life that moves inexhaustibly in gift, even dispossession.<sup>153</sup>

This underived, ceaseless circulation reveals the divine persons' 'motionless motion' as *actus purus*, being-itself, *ipsum esse*, fully constituted and subsisting "only in their complete and utter self-giving to one another."<sup>154</sup>

## From procession to mission

But how does God's inner self-giving relate to the missions of the Son and the Spirit (e.g. Jn. 8:16; Gal. 4:4; Rom. 5:5), and, beyond that, to the hope that human giving-and-receiving might participate intensely in divine gift-exchange?

### *Translating the processions*

Aquinas teaches that divine missions may be visible – namely the Son's incarnate appearing and the Spirit's manifestation through physical signs<sup>155</sup> – or invisible – that is, their sending into faithful hearts in sanctifying grace.<sup>156</sup> Such missions are 'fitting' and involve two aspects, namely the person's eternal procession, 'extended' temporally and spatially, and the way he becomes present in a new way to creatures, thus implying both the orientation of the one sent to the sender and the one sent to the mission's goal.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Williams, 'What does love know?', 271.

<sup>154</sup> Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 119.

<sup>155</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.7.

<sup>156</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.3 – Ia.43.6.

<sup>157</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.1.*responsio*.

Trinitarian sendings differ from creaturely missions in two important ways.<sup>158</sup> First, divine missions involve neither subordination of the one sent to the sender, nor dependence upon external counsel, nor physical separation, for the mission is forever ‘contained’ within the eternal, internal procession.<sup>159</sup> Secondly, completion does not imply presence where there was previously absence, for God is never remote from his creatures; through the incarnation, for example, the Son “began to exist visibly in the world” whilst already being in the world (Jn 1.10).<sup>160</sup> Thus, “a divine person is *sent* in that he exists in someone in a new way; and he is *given* in that he is possessed by someone”<sup>161</sup>, thus effecting creaturely change but none for God.<sup>162</sup>

The relation thus instigated is wholly superfluous and gratuitous for God but for the beneficiary of the mission it is entirely ‘real’, altering her and settling her more fully in God’s life.<sup>163</sup> Generation and spiration are exclusive and eternal, constituting Son and Spirit through immanent processions and rendering God’s inner relations real; hence, procession is linked to giving eternally, for example, in the Son’s ceaseless coming-forth from the Father, whilst being ‘unfolded’ in missional giving.<sup>164</sup> However, giving associated to mission has only temporal significance for God,<sup>165</sup> for it “includes the eternal procession” but “with the addition of a temporal effect”<sup>166</sup> which provides an external ‘terminus’ beyond God. Yet, as Emery observes, “the temporal procession is an embassy of the eternal, bringing a part of its home country into our history”<sup>167</sup>, a *partial* giving which genuinely flows, nevertheless, from divine fullness. So in temporal mission, God is truly given and received and creatures participate more intensely

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<sup>158</sup> Emery, *Trinitarian Theology*, 365f.

<sup>159</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.1.ad 2; cf. Ia.43.2.ad 3; Ia.43.4.ad 3.

<sup>160</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.1.*responsio*.

<sup>161</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.3.*solutio*; In *Ioan.* 14.32.

<sup>162</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.2.ad 2.

<sup>163</sup> In *Sent.*, 14.1.1.ad 2 as interpreted in Emery, *Trinitarian theology*, 368.

<sup>164</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.2.*responsio*.

<sup>165</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.2.*responsio*.

<sup>166</sup> *ST*, Ia.43.2.ad 3.

<sup>167</sup> Emery, *Trinitarian theology*, 368.

in being, receiving a fuller share in that life which is inherently perfect, complete giving-and-receiving.<sup>168</sup>

### ***Balthasar and Urkenosis***

Hans urs von Balthasar's theology builds upon this teaching on trinitarian missions, rendering Aquinas's often tacit notions of trinitarian giving-and-receiving more explicit. Balthasar's epic depends upon the scripturally-attested concept of *diastasis*, that distance underlying (i) human-divine ontological difference; (ii) the sin-riven, unholy separation of alienated humanity; and (iii) the hope of restored, grace-enabled unity, each rooted ultimately in the (infinite<sup>169</sup>) distance between the divine Persons.<sup>170</sup> As chapter five demonstrates, this inner distance is 'stretched' unprecedentedly in the salvific drama of Christ's crucifixion and descent. Distance/difference appears embedded within creation's primal separations (Gen. 1) and as the (once holy) creature-Creator space becomes stretched to crisis-point, culminating in humanity's postlapsarian expulsion from Eden (3:24). The ensuing narrative portrays humanity's relationship to its creator to range from profound intimacy (e.g. Ps. 139) to wilful rejection, expressed through recurrent infidelity, idolatry and lawlessness, finally occasioning divine punishment through chasmic exilic displacement and God's devastating withdrawal from the temple (Ezek. 10). Israel's tale of disconnection is consummated, overcome and resolved through Christ's self-emptying, his mission representing not simply a divine drawing-near but slave-like descent into death (Phil. 2:5-11), a salvific association with God's separated, wayward children, so that, in him, Adam's primordial communion might be restored and perfected.

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<sup>168</sup> These degrees of participation are Maximus the Confessor's distinctions between being, well-being and eternal well-being (see chapter three).

<sup>169</sup> Balthasar's controversial notion of *infinite* intra-trinitarian distance will be explored in chapter five.

<sup>170</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, volume III: Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil, CRV (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 173.

For Balthasar, however, Christ's death-sealed kenosis is not something 'additional' to God's eternal giving-and-receiving. As early as Genesis 1, enigmatic hints emerge that biblical *diastasis* exceeds merely human-divine and human-human difference/distance through the distinction, yet unity-in-operation, of *Elohim*, *ruach* and *dabar*, willing to "make humankind in *our* image" (1:26). Reflecting on Balthasar's reading of Philippians 2, Graham Ward contends that Christ's self-emptying, far from implying divinity abdicated, actually *manifests* that nature, the kenotic hymn's juxtaposition of slavery and glory revealing them both as "icons of trinitarian procession."<sup>171</sup> The Son's visible outpouring and subsequent exaltation signify the economic time-space 'translation' of eternal trinitarian giving-and-receiving, demonstrated as Paul contrasts the inward, eternal "form (*morphē*) of God" (Phil 2:6) with a progressively outward-focused, self-bestowal "in human likeness (*homoioōmati*)" and "human form (*schēmati*)" (2:7).<sup>172</sup> Christ's movement from inherent trinitarian identity into worldly, transient appearances embodies the *ek-stasis* that characterises God's life of self-emptying, mutual giving:<sup>173</sup> "in begetting the Son, the Father pours out himself without reserve, yet without annihilating himself, thus manifesting, in this self-destitution, both infinite power and powerlessness."<sup>174</sup>

Christ's kenosis constitutes neither divine 'loss' nor merely necessary soteriological action, but is, rather, the full *revelation of God*, the genitive understood both objectively and subjectively: "in generating the Son, the Father does not 'lose' himself to someone else in order thereby to 'regain' himself; for he *is always* himself by giving himself."<sup>175</sup> This primordial self-giving (*Urkenosis*) is utterly intrinsic to God's very nature, for the Father does not exist 'prior' to this

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<sup>171</sup> Graham Ward, 'Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection' in Gardner *et al*, *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 22.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* cf. López, *GUB*, 69.

<sup>174</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison; 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988-95), 4:325. See also Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (hereafter, *MP*), trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), viii.

<sup>175</sup> *Theo-drama*, 2:256.

eternal self-emptying: “he *is* the movement of self-giving that holds nothing back”<sup>176</sup>, or, in Aquinas’s terminology, trinitarian processions are wholly immanent and relations are real. Hence, the gift-exchange of love *is* the very essence of God and hence of Being/being: “absolute freedom of self-possession [understands] itself, according to its absolute nature, as limitless self-giving ... apart from this self-giving, it would not be itself.”<sup>177</sup>

Echoing Sergei Bulgakov, Balthasar thereby regards kenosis as a trinitarian ‘action’, both economically and immanently, rooting Calvary’s sacrificial exchange within eternal, urkenotic giving-and-receiving.<sup>178</sup> Generated by the “uninterrupted reception of everything that he is, of his very self, from the Father”<sup>179</sup>, the Son reciprocates with the return-gift of eternal, unreserved *eucharistia* directed to the Father, the Source, manifested through obedient availability.<sup>180</sup> Receptivity in God implies neither divine ‘lack’ nor ‘evolutionary’ coming-to-be but rather a super-positive active receptivity ‘completed’ only in the return-gift of thanksgiving.<sup>181</sup> Reciprocation is giving’s necessary corollary: paternal self-giving is fulfilled only in filial thankful reception, allowing the Father to *receive* his fatherhood only insofar as the Son embraces his own filial identity; as Aquinas discerned, trinitarian relations distinguish and constitute the Persons.

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:323. See also Anne Hunt, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery: a Development in recent Catholic Theology*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997), 61 and Rowan Williams, ‘Afterword: Making Differences’ in Gardner *et al*, 176.

<sup>177</sup> *Theo-drama*, 2:256

<sup>178</sup> *MP*, 35; cf. Sergius Bulgakov, trans. Boris Jakim, *The Lamb of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 99.

<sup>179</sup> Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, trans. unnamed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 26.

<sup>180</sup> *Theo-drama*, 4:324, 2:256.

<sup>181</sup> Hunt, 84.



Further echoes are heard in Balthasar's affirmation that "[the Son's] *missio* by the Father is a modality of his *processio* from the Father."<sup>182</sup> From this mutual, eternal, ek-static giving is breathed the Spirit whose very essence ("I") as gift – love itself – represents the intrinsic relation of Father and Son ("We") expropriated<sup>183</sup>, maintaining, sealing and bridging the infinite distance between them.<sup>184</sup> God's absolute, reciprocal, inner self-giving eternally constitutes the gift, a donation of unrestricted love, intrinsically "good and full of meaning ... quite simply, beautiful and glorious."<sup>185</sup>

You, Father, give your entire being as God to the Son; you are Father only inasmuch as you give yourself; you, Son, receive everything from the Father and before Him you want nothing other than one receiving and giving back, the one representing, glorifying the Spirit, are the unity of these two mutually meeting, self-givings, their We as a new I that royally, divinely rules them both.<sup>186</sup>

Balthasar's prayer portrays God's life *as* relation, both actively giving and passively receiving – 'letting-be' and 'being-let-be' – the absolute prototype for finite, created freedom which finds completion through comprehending its essential giftedness.<sup>187</sup>

To himself, God is never 'just there' in the Positivist sense: rather, he is always the most 'improbable' miracle in that the utter self-surrender of the Father-Origin truly generates the coeternal Son and that the encounter and union of both truly cause the one Spirit, the hypostasis of all that is meant by 'gift', to proceed from both.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *The von Balthasar Reader* (hereafter, *VBR*), trans. Medard Kehl and Werner Löser (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 134. That "[the Son's] mission from God (*missio*).... is identical with the Person in God and as God (*processio*)" is regarded as the principal conclusion of *Theo-drama* (5:533).

<sup>183</sup> *Theo-drama*, 2:256; cf. 3:511.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:324.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:273.

<sup>186</sup> *VBR*, 428-9.

<sup>187</sup> See Rowan Williams, 'Balthasar and the Trinity' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42.

<sup>188</sup> *Theo-drama*, 2:286-7.

## Creation's return

In differing degrees, both Aquinas and Balthasar implicitly overcome Derridean stringency by establishing the gift as theological, epitomised within the perfect circular communion of Father, Son and Spirit. Trinitarian self-giving (and thereby self-reception) are willed (and therefore 'conscious' and 'remembered'), always-already reciprocated within the motionless motion of love's ceaseless going-beyond-self. So Derrida's aneconomic, amnesic gift ontology collapses, not simply in discovering a (trinitarian) 'place' for the true (divine) gift but in declaring it to be the very locus of the world's making and re-making. Creation is thus established as God affords a share in his inward gift-giving.

So how does this participatory model imprint *reciprocity* upon creation? In this section, I shall argue first that creation's production – in beginning and ceaseless sustaining – finds its precedent in the intellectual and willed processions of Son and Spirit. Moreover, humanity's end is to enjoy reciprocal friendship with God, discovering a grace-enabled place in the circle of divine love. However, this supreme giftedness is threatened inasmuch as sin, understood as vortex-like gift-denial, inhibits this mutuality. Hence, salvation, achieved through Christ's self-giving sacrifice, entails mending humanity's broken relationship to God (and hence to the gift), thus restoring and perfecting communion.

### ***From procession to production***

Far from proposing a monistic account of the world's coming-to-be, Aquinas argues that creation *ex nihilo* finds precedent in God's eternal processions: creatures pre-exist in being *known* – as "effects pre-exist in a cause according to

its mode of being”<sup>189</sup> – and *willed* – as a strictly gratuitous emanation for “by his will he produces things in being.”<sup>190</sup> Whilst divine gift-exchange is being-itself, needing nothing beyond itself, creation proceeds through the Trinity’s willed, strictly *unnecessary* action.<sup>191</sup> Creation, *perpetually* emerging *ex nihilo*, is *forever* gift, continually in motion towards perfection, namely full participation – *qua* creation – in trinitarian subsistent processions: “the going-out [*exitus*] of the persons in the unity of essence is the cause of the going-out of creatures in the diversity of essence.”<sup>192</sup> The Son’s ceaseless acceptance of being serves as “the causal archetype of all reception of being”, whilst the Spirit’s eternal procession is “the reason and exemplar cause of all the gifts that the will of God makes to creatures.”<sup>193</sup> Thus creatures pre-exist within trinitarian plenitudinous gift-exchange and creating entails divinely-willed *participation* therein, communicating some *share* in God’s pre-eminent knowledge and love.<sup>194</sup> The Word’s production of creatures demonstrates an intentional, intellectual basis, whilst the Spirit roots God’s love of his own goodness.<sup>195</sup>

Creation is a single, trinitarian action not proper to any particular Person,<sup>196</sup> yet each has a distinct mode of action, the Son deriving his creative action from Father<sup>197</sup> and the Spirit from both Father and Son.<sup>198</sup> So creatures’ acceptance of being is grounded in the Trinity’s ‘experience’ of giving-and-receiving and creation’s resultant diverse relations enjoy true participation in trinitarian relations and distinction of persons, the very ground of creation’s being.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> *ST*, Ia.19.4.*responsio*.

<sup>190</sup> *SCG*, IV.19.12.

<sup>191</sup> See Levering, 99ff..

<sup>192</sup> *In Sent.*, d.2.*divisio textus*, quoted by Emery, ‘Trinity and Creation’, 59.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>194</sup> *ST*, Ia.45.6.*responsio*.

<sup>195</sup> *ST*, Ia.32.1.ad 3; Ia.37.2.ad 3.

<sup>196</sup> *ST*, Ia.45.6.*responsio*.

<sup>197</sup> *In Ioan.*, 15.26; cf. 1.3; 14.12.

<sup>198</sup> *In Ioan.*, 16.13.

<sup>199</sup> *In Sent.*, 26.2.2.ad.2.

### ***Made for reciprocity***

Yet being itself – the true gift – is trinitarian: divine ‘inner’ love, directed wholly towards the other and always-already reciprocated, is ecstatic, replete and perfect – pure actuality – allowing the world to ‘pre-exist’ therein.<sup>200</sup> Called to communicate divine goodness,<sup>201</sup> human life emerges gratuitously from God and rebounds towards him – “the beginning and end of nature”<sup>202</sup> – participating thereby in trinitarian self-giving mutuality. Whilst the first-born Son alone *is* God’s image (Col. 1.15)<sup>203</sup>, human beings are, nevertheless, made *in* the image of God by virtue of their intellectual nature, becoming most like God when fully imitating his intellect, by which God understands and knows himself.<sup>204</sup> Hence humanity aspires beyond its natural aptitude to know and love God and the graced, yet imperfect, knowledge and love of the just, towards the absolute capacities of the blessed in whom the image “consists in the likeness of glory” and whose received virtues incline them perfectly towards God who is pure act, eternally knowing and loving himself.<sup>205</sup>

Human reason and will are innately orientated towards God only insofar as they participate in the eternal, internal, intellectual and loving processions of the Son and Spirit and their extension into the visible, temporal missions. The divine persons are truly *given* for our enjoyment or ‘fruition’ (*frui*), experienced imperfectly through sanctifying grace and possessed perfectly in beatific vision. For Aquinas, “the gifts of grace perfect nature without destroying it”<sup>206</sup>, attracting humanity beyond itself in sweet, delightful motion towards full union, ecstatic

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<sup>200</sup> Williams, ‘What does love know?’, 267.

<sup>201</sup> *ST*, I.93.

<sup>202</sup> *ST*, Ia-IIae.62.1.ad 3.

<sup>203</sup> *ST*, I.93.1 ad 2.

<sup>204</sup> *ST*, I.93.4.responsio.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *In librum Boethii De Trinitate expositio*, 2.3.responsio, quoted by Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion*, 86.

participation in divine good.<sup>207</sup> This gift of fruition, comes not merely as unrequitable gift but as a seal (*sigillatio*) conforming us to the mode of the Son and Spirit's procession (and mission), namely wisdom and love.<sup>208</sup> Thus, the Spirit's sanctification affords not merely 'cosmetic' perfection but reorients creaturely existence towards full participation in the *habitus* of love, shaping behaviour through the *res tantum* of charity.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, charity "signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with Him; which implies, besides love, *a certain mutual return of love, together with mutual communion*", a grace-initiated, glory-perfected fellowship (cf. 1 Jn. 4:6; 1 Cor. 1:9).<sup>210</sup> In discovering its end in human-divine friendship founded upon ceaseless trinitarian mutuality, creation discovers the gift's ultimate (or foundational) non-aporetic reciprocity in love's endless relay. The spiral participates yet more intensely in the trinitarian circle. As David Bentley Hart maintains,

creation is, before all else, given by God to God, and only then – through the pneumatological generosity of the trinitarian life – given to creatures: a gift that *is* only so long as it is given back, passed on, received and imparted not as a possession but always as grace. This is indeed a "circle" – the infinite circle of divine love – and for that reason capable of a true gift: one that draws creature into a circle upon which they have no natural "right" to intrude. And if creatures participate in God's language of love – in this erotic charity of the gift – simply by being creatures, it is all but impossible for them not also to give, not to extend signs of love to others, not to donate themselves entirely to the economy of agape; the gift must be actively withheld not to be given.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> See *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>208</sup> *In Sent.*, 14.2.2.ad 2 and 3.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. *In Sent.*, 17.1.1.ad 1.

<sup>210</sup> *ST*, Ia-IIae.65.5.*responsio*; italics added.

<sup>211</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: the Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 2004), 268.

### ***Betraying the gift***

Such a marvellous vision remains naively incomplete, however, without recognising sin's destabilising influence. Aquinas takes the classic Augustinian view of evil as privation of the good: "evil is the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing."<sup>212</sup> As God is without flaw, evil is not divinely caused but through defective secondary causes.<sup>213</sup> Nevertheless, as God creates a world which *participates* in being, evil lurks as creation's unravelling possibility, traced to God – goodness itself – only inasmuch as it represents *lack* of goodness.<sup>214</sup> So whilst God never instigates sinful action or moral evil, he nevertheless permits a world where disorder may be endured and suffered.<sup>215</sup> Giftedness allows the possibility of rejection, therefore and resultant sin constitutes "a sickness of the soul"<sup>216</sup> that reorients us away from God, our true end,<sup>217</sup> a loss ultimately death-imposing unless God intervenes radically.<sup>218</sup>

Sin essentially involves refusing God's gift of charity. Hence, the Son and Spirit's self-communicating temporal missions happen both *within* and *for* a distorted creation, a universe envisioned for final trinitarian orientation in perfected giving-and-receiving, yet blighted by sin's gift-denying dis-ease. Founded within the Trinity's transparent gift circle, creation's spiral is meant to intensify mutual charity towards this otherwise elusive to-and-fro, yet sin's entangling, charity-negating vortex simultaneously threatens to unravel that blissful prospect. Redemption therefore entails restoration to our divinely-intended end, re-establishing human-divine reciprocity, accomplished by God's power alone

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<sup>212</sup> *ST*, Ia.49.1.*responsio*.

<sup>213</sup> *ST*, Ia.49.2.*responsio*.

<sup>214</sup> *ST*, I.49.2.ad 2.

<sup>215</sup> See Rik van Nieuwenhove, "'Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion': Aquinas' Soteriology" in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 281.

<sup>216</sup> *ST*, IaIIae.88.1.*responsio*.

<sup>217</sup> *ST*, IaIIae.79.1.*responsio*.

<sup>218</sup> *ST*, IaIIae.88.1.*responsio*.

through participation in Christ's redemptive work and sharing in his charity.<sup>219</sup> The Son's self-giving unto death and the consequent breathing forth of the Spirit, the Gift itself, elicits humankind's faith-response, inaugurating participation in the triune life revealed by Christ.<sup>220</sup> Christ's coming orders the human will towards enjoying God, manifested as humanity responds with love to the great love expressed in the passion, for therein lies "the perfection of human salvation."<sup>221</sup> For Aquinas, true sacrifice represents outwardly the soul's inward spiritual self-offering<sup>222</sup> and hence Calvary's salvation-bestowing sacrifice both manifests eternal, trinitarian self-giving and actualises human participation in that superabundant donation. Old Testament sacrifices therefore derive their soteriological worth proleptically from Christ's unique paschal offering, which in turn manifests visibly his unseen filial sacrifice of obedience and love, an offering which becomes the Church's own in eucharistic offering and in every Christian's self-gift.<sup>223</sup> So Christ crucified both *reveals* trinitarian giving-and-receiving and *enables* others to participate in it through grace, thereby becoming (re-)identified through the gift which Adam disastrously denied.

## Conclusion

So what does Aquinas's extensive legacy tell us about the gift vis-à-vis the mutually incompatible principles postulated by Mauss, Derrida, Marion, Milbank and López?

First, with regard to contentions surrounding mutuality, Aquinas implicitly (and Balthasar explicitly) propose a trinitarianism shaped entirely by the gift-of-self

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<sup>219</sup> For an argument for the nature of Aquinas' understanding of redemption in non-judicial terms see van Nieuwenhove, 'Bearing the marks', 283.

<sup>220</sup> *SCG*, 54.2 and 55.2.

<sup>221</sup> *ST IIIa.46.3.responsio*.

<sup>222</sup> *ST IIaIIae.85.2.responsio*.

<sup>223</sup> See van Nieuwenhove, 'Bearing the Marks', 292.

bestowed, received and reciprocated, not as miraculously ‘supplementary’ (that is, accidental) to existent persons but *constituting* that inner life through unprecedented processions and relations. Reciprocity is thus integral to God. This perfect transparency, eternally ‘occurring’ through God’s intellect and will, represents divine bliss, conscious and forever ‘remembered’ as Christ’s incarnate witness demonstrates. Moreover, whilst creation’s *ex nihilo* coming-to-be through the overflowing generosity of being-itself might appear to be the ultimate one-way gift, its ‘location’ within the Son and Spirit’s eternal processions not only permits some spiralling counter-gift but has that return ‘inbuilt’. Hence, whilst the true, trinitarian gift is supremely immaterial, the world’s emergence proposes countless human ‘gift-objects’ who may transmit the gift-of-being through secondary means and whose rational, self-donating desires, rightly ordered to their divine source, embody being’s response to God and anticipate the entire creation’s return. Creation thus shows the visible gift to participate in the gift inherent, thus overcoming Derrida’s insistence on an impossibly pure, inaccessible gift. Furthermore, as human beings are called to share intimately in that divine giving-and-receiving, charity flourishes and human-divine friendship becomes possible, thus bridging the gap between the ontology and practice of the gift.

Nevertheless, humanity’s *return* to God depends upon the *appearance* of the pure gift within creation in order to defuse sin’s gift-denying effects, translating the eternal divine processions of Son and Spirit into Christ’s embodied life and the Spirit’s Pentecostal outpouring. Moreover, as the next chapter shows, more than merely effecting salvation, creation’s very *emergence* depends upon this gift dynamic.



## PART II

# Unfolding the Gift

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Having demonstrated that the true gift has an eternal, invisible, trinitarian ‘shape’ I explore in this part the means for its manifestation and bestowal through creation’s *ex nihilo* emergence and the perceptible missions of Christ and the Spirit. This is no mere ‘economic’ necessity but reveals also the ‘texture’ of the pure gift as anticipated and remembered, as embodied and as expecting some return in recipients’ thankful counter-gift. From the world’s dawning to its resurrectional end in the new creation, how does God in Christ and the Spirit make the gift ‘coherent’ by showing it to be nothing less than participation in his own perfectly transparent life?



## CHAPTER THREE

# Creation in Christ

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### Introduction

Perpetually held in being, creation has no existence outside the trinitarian gift. The world therefore cannot receive its existence in-and-of-itself: God's constitutive gift-of-being seeks a prior recipient and discovers this in the Son's eternal, transparent, plenitudinous, eucharistic reception. Philosophically, creation can 'be' only 'within' another whose own being is itself donated: that is, the cosmos receives its being *as* gift which is shown *to be* gift in-and-of-itself. Theologically, creation is *in* Christ, participating in the gift-of-being which flows from being-itself, sharing in the timeless, reciprocal donation-reception of Father and Son in the Holy Spirit.

In this chapter I argue that creation's 'beginning' (Gen. 1:1) is Christ himself and its constitutive 'words' (1:3 etc.) cohere in him, the eternal Word (Jn 1:1-3): the world emerges in, through and for him (Col. 1:15-17), not as merely 'external' gift but as divine *self*-gift, conferred contractedly and non-pantheistically through descent. Moreover, if creation's source is Christ, so too its final purpose, his perfect human-divine union providing completion, not merely through temporal incarnation but, more fundamentally, as *eternal* possibility.

To support these bold contentions I will draw extensively on the cosmologies of the great Byzantine father Maximus the Confessor (580-662) and the German cardinal and mystical theologian Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). But why Maximus and Cusa? Like Aquinas, both offer sustained accounts of the centrality of *participation* in understanding creation as gifted, and also accentuate Christ's

as creation's principle, thus bridging between the gift's ontology and its visible, enfleshed manifestation.

In particular, Maximus regards creation, made through the eternal Son as intrinsically ordered towards "the establishment of communion between created and uncreated being in Christ, the Logos", rejoicing that "in the Divinity's perfect inner life there occurs eternally a motif for creative and salvific action: *philanthropia*, love of human beings."<sup>1</sup> So in ceaseless, inner-trinitarian giving-and-receiving creation finds its possibility, God's desire for the world's perfect union with him fulfilled in Christ who spans the gap between the pure gift and the gift-as-observed precisely in *being* and *diffusing* the gift.

Within the same Neoplatonic framework, yet standing, centuries later, on modernity's threshold, Cusa represents a final sustained expression of the mediaeval theological-anthropological synthesis, holding God, world and self inextricably together in participative union-amid-distinction, before later writers drove a wedge between creation and creator, finding the world's immanent principle to be *something* rather than *someone*.<sup>2</sup> Cusa provides detailed exegesis of James 1:17 which portrays giving and the gift itself as divine descending action, pondering thereby how creation can be comprehended not as some 'external' gift *from* God but an 'internal' gift *of* God himself, *unfolded* non-panteistically through Christ, the beginning, so that it may be teleologically *enfolded* in him.

Somewhat abstractly, these thinkers show how the incarnate Christ is creation's principle and centre, the divine-human revelation who initiates, sustains and completes all things. Yet Christ's enfleshed advent happens against the evocative,

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<sup>1</sup> Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See David Albertson, "That He Might Fill All Things: Creation and Christology in Two Treatises by Nicholas of Cusa", *IJST*, 8:2(2006), 184-5.

particular Hebraic gift-symbols of land, temple, king and priest. Hence, I consider also Israel's notions of the gift, which, read against creation's ordained cosmic order, depict a vivid anthropology traced back to Adam, whose original giftedness and delusional rejection frames the story of creation, sin, redemption and glory. Nevertheless, Adam is not Christ's precursor; rather, it is in Christ that true humanity first 'appears', his perfect relationship to the gift revealing the redeemed life, creation's original purpose.

In conclusion, I contend that there is but one gift and that gift is God himself, imparted non-panteistically so that that which is not may come to be. Humanity's calling is not simply to be but to receive God's ultimate gift of eternal well-being, a fully realised share in the divine life. Moreover, creation and salvation in Christ reveal the true gift as vectored, possessing both magnitude and direction, not merely a brute thing, but a thing-given, containing both the giver's 'ecstatic' intentionality and the possibility that its recipient will be thereby transformed, not dampening the gift's original 'momentum' within self-inflating acquisitiveness but becoming carried onwards beyond itself towards kenotic self-dispossession. Gift-giving thus embodies displacement for both donor and donee, seen, as subsequent chapters illustrate, in the missions of Christ and the Spirit and the Church's consequent self-giving.

## **In the beginning**

I have maintained that Aquinas's trinitarian theology resolves the gift's philosophical aporiae. Creation, forever *ex nihilo*, continuously receives being from the one who is being-itself, through the Son's prior self-reception. Yet, this presents its own difficulty for trinitarian donation-reception is perfectly reciprocal, 'defining' God by plenitudinous gift-exchange, whereas creation is simply through constant in-flow of divinely-donated being without corresponding

‘ex-flow’. So creation is established as recipient *per se*, perpetually sustained above the void of non-being.

Moreover, this raises another complication, inasmuch as divine donation differs markedly from human gift-giving. For me to give a friend a present she must *already* exist as potential recipient. Creation, however, is founded “in the beginning” (Gen. 1.3) *and at every subsequent instant* by the uninterrupted inflow of being. That is, God gives us not simply the continuous gift-of-being but also the ongoing *capacity to receive* (cf. Jn. 3.27). To avoid infinite regress, human reception requires God’s eternal trinitarian gift-paradigm, resolving the gift’s philosophical aporiae *theo-logically*.

Contemplating God’s inner donation-reception nonetheless yields little gain for whilst the Son is intrinsically recipient, his reception represents ceaseless, superabundant reciprocity that confounds (or maybe perfects?) humanity’s temporal gift-giving. Human donation-reception, moreover, depends upon existing relationships, whereas the inner-trinitarian relations are inherent (*real*), the Son’s procession eternally constituting both perfect receptivity and unstinting generosity. Nevertheless, as trinitarian *ecstasis* is truly the ground of being and thereby of giving-and-receiving, might we discern therein mysterious intimations of our own recipient status, an identity perfected, creature-wise, by grace? Moreover, is creation something which possesses its own ostensibly independent ‘solidity’ or is there only one all-encompassing gift, namely God himself?

## *Christ, the image of God*

Resolution emerges through contemplating Christ as the image (*eikōn*)<sup>3</sup> of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2-3), vital in comprehending ourselves as created “in the image of God” (Gen 1.27; Rom. 8:29). In unhindered reception of paternal plenitude, eternally reciprocated, the Image truly *is* the original. Moreover, this flawless filial mirroring is manifested incarnately in Jesus of Nazareth (Jn. 1:18; 1 Jn. 1.1-3; cf. Mat. 13.16-17), in whom human gift-reception is exemplified and, more fundamentally, creation itself emerges:

He is the image (*eikōn*) of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him (*en autō*) all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him (*di’ autou*) and for him (*eis auton*). He himself is before all things, and in him (*en autō*) all things hold together (Col. 1:15-17).<sup>4</sup>

Certain patristic and contemporary exegetes propose literary connections between the “in him” of Colossians 1:16 and the “in the beginning” (*be-reshit*) of Genesis 1:1.<sup>5</sup> Eschewing naïve, temporal readings, Philip Alexander ponders the uncommon *reshit*, implying agency or instrumentality, prefixed here with the preposition *be*, meaning ‘in’, ‘by’, ‘into’ or ‘for the sake of.’<sup>6</sup> Although the

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<sup>3</sup> *Eikōn* conveyed a range of meanings, including “representation, reflection, likeness” (James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 87).

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1 repeatedly emphasises creation coming-to-be through God’s word (cf. Ps. 33.6), never empty (cf. Deut. 32:47; Isa. 55:11) but astoundingly potent (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 52). Wisdom’s prominent cosmological role reinforces this (e.g. Prov. 3:19; Prov. 8; Job 28; Sir. 24), whilst Jn. 1:3 and Heb. 1:2-3 offer explicit Christological reappropriation (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6, read alongside 1:18-31). Furthermore, Ephesians’ vivid cosmology, proclaiming Christ as focus for creation, redemption and teleology, explodes all individualistic soteriologies. Cf. Dunn, 88 and Oliver Davies, *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Here I gratefully acknowledge Dr. Paula Gooder’s important lecture on the significance of *be-reshit* given at the 2009 St. Davids Diocesan Clergy School.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Alexander, “‘In the Beginning’: Rabbinic and Patristic Exegesis of Genesis 1:1” in *The exegetical encounter between Jews and Christians in late antiquity*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3.

Hebrew Bible uses *bārā* solely with God as subject,<sup>7</sup> Rabbinic exegesis maintains that *bereshit* denotes God creating “through the agency of the Craftsman-Torah”<sup>8</sup>, thereby according the Torah ‘pre-existent’ status as creation’s artisan and blueprint.<sup>9</sup> Patristic writers likewise affirm God’s exclusive action through another, namely Christ. Augustine contends that God created “not in the beginning of time but in Christ” and renders Christ’s response to the question “who are you?” (Jn. 8:25) as “the beginning, as which I am also speaking to you.”<sup>10</sup> Origen equates wisdom in Proverbs 8 with Christ, linking Colossians 1 and 1 Corinthians 1:24:<sup>11</sup> “what is the ‘beginning’ (*principium*) of all things if it be not our Lord and the Saviour of all Christ Jesus, ‘the firstborn of every creature?’ (Colossians 1:15)”<sup>12</sup>

Proverbs 8:22 portrays wisdom proclaiming

the LORD begat me as the beginning (*reshit*) of His way,  
the antecedent of His works, of old.<sup>13</sup>

C.F. Burney claims that Colossians 1:16’s “in him” intentionally evokes both *reshit* (Prov. 8:22) and *be-reshit* (Gen. 1:1) to expound Christ’s creative agency.<sup>14</sup> The array of meanings ascribed to *be* thereby suggest that God created ‘*in rêshîth*’ or ‘*by the agency of rêshîth*’ or even ‘*into rêshîth*’, implying that “that creation tends *into Him* as its goal.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, *rêshîth* proposes Christ temporally “*before* all things” (Col. 1:17), the ‘sum-total’ (1:17), ‘head’ (1:18) and as ‘first-

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<sup>7</sup> See Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton (Leiderdorp: Deo Publishing, 2005), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander, 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *A Refutation of the Manichees* I.3, in *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>11</sup> *De Principiis* 1.2.1, quoted by Alexander, 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> *Homily I on the Pentateuch*, cited by Alexander, 17.

<sup>13</sup> As rendered by C.F. Burney, ‘Christ as the *Archē* of Creation’ *JTS* 27(1925-6), 168.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 175, capitalization in the original replaced by bold italics here.



fruits' (1:18).<sup>16</sup> Collectively, these rich interpretations portray Christ fulfilling *reshit* superlatively, recapitulating all things in himself (Eph. 1:10) and realizing the “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) through humanity’s teleological reversion to its origin.<sup>17</sup> Hence, Christ is no arbitrary, external agent for all things are mysteriously held *in* him and tend *into* him, who is “all in all” (Eph. 1:23), the universal origin and end, “[sustaining] all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:3).<sup>18</sup>

### ***Creation as divine, non-pantheistic self-gift***

Resonances appear in John’s prologue, locating creation’s temporal coming-to-be both within a Platonic-Logos worldview (1:1-4) and that of the Son’s eternal coming-forth (1:14-18): the Father’s timeless self-expression is creation’s immanent principle, the one *through* whom, *for* whom and *in* whom the world receives itself. Maximus the Confessor teaches that God eternally possessed *logoi* for everything that would be created, thus bringing forth all things, visible and invisible, from non-being.<sup>19</sup> Discussing Gregory Nazianzus’s mysterious statement “we are a portion of God,”<sup>20</sup> he refutes Origenist contentions concerning humanity’s connaturality with God, rooting all things instead in *logoi* forever “known by God” and “securely fixed ... in him who is the truth of all things.”<sup>21</sup> Unlike the creator, all things “exist in potentiality before they exist in actuality,” thus distinguishing – yet never divorcing – the ‘levels of existence’ of

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> For detailed discussion of the prepositions ascribed to Christ in Col. 1, see Dunn, 87-99.

<sup>19</sup> *Ambiguum* 7, translated in Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) (hereafter, *CMJC*), 54. See also Melchisedec Törönen, *Unity and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 129-30 and Tollefsen, chapter 3.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* 14.7 (PG 35:865C).

<sup>21</sup> *Ambiguum* 7 (*CMJC*, 54).

each<sup>22</sup>, highlighting inherent *difference-in-unity* between the created and uncreated, thus spanning the ontological gulf without violation.<sup>23</sup>

Each thing is constituted through its own particular ‘word’, individual *logoi* cohering in the divine Logos.<sup>24</sup> Indeed creation’s *logoi* represent one of numerous ‘Logos incarnations’, manifested also in scripture’s spiritual meanings, superlatively in Christ and, participatively, in believers’ devout lives.<sup>25</sup> Maximus thus espouses what was later termed an ‘exemplarist’ worldview: as *causa exemplaris* God holds intellectually all Ideas comprising creation’s patterns.<sup>26</sup> This Platonic notion supports wisdom’s co-creative role (Prov. 8:22-31; Wis. 11:20b) and creation’s Christocentrism (Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17). Creation thus embodies the divinely-imposed order of Genesis 1, both in temporal emergence and final motion into God (cf. Rom. 11:36). Creation thus receives itself *from* God as gift and returns *to* God as its final rest, an *exitus-reditus* model rendered possible within the Son’s always-prior reception.

Within the same Neoplatonic tradition, Nicholas of Cusa relates divine and creaturely reception by regarding the *incarnation* – viewed as mysteriously *eternal* – as creation’s principle. His celebrated *De docta ignorantia* (‘On Learned Ignorance’) proposes God as ‘absolute maximum’, infinity itself, yet, mysteriously, the measure of the finite,<sup>27</sup> “an infinity so radical it exceeds the opposition of alterity, such that in the maximum opposites coincide.”<sup>28</sup> What are we to make of this paradox? Cusa offers several mathematical elucidations, most

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<sup>22</sup> *Ambiguum* 7 (CMJC, 55).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>24</sup> *Ambiguum* 10, translated in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), 105-8.

<sup>25</sup> See Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Second Edition) (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 77-9.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.15.3.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* (hereafter, *DDI*) in *Nicholas of Cusa: Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 85-206.

<sup>28</sup> Albertson, 186.

instructively the circle-inscribed polygon.<sup>29</sup> As the polygon's sides increase in number, spatial difference decreases, indicating the polygon's ever-intensifying participation in the circle.<sup>30</sup> For Cusa, this represents the relationship of intellect to truth, for truth remains elusively beyond us whilst intimately present: "there is no proportion between the infinite and the finite"<sup>31</sup> and "because the infinite escapes all proportion, the infinite as infinite is unknown."<sup>32</sup> For Cusa, possibility and actuality are both eternal, coexisting forever in God. Indeed, God *is* "this eternal union of possibility and actuality", a perfect meeting of *posse* and *est* reflected in his self-coined term *possest*.<sup>33</sup> As absolute maximum, God's perfect actuality is not distinct from the minimum, for in him the two coincide.<sup>34</sup> In God, apparent opposites meet without dissolving or resolving difference, allowing coexistence that, outside God, is jarringly conflictual. As a Platonist, Cusa tenaciously rejected the principle of non-contradiction, regarding the compatibility of contradictories in God as essential for mystical ascent towards divine unity and simplicity, for all separated things participate in underlying oneness.<sup>35</sup>

Cusa describes creation as 'descent' or 'contraction' from the absolute maximum, thus yielding space-time particularities.<sup>36</sup> Having demonstrated that all things are in God he contends that "God is in all things, as if, by mediation of the universe."<sup>37</sup> Regarding the universe as the "most perfect ... [preceding] all things in the order of nature", he claims, astoundingly, that "the universe is the creature",

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<sup>29</sup> For other models see Elizabeth Brient, "How can the infinite be the measure of the finite: Three Mathematical Models from the *De docta ignorantia*?" in *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, ed. Peter J. Casarella (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 210-225.

<sup>30</sup> *DDI*, I.3.10

<sup>31</sup> *DDI*, I.3.9

<sup>32</sup> *DDI*, I.1.3

<sup>33</sup> See Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), 17ff; quotation, 18.

<sup>34</sup> *DDI*, I.4.12.

<sup>35</sup> *DDI*, I.2.5.

<sup>36</sup> *DDI*, II.5.117

<sup>37</sup> *DDI*, II.5.117

with the hasty qualification that “each receives all things in such a way that in each thing all are *contractedly* this thing.”<sup>38</sup> So divine fullness is *given* universally but *received* according to nature. Here Cusa bears striking resemblance to Meister Eckhart: “God is in each being insofar as that being is, but in none insofar as it is this being.”<sup>39</sup>

Cusa’s later treatise, *De Dato Patris Luminum*, expands consideration of participation in the absolute maximum, taking its title from James 1:17, a text which depicts giving as *descent*: “every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” For Cusa, the apostle’s intention is to demonstrate the attainment of ‘everything desired’, which for intellectual spirits is understanding, cascading from the Giver of best gifts.<sup>40</sup> Under divine grace, the intellect apprehends this ‘best gift’, represented brilliantly in Solomon’s request for wisdom, thereby progressing from potency towards act.<sup>41</sup> As maximal good, simple and indivisible, the Father of lights gives nothing less than himself and so creation entails his genuine gift-of-*self*, “[imparted] ... undiminishedly.”<sup>42</sup>

Cusa seemingly veers towards pantheism, declaring that

... it seems to be the case that God and the creation are the same thing – according to the mode of the Giver *God*, according the mode of the given *the creation*. Accordingly, there would [seem to] be only one thing, and it would receive different names in accordance with the different modes. Hence, this [one] thing would be eternal in accordance with the mode of

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<sup>38</sup> *DDI*, II.5.117; italics added.

<sup>39</sup> Eckhart, *Commentary on John*, n. 206, 4-10, quoted in Elizabeth Brient, “Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa on the ‘Where’ of God” in (ed.) Thomas M. Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto, *Nicholas of Cusa and his Age: Intellect and Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 131.

<sup>40</sup> *De Dato Patris Luminum* (hereafter, *DDPL*), I.92. The translation used is Jasper Hopkins’ in his *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1983), chapter 5.

<sup>41</sup> *DDPL*, I.94

<sup>42</sup> *DDPL*, II.97. Albertson (198) discerns here the Dionysian maxim that goodness is inherently self-diffusive and Eckhart’s contention that divine giving is never partial.

the Giver, but it would be temporal in accordance with the mode of the given; and it would be both Creator and created, and so on.<sup>43</sup>

Jasper Hopkins refutes pantheistic readings that regard the finite universe as a contraction of the Infinite God,<sup>44</sup> contending that Cusa's metaphysic of contraction denies that recipients contract (that is, receive limitedly) God's being *itself* but rather a *likeness* thereof.<sup>45</sup> The gift of being descends through mediation of the universe whose forms (like Maximus's *logoi*) donate being, themselves derived from God who is Absolute Form of being.<sup>46</sup> Only thus can Cusa venture that "the infinite is received finitely; the universal singularly; and the absolute, contractedly."<sup>47</sup> There is but one gift: God himself.

Nevertheless, despite divine self-donation, creation differs *infinitely* from the creator just as Cusa's circle-inscribed polygon remains forever distinct from the circle from which it derives and to which it tends. Topology, that mathematical discipline concerned with the preservation of spatial properties following deformation, offers useful insights. Although materially and geometrically different, a ring doughnut and a single-handled mug are topologically equivalent for the mug's shape can be derived from the doughnut's by continuous deformation. They are *homeomorphic* – sharing *similar*, but not *identical*, form. Our being and God's, whilst radically different 'geometrically' (we are not God and never will be in infinite ascent towards perfection), nevertheless share similar form inasmuch as each creaturely form derives from, is oriented to and participates in the Absolute Form which is God. Nonetheless whereas mug and doughnut can 'become' each other, correspondence between our being and God's is strictly one-way: whilst incomplete humanity aspires towards deification, God

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<sup>43</sup> *DDPL*, II.97.

<sup>44</sup> Hopkins, *Metaphysic of Contraction*, 97.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 102. See also Louis Dupré "The Question of Pantheism from Eckhart to Cusanus" in Casarella, *Cusanus*, 74-88.

<sup>46</sup> See Simon Oliver, 'Christ, Descent and Participation', in Adrian Pabst and Angus Paddison (eds.), *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth*, (London: SCM Press, 2009), 75.

<sup>47</sup> *DDPL*, II.99.

lacks nothing. The contraction which generates creation is the bringing-to-be of that which simply *is not*: creatures enjoy participation in divine plenitude – privation indeed – yet a genuine *share* nonetheless.

Using another metaphor, Cusa observes that some mirrors provide accurate images, whilst others distort, indicating differing capacities to ‘receive’ the original.<sup>48</sup> In God alone “[what is received] is received as it is”<sup>49</sup>: solely in filial procession is the image truly the original, reciprocated eternally through undepleted, non-identical return-gift. Creaturely reception differs markedly in that being is received like an object given light in full, self-imparting spectrum whilst *absorbing* that light *contractedly*, according to colour.<sup>50</sup>

Divine self-donation is genuinely kenotic, representing not self-diminishing ‘loss’ that would render God subject to creation but rather the reverse: a replete donation, raising it towards participation in divine fullness.<sup>51</sup> Creation’s particularising ‘unfolding’ happens through receiving God’s being finitely, inseparable from its unifying ‘enfolding’ in God. It is crucially dependent upon the eternal Son’s ‘unfolding-enfolding’ through procession, which, although *perceived* temporally, possesses the uniquely trinitarian quality of ‘motionless motion’.<sup>52</sup> God’s manifestation in creation reflects an always-prior action in the Word:

In this Light – which is the Father’s Word, First-begotten Son, and Supreme Manifestation – the Father of lights has freely begotten all the descending manifestations. Thus, all the manifesting lights were enfolded in the Supreme Power-and-Strength-for-uniting-the-manifestations.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *DDPL*, II.99.

<sup>49</sup> *DDPL*, II.99.

<sup>50</sup> *DDPL*, II.100.

<sup>51</sup> Oliver, 76.

<sup>52</sup> See, further, Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 134-5.

<sup>53</sup> *DDPL*, IV.110

In the Word's unique, primal, maximal manifestation of the Father, all diverse, contracted, temporal manifestations cohere and participate.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, unlike the Word's perfectly actualised reception, these descending gifts are received in potentiality, like seeds' unrealised possibilities.<sup>55</sup> Hence, creatures begun through descending filial disclosure<sup>56</sup> remain unfinished, awaiting completion through return to their divine beginning.<sup>57</sup> Receiving itself gratuitously from Absolute Maximality and imitating this maximality in diversity and plurality, creation represents a 'contracted maximum', descending from the Father of lights.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Eternal incarnation?***

However, creation's emergence through the Word relates not simply to timeless procession but also temporal advent. Maximus ponders Christ's mystery, "hidden throughout the ages and generations but now ... revealed to his saints" (Col. 1:26) "at the end of the ages" (1 Pet. 1:20) in "the ineffable and incomprehensible hypostatic union between Christ's divinity and humanity."<sup>59</sup> Preserving both natures' integrity and entailing no change or motion for God,<sup>60</sup> Christ's divine-human union represents

the divine purpose conceived before the beginning of created things, .... the preconceived goal for which everything exists, but which itself exists on account of nothing. Inasmuch as it leads to God, it is the recapitulation of the things he has created .... the mystery which circumscribes all the ages."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Albertson, 201.

<sup>55</sup> *DDPL*, IV.112-116.

<sup>56</sup> *DDPL*, IV.111

<sup>57</sup> *DDPL*, IV.112-116. Gregory of Nyssa echoed Cusa's belief in creatures' mysteriousness, arguing that a thing always surpasses its outward characteristics, its inner reality remaining apprehendable only *beyond* time and in relation to God. See Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 90-1.

<sup>58</sup> *DDI*, II.4.112.

<sup>59</sup> *Ad Thalassium* 60 (*CMJC*, 123).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid* (*CMJC*, 124).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid* (*CMJC*, 124); cf. Eph. 1:10.

Christ's incarnation constitutes the very bound (fulfilment) of all things, "the union between a limit of the ages and limitlessness, between measure and immeasurability, between finitude and infinity, between Creator and creation, between rest and motion ... conceived before the ages."<sup>62</sup> Received sensibly (1 Jn. 1:1-3) Christ transports us beyond mere knowledge of reason towards knowledge of participation by grace, anticipating final perfection in deification.<sup>63</sup> Eternally foreknown, the Son's incarnation exceeds salvific remedy, however: "Christ's concrete person is not only God's final thought for the world but also his original plan."<sup>64</sup> The perfect, unconfused divine-human synthesis thus unfolds the gift's origin in the Son's transparent procession, revealing temporally and spatially timeless trinitarian giving-and-receiving.<sup>65</sup>

Assuming flesh, the Lord deigned to become "the type and symbol of himself", thereby manifesting himself and leading creation to himself.<sup>66</sup> Christ thus reveals humankind "mysteriously 'inhabited' by another", a "new manner of being", a particular "divine mode."<sup>67</sup> In him, humanity is drawn towards maximal identity, becoming like God through participation in divine being, whilst preserving ontological difference.<sup>68</sup> Maintaining humanity and divinity unconfusedly, Christ's incarnate self-donation is "a new mystery", inaugurating the new creation.<sup>69</sup> Even his crucified self-emptying represents supreme freedom, subjecting all that diminishes humankind to himself, thereby reawakening humanity – and consequently creation – to its original fullness.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid* (CMJC, 125).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*. (CMJC, 126).

<sup>64</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: the Universe according to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), 207.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 208.

<sup>66</sup> *Ambiguum* 10, (Louth, 132).

<sup>67</sup> Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 215.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.



Cusa, however, proposes an even more radical synthesis for in Christ “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17) as he “fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23). Having considered God as Absolute Maximum and creation as contracted maximum, he imagines the Son’s *eternal* incarnation. Inherently intellectual and sensible, humanity embraces all things, constituting a “microcosm or miniature world”<sup>71</sup> and desiring the maximality found in the Absolute, an ascent accomplished solely in the singular human being

who would be the universal contracted being of each creature through this human’s union with the absolute, which is the absolute being of all things. Through this human being all things would receive the beginning and the end of their contraction, so that through this human, who is the contracted maximum, all things would come forth from the absolute maximum into contracted being and would return to the absolute through the same intermediary....<sup>72</sup>

This unique person would be “the perfection of the universe, holding primacy in everything”<sup>73</sup> and through him “God would, in the humanity, be all things contractedly, just as God is the equality of being all things absolutely.”<sup>74</sup> The many-sided polygon of human intellect lies ever within the circle of divine intellect – creation’s “absolute truth and absolute quiddity”<sup>75</sup> – but, in Christ, the polygon attains maximality, possessing infinite sides and thereby achieving actuality by sheer union with the circle.<sup>76</sup> Hence, the incarnation manifests the perfect union of Absolute Maximum and contracted maximum, revealing the world’s eternal ‘where’. Nevertheless, this kenosis demands no divine ‘shrinking’ to ‘fit’ humanity, rather the (immensely positive) embrace of flesh, thus fashioning creation’s very zenith.<sup>77</sup> Christ reveals God

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<sup>71</sup> *DDI*, III.3.198.

<sup>72</sup> *DDI*, III.3.199

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *DDI*, III.3.200

<sup>75</sup> Brient, “How can the infinite”, 222-3.

<sup>76</sup> *DDI*, III.4.206.

<sup>77</sup> See Oliver, 79; cf. *DDI*, III.3.202.

as both God and human, whose created humanity has in the highest way been assumed into unity with God, as if the universal contraction of all things were hypostatically and personally united with the equality of being in all things.<sup>78</sup>

The incarnation reveals tangibly that the Word enfolds creation eternally and *temporally*. Hence, creation is inherently Christomorphic and theophanic.<sup>79</sup> All things receive contracted being through the union of the Absolute Maximum with the universal contraction that is humanity.<sup>80</sup> For Cusa, the incarnation is eternal, for the Word, as *possest*, unites actuality and potentiality, presenting the Father's visible, incarnate gift as descending manifestation of this timeless reality. Creation itself *unfolds* temporally this eternal incarnation, showing all things ever *enfolded* in trinitarian self-giving love.<sup>81</sup>

Cusa implicitly demonstrates thereby the fullest imaginable meaning of creation's *reshit* (Gen. 1:1): in Christ, the one in whom, through whom and for whom creation comes to be (Col. 1:16) "a series of impossible unions" is effected, between "created and uncreated, time and eternity, death and life, and, just as impossibly, human language and divine Word."<sup>82</sup> As Christ surpasses creation in nature and timeless perfection<sup>83</sup>, the world does not merely 'provide' flesh for some discrete event, but is *already* christoform, ever prepared for his incarnate advent. So instead of envisaging the Word appearing in the world we should rather imagine *the world in the Word*.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *DDI*, III.3.202

<sup>79</sup> Oliver, 79.

<sup>80</sup> *DDI*, III.3.202

<sup>81</sup> Albertson, 202

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>83</sup> *DDI*, III.3.202.

<sup>84</sup> Whilst *De Dato* explores creation's divine descent, the approximately contemporary text *De Filiatione Dei* investigates humanity's filiation in the Son, as intellect awakens to true identity. Taken together, they exhibit a classic *exitus-reditus* structure.

The temporal world is eternal in God in perfect union, “[descending] and received in its own being with a beginning.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed,

in the Giver every creature is eternal and is eternity itself.... Every gift was eternally with the Father, from whom it descends when it is received. For the Giver gave always and eternally; but [the gift] was received only with a descent from eternity.<sup>86</sup>

Thus humanity’s underlying gift dilemma is resolved: on the one hand, the Son’s eternal reception of the Father’s gift differs radically from humanity’s through maximal transparency, total reciprocity and in being forever ‘established’. However, in temporally unfolding the eternal incarnation, the world is already enfolded in the Son, finding in him its ground of receptivity, “a maximally perfected microcosmos, the humanity of Jesus.”<sup>87</sup> Jesus thus manifests the limit (fulfilment) of creaturely reception – and the fullness of self-giving love in kenotic disappropriation.<sup>88</sup>

As the Son is forever united to creation’s possibility so that possibility finds completion in him, beginning with creation’s *unfolding* through descent and perfected in *enfolding* ascent towards perfect union with Absolute Maximality. So whereas Meister Eckhart, in denoting God as the true ‘place’ of all things, imagined creatures undertaking a journey *beyond* time, motion and number *to* eternity and rest in the One, Cusa emphasises the passage *into* the world, for creation’s truth is precisely the *incarnate* Son, the intersection between unfolding and enfolding, “the place where every movement of nature and grace find rest”<sup>89</sup> (cf. Col. 1). Cusa thus affirms creation’s agent to be “not the *verbum increatum*”

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<sup>85</sup> *DDPL*, III.106.

<sup>86</sup> *DDPL*, III.104.

<sup>87</sup> Albertson, 186.

<sup>88</sup> The next chapter will illustrate this reception-donation dynamic as reported in the gospels.

<sup>89</sup> See Brient, “The ‘Where’ of God”, 140-41. The quotation is from Cusa’s *Sermo* CCXVI, n.14, quoted *ibid.*, 145.

but “the *verbum incarnatum*”, who remains immanently present.<sup>90</sup> Creation’s emergence and completion are thus intrinsically Christological (cf. Col. 1:15-20): “cosmogenesis is Christogenesis.”<sup>91</sup> So the incarnation is not narrowly soteriological, but possesses cosmic ‘infrastructure’: creation and salvation are inextricably one, entailing christomorphic motion, in descent and ascent respectively.<sup>92</sup>

## In Adam

As *possest*, the Son brings *potential* beings into *actuality* through his eternal procession from the Father, the trinitarian basis of all giving-and-receiving. Moreover, Christ makes manifest tangibly and appropriably an intensifying participation in that gift, thereby reconstituting humanity – and thus all things – in their appointed status “in him .... through him and for him” (Col. 1:16). Patristic exegesis shows humanity to be understood only in Christ, creation’s archetype and exemplar, who displays humanity to itself, demonstrating that it coheres in him alone and enabling its teleological return. Human beings are therefore defined from the future, from Christ whose kingdom and lordship extend their sway proleptically and transformatively into the present.

Nevertheless, Christ emerges also from the *past*, defined against Israel’s complex signifiers of covenants, law, land and sacrifice. Hence, the cosmic perspective outlined above may be enriched through considering ‘earthy’ Hebraic theological anthropology.

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<sup>90</sup> Albertson, 189, building on Bernard McGinn’s ‘*Maximum Contratuctum et Absolutum*: The Motive for the Incarnation in Nicholas of Cusa and his Predecessors’ in Izbicki and Bellitto (eds.), 172.

<sup>91</sup> McGinn, 162.

<sup>92</sup> As McGinn notes (152), the soteriological motives of Lk. 19:10, 1 Tim. 1:15 Tit. 2:13-14 etc., are complemented by the expansive cosmological vision of Jn. 1:1-3, Rom. 1:4, Col. 1:15-17, Eph. 1:3-10; 4:10, Heb. 2:10 and 1 Pet. 1:18-20.

First, I observe how Jerusalem's temple represents the cosmos in its divinely-given order, according both king and high priest the sacral task of ensuring that earth coheres with heaven: creation is manifested as disciplined and mediates between the pure gift and the gift-as-observed. Secondly, Adam's original kingly/priestly calling universalises this vocation as humankind receives, preserves and returns the gift. Thirdly, humanity, made to rest finally in God, is intrinsically in motion, profoundly malleable, precariously ambiguous. Hence, true freedom entails re-alignment with appointed ends, namely deification, yet as the world's unruly depths threaten creation, so the priest-king may deludedly stray beyond God's gift-economy, thereby jeopardizing creation's giftedness and humanity's ultimate end.

### ***King and priest in the cosmic temple***

Harrowed through turbulent exile, the Pentateuchal priestly writer emphasises creation's intrinsic disciplining, for unlike the chaotic 'formless void' – the evocative *tohu wabohu* of Genesis 1:2 – creation materialises through sequential ordering.<sup>93</sup> Partitioning waters and dry land (1.9-10) marks God's systematic, purposeful act in creation's emergence and conservation (Pss. 33:6-7; 104:6-9), with tumultuous waters bridled by God's forceful word (Job 38:8-11). Creation's constitutive gift is imparted neither haphazardly nor confusedly but with particular form and ordering.

Expanding Aristotelian ideas of natural place and motion, Meister Eckhart affirmed God as created things' proper location; mislocated, they suffer restlessness and seek restoration to their proper peace and stability.<sup>94</sup> However,

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<sup>93</sup> Downplaying possible influence from ancient, violent near-eastern myths, Ratzinger observes Genesis emphasizing God's omnipotent capacity to create out of *nothing* whilst offering evil no pre-creative substantial basis. See Joseph Ratzinger, *'In the beginning': a Catholic Understanding of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Benedict Ramsey, O.P. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 13.

<sup>94</sup> See Brient's "Where' of God", 129.

when God removes creation's 'restraining orders' the flood almost unmakes the world, emphasizing its gratuitous contingency. Righteous, representative Noah, however, receives God's assurance of protection (Gen. 9:11), an "everlasting covenant" (*b'ērit 'olam*) of striking universality (9:16), theologically preceding and perfecting the beneficiary-specific covenants made with Abraham (pledging land and descendants), Moses (law-adherence following gracious deliverance) and David (royal lineage). Following repeated transgression, the exiles are deprived of Abraham's land, the temple of Mosaic sacrifice and the Davidic monarchy, thus exposing non-universal covenants as breachable; God's gift may be rejected or withdrawn. From Babylonian desolation, however, hope for a "new covenant" emerges, exceeding former dispensations, forgiving sin and internalizing law, yet dependent upon creation's underlying fixedness (Jer. 31:31-7), an expanded, eventually 'democratised', covenant.

Robert Murray has shown the pre-exilic king's role to be principally *sacral*, in maintaining order (e.g. Ps. 89).<sup>95</sup> Awesome royal responsibilities enacted in the annual festivals regulated not simply the land's continued fertility, but *cosmic* stability.<sup>96</sup> The Deuteronomistic Historian assesses kings through polarizing formularies, concluding that, despite righteous exceptions, cumulative lawlessness yields overwhelming disorder and loss. Nevertheless, although exiled, dispossessed Israel had to reinterpret covenantal symbolism, the royal cosmic *ideal* remained paramount, eventually being reallocated to the post-exilic priesthood.<sup>97</sup>

Israel's tabernacle – and, subsequently, temple – enshrined this regulative paradigm, signifying creation's cadenced emergence through the sanctuary's

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<sup>95</sup> Although Deuteronomistic redaction proposed a more person-focused voluntaristic ethical system, the earlier expansive vision persisted. See Murray's, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 48.

<sup>96</sup> See *ibid.*, chapter 5.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-88.

physical structure. Believing that God himself dwelled therein, enthroned (Ps. 11:4; Jer. 17:12), the tabernacle was initially undivided, thereby affirming creation's original unity (Ex. 40:17-19). Entry of the covenant-bearing ark (40:20-21) necessitated a veil to denote categories of holiness which echoed firmamental separations: whilst the inner sector was deemed 'most holy' – intrinsically holy, having power to convey holiness – the outer zone was regarded as holy whilst lacking holiness-imparting power.<sup>98</sup> The sanctuary was God's dwelling-place amidst creation and the veil's four colours, representing creation's elements, implied the eternal and invisible as merely *hidden* – but not separated – from the tangible, temporal world.<sup>99</sup> The high priest, whose vestments bore the divine Name, became 'actively' holy on entering the sanctuary, thus transmitting holiness to creation through sustained connection to its vivifying source.<sup>100</sup> Creation remained entirely provisional, dependent upon union with the life-giving holy of holies (*debir*), a bond interpreted as righteousness. The *debir* denoted creation's first day, that state beyond time and matter, the very mystery of existence itself, the dynamic hub around which the ordered creation moved in ceaseless praise (echoed in the *Benedicite*).<sup>101</sup> In Aristotelian terms, the *debir* represented the actual from which creation emerged in potency: contingent, unfinished and yet – through divine connection – glorious.<sup>102</sup>

For Philo, the powers surrounding YHWH in the *debir* were distinguishable 'engravings' subsequently given 'solidity' in creation, a connection-amid-differentiation seen in Ezekiel's chariot visions (Ezek. 1, 10) where hidden inner

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<sup>98</sup> Margaret Barker, *Creation: a Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 40.

<sup>99</sup> Indeed, *'alum* ('hidden') and *'olam* ('eternity') share a common root (Barker, 66). Jesus, too, alludes to the veiled presence of the Kingdom (e.g. Lk. 17:21).

<sup>100</sup> Barker, *Creation*, 40-41.

<sup>101</sup> It was believed that some such as Enoch, Jacob and Moses had been granted visions of creation's mystery, a revelation which Christians later claimed for themselves (Jn. 1:51, 3:3, 17:24; Rev. 22:3-5). See Barker, *Creation*, 79-81.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Philo, *On the Special Laws (De Specialibus Legibus)* I.66, tr. F.H.Colson, *Philo, with an English translation* (Loeb Classical Library) Vol. VII (London/Cambridge, Massachusetts: Heinemann/Harvard University Press, 1937), 137.

realities (*dēmut*) correlate with outward appearance (*mar'eh*).<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, creation is preserved in order, with cosmic elements bound to the divine Name through a great oath (1 Enoch 69).<sup>104</sup> The temple's foundation rock became regarded as the fixed point where dry land emerged from chaos and Adam was formed from dust, where Adam, Cain and Abel offered sacrifice, Abram and Melchizedek met, Isaac was nearly sacrificed and Jacob received his magnificent ladder vision.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the connection with the primal subterranean deluge was symbolised by the temple courtyard's vast bronze basin, believed to represent the sea over which YHWH was enthroned (Pss. 29:10; 93:2-4).<sup>106</sup>

As appointed mediator, the king was to minister at this unique meeting-place of heaven and earth (cf. 1 Kings 8:30), executing cosmic rites which preserved 'rightness' (*sedeq*) and well-being (*šalom*), echoing God's perpetual ordering.<sup>107</sup> Such royal/priestly liturgy conveyed God's gift of holiness, whilst failure led to distortion (*'awon*), a word linked etymologically to 'iniquity'.<sup>108</sup> Within 'the everlasting covenant' (2 Sam. 23:5; cf. Gen. 9:16), the king sought God's justice (*mišpat*) and righteousness (*sedeq*), embodied them (Ps. 72:1-2) and demonstrated rightful ordering paralleling cosmic concord.<sup>109</sup> Administering righteousness, wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34 etc.), justice (3:28), compassion (Pss. 72:4; 132:15) and judgement (122:5), YHWH's royal vice-regent was to correlate temporal human ethics with eternal divine purposes, *receiving* God's ceaseless gratuity in harmonious order.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> See Barker, *Creation*, 85-87; cf. Prov. 8:27-29.

<sup>104</sup> Barker, *Creation*, 120. In Christian terms, it is in Christ that 'all things hold together' (Col. 1:17; cf. Eph 1:10 and 4:3).

<sup>105</sup> Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 19.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>107</sup> Murray, 74.

<sup>108</sup> Barker, *Creation*, 43.

<sup>109</sup> Murray, 65.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Barker, *Creation*, 6.



Moreover, the king's role exceeded mediation. The first temple's *debir* contained YHWH's cherubim-enveloped throne (1 Chr. 28:18), on which the *king* sat (29:23) as "the human presence of the LORD".<sup>111</sup> Indeed, Aaron bore the divine Name with intercessory power (Ex. 28:36-38) and Moses and Aaron's blessing manifested YHWH's glory (Lev. 9:2; cf. Sir. 50:11).<sup>112</sup> Moreover, later Rabbinic traditions regarded Aaron's vestments as a copy of God's garments, derived from the fabric of the divine mystery.<sup>113</sup> The high priest, whose robe depicted "the whole world" (Wis.18:24), interceded not merely for Israel but for the cosmos, whilst representing earth and heaven conjoined and disclosing God's very presence.<sup>114</sup>

### ***Adam's universalising priesthood***

Nevertheless, beneath such exaltedness lay the universal human being, Adam, called to receive creation as gift and return it to the Giver, manifesting the priestly reciprocity found perfectly in Christ alone, the Father's *eikōn* (Col. 1:15), yet imparted to privileged humanity (Gen. 1:26). As an image corresponds to an 'original', so God-imaging creatures have dynamic 'gift-exchange' mysteriously inbuilt, as "animate icons" accorded a 'theophanic' vocation of symbolizing the divine presence in the cosmic temple.<sup>115</sup> Human beings thus occupy a liminal status between Creator and creation, like sacraments, embodying the original, pre-eminent commission.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Barker, *Creation*, 25.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Wis. 18:24.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Barker, *Creation*, 204-5.

<sup>115</sup> S. Dean McBride Jr., "Divine Protocol: Genesis 1:1-2:3 as Prologue to the Pentateuch" in William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride Jr., *God who creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 16.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-40.

Following the Noahic, Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, Genesis-Exodus climaxes as Aaron and his sons are purified and vested as priests and the tabernacle completed. This account reiterates Eden's cultic terminology, suggesting an original Adamic priestliness merely glimpsed in Aaron's line.<sup>117</sup> Whilst wonderful, Aaron's vestments required human skill (Ex. 28), unlike Adam and Eve's magnificent garments given through direct influx of light.<sup>118</sup> Humanity's primal vocation to fill creation with divine beauty and glory (cf. Gen. 1:28)<sup>119</sup> is merely echoed by priests entering the sanctuary (Lev. 9:23). Accorded splendid robes in creation's original temple and commissioned as conduit for divine blessing, Adam was made *in* the image (*selem*) of God,<sup>120</sup> or, in certain extra-biblical texts, *as* the image of God whom the angels were commanded to worship, a motif which New Testament writers apply repeatedly to Christ, the new Adam (Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:11-12; cf. Ps. 2:7).

However, insight into creation's glorious receptivity was *given* (and therefore not evident) to Isaiah (Isa. 6:3), indicating the sanctuary's awesome disclosure but also the tragedy of creation's splendour becoming veiled. Unlike Adam's uninhibited communion (Gen. 2), "[seeing] the King, the LORD of hosts" overwhelms unworthy Isaiah (6:5). Reserving priestliness for Israel's élite represented a *loss*, for in Adam this identity was universally bestowed, with cosmic efficaciousness (contrast Ex. 28:9, 21, 29). The Aaronic tabernacle-temple paradigm therefore imaged Adam's original vocation, awakening fallen, yet gifted, people to *return* that gift to its source, discerning within limited, temporal rites humankind's primal, cosmic priesthood, offering praise and thus receiving the world anew.

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<sup>117</sup> Barker, *Creation*, 203, 228.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* Contrast Gen. 3:15.

<sup>119</sup> Barker, *Creation*, 204.

<sup>120</sup> Noting the pluralised "let *us* make..." (Gen. 1:26), Philo observes that Adam is created in the image (*eikōn*) not of the Father but of "the second God, who is his Logos", insight well-utilised by early Christians. See Philo's *Questions on Genesis*, II.62; Barker, *Creation*, 202.

Israel's ancient sacrificial rites likewise highlighted *creation's* benefit, above all in *Yom Kippēr's* announcement of cosmic order through re-establishing righteousness (*sedaqah*), peace, wholeness and well-being (*šalom*) amid the perennial threat of primal chaos.<sup>121</sup> Atonement (*tiqqun 'olam*) involved straightening creation's crookedness and so 'cleansing' the sanctuary signified not divine propitiation but healing a rift, repairing a tainted thing, in this case the temple.<sup>122</sup> The verb *kippēr*, best translated as to 'purge' or 'decontaminate', renders *Yom Kippēr* the 'Day of Purgation' (Lev. 16) where sacrificial blood smeared or asperged in the sanctuary literally 'rubbed off' impurity and the expelled scapegoat removed sin into the wilderness (16:21-22).<sup>123</sup> Hence *Yom Kippēr* both cleansed the *debir*, the cosmic symbol, and eradicated human sin, thereby renewing all creation.<sup>124</sup> Bearing the divine Name, the high priest ritualised YHWH's restorative action, the victim's life-bearing blood (17:11) possessing replenishing power to purify both temple and creation.<sup>125</sup> In the *Mishnah*, the blood was also sprinkled on the golden incense altar and the altar of sacrifice, thus representing creation-renewing power emanating from YHWH's sanctuary presence and humanity fulfilling its Adamic priesthood.<sup>126</sup>

Humanity made in God's image (*selem*) and likeness (*dēmut*) (Gen. 1:26) underlay Ezekiel's mysterious vision of an enthroned individual: "the likeness (*dēmut*) as the appearance (*mar'eh*) of Adam" which was "the appearance (*mar'eh*) of the likeness (*dēmut*) of the glory (*kabod*) of the LORD" (Ezek. 1:26b, 28b). This glorious human being heralds Adam's primal, supremely gifted, majesty, announcing "the vision of a man.... [who is] the glory of God.... the only begotten

<sup>121</sup> See Mark Winer, "Tikkun 'olam: a Jewish theology of 'repairing the world'" in *Theology*, CXI(864)(2008), 433-441.

<sup>122</sup> See Mary Douglas, 'Atonement in Leviticus' in *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1:2(1993/94), 109-130; cf. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: the Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 44-8.

<sup>123</sup> See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1079-1082.

<sup>124</sup> Barker, *Creation*, 154-5.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

Word of God”<sup>127</sup>, thus emphasising the ontological gap between even pristine Adam and the divine plenitudinous glory.

### ***Humanity in motion***

Emerging “*in the beginning*” (Gen. 1:1) through God’s word (1:3 etc.), creation is theologically comprehensible only through Christ, the divine Word (Jn. 1:1-3), the world’s beginning and end (Col. 1:16). Constituted by divine *logoi*, themselves cohering in the Logos, the cosmos is ordered by and towards God, intrinsically *gifted*, not merely some brute ‘given’. Like the Hebraic disciplined, contingent universe, Maximus the Confessor emphasises creation’s eloquent, predetermined order which, though veiled, finds full revelation, salvific reintegration and deified fulfilment in and through Christ.

Beings are created in motion, tending towards God in whom creation finds its restful consummation (cf. Deut. 12.9; Heb. 4.10).<sup>128</sup> Origen taught that humanity was created to be at rest, with motion triggered only as contemplative vision dimmed, an emergency measure made to stem the fall.<sup>129</sup> Maximus amends this ‘becoming-rest-movement’ model, contending that creation’s motionlessness occurs *telologically*, through a ‘becoming-movement-rest’ paradigm.<sup>130</sup> Sharing God’s gift-of-being with all creation, rational creatures alone can orient towards *well-being* and finally deification (*eternal well-being*), God’s will for humanity. Whilst being is “given to existent things by essence” and well-being “by free choice to those who have the liberty of movement”, eternal well-being is

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<sup>127</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, quoted by Angela Russell Christman, *What did Ezekiel See? Christian Exegesis of Ezekiel’s Vision of the Chariot from Irenaeus to Gregory the Great* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 30.

<sup>128</sup> See Tollefsen, 47ff.

<sup>129</sup> See Louth, 65; *CMJC*, 23-25.

<sup>130</sup> *Ambiguum* 7 (*CMJC*, 45-74); Louth, 67.

“bestowed by grace”<sup>131</sup>, such states corresponding to the sixth, seventh and eighth days of creation respectively.<sup>132</sup>

In imaginative, anagogical interpretation of Jonah, Maximus correlates these ontological states with three universal laws. First, natural law, concerning humankind’s common receipt of *being*, establishes core solidarity and mutual decency (Mt. 7:12; Lk. 6:31).<sup>133</sup> In demonstrating reciprocal love (Lev. 19:18; Mt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31) human beings proceed to *well-being*<sup>134</sup>, embodying the law of grace only through embracing Christ’s teaching that love-of-others should exceed self-love (Jn. 15.13), thereby imitating his willing sacrifice and proleptically intimating God’s final gratuitous transformation, namely deification or *eternal well-being*.<sup>135</sup>

Humanity is therefore unfinished, requiring grace to fulfil its proper end through receiving intensified participation in being.<sup>136</sup> The *logos* of being configures the creature in contingency and potentiality, the *logos* of well-being actualises the will and the *logos* of eternal well-being draws the human creature towards realisation in deification.<sup>137</sup> Maximus, therefore, posits a distinction – *but no gulf* – between the natural and supernatural, for self-determination aligns the will to its appointed purpose.<sup>138</sup> *Freedom* therefore entails not the ‘liberation’ of ‘free-market’ economies,<sup>139</sup> but willingness to be moved towards final ends: “genuine

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<sup>131</sup> *Ambiguum* 65, quoted by Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Byzantine Gospel: Maximus the Confessor in Modern Scholarship* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 204.

<sup>132</sup> *Cap. Theol.* 1.56, in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George Berthold (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 138.

<sup>133</sup> *Ad Thalassium* 64 (*CMJC*, 167-68).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid* (*CMJC*, 168).

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid* (*CMJC*, 169).

<sup>136</sup> Maximus assertions are widely echoed. For example, Cusa speaks of degrees of living well, with Christ as entrance to the “unlimited way” towards the fullness of perfection. See Brient, “The ‘Where’ of God”, 143.

<sup>137</sup> See Tollefsen, 119.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>139</sup> Indeed, unbridled economics might incite annihilative behaviour, freedom’s precise antithesis.

autonomy, consequently, is.... ‘theonomy’.”<sup>140</sup> Freedom means desiring God’s gift in its intended deifying potentiality, whilst *not* desiring the ‘unoffered’ non-gift for this consigns its pursuants to deathly, self-annulling illusion, a profoundly anti-kingly, anti-priestly act, wielding ominous, disintegrative implications for creation.

Israel knew that returning to primeval chaos was a terrifying prospect. Chastising in order to realign creation, YHWH expresses passionate sorrow for those whose anarchic infidelity presages destruction in cosmic unfastening towards the pre-creative *tohu wabohu* (Jer. 4:23). Such destruction undoes God’s ‘very good’ creation, through “complete, unreserved, elemental negation”, showing YHWH “fully capable of termination” through “the most imaginable discontinuity that could be uttered.”<sup>141</sup> As humanity scorns the gift, creation hurtles towards *tohu wabohu*, a tragedy involving heaven itself.<sup>142</sup> Legal violation “[breaks] the everlasting covenant” (Isa. 24:5) and generates cosmic disorder, imagining an ungiven, literally impossible, fate whose temporary privative persistence will eventually wither. Creation thus suffers self-consigned futility, grasping chimeric illusions rather than God’s prescribed gift-of-being. Transgressing these limits emulates the sea’s (ultimately obliterative) inundation, inexorably unravelling towards the primal chaos.

Eden intimates such degeneration. Superbly gifted, Adam is to enact humankind’s universal priesthood in the liturgy of tilling and keeping (Gen. 2:15-16). Yet this gift-economy offers not everything, for, alongside abundant gifts, lurks the forbidden, *ungiven* tree (2:17), whose knowledge of good and evil represents a beguiling alternative to eucharistic reception of divine benevolence. In his

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<sup>140</sup> Tollefsen, 120.

<sup>141</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Jeremiah: *Creatio in Extremis*” in Brown and McBride, 156.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Isa. 24.4. 24.10: “the city of chaos (*tohu*) is broken down.” 34.11b depicts Bozrah’s destruction as creation’s collapse: “he shall stretch the line of *tohu* over it, and the plummet of *bohu* over its nobles.”

*Homilies on the Song of Songs*, Gregory of Nyssa ponders how the “tree of life” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” could somehow co-exist at paradise’s precise centre.<sup>143</sup> As created “likeness of undefiled Beauty”, humankind suffered nothing of “the melancholy mark of death’s downcasting”, but was rather, “truly good and very good, because embellished with the joyous mark of life.”<sup>144</sup> Death is pure enigma, therefore, for “the killer-tree is no part of God’s planting”<sup>145</sup>; whilst life is “the very center of God’s plantation”, death is “rootless and unplanted.”<sup>146</sup> God’s gift is therefore everything, and anything contrary is unreal and phantom-like – a non-gift, intruding with seemingly solid ‘existence’. Here Gregory approximates to Augustine’s roughly contemporaneous reading of evil as privation of the good<sup>147</sup>, whose ‘being’ is simply lack of God’s intended gift – literally ‘no-thing’. Outside God nothing exists “save only evil” which, paradoxically, “possesses being only in not being anything; for there is no way in which evil comes to be except by the negation of what is.”<sup>148</sup> Evil nevertheless happens but always as repudiation, denial or sheer blindness to what truly *is*.<sup>149</sup>

Genesis exposes such non-gift as *anti*-gift as Adam – made to live harmoniously within creation’s appointed ordering – plunges into diminishment delineated by curses, enmity, pain, subjugation, toil and banishment, eventually returning to the primal *adamah* (3:15-24). Curses likewise afflict earth itself (3:17), thrust into misalignment by the very priest ordained to preserve its heaven-anchored order. Adam’s punishment (3:16-19), occasioned through consuming ungiven fruit,

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<sup>143</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom. In Cant., praef.*, quoted by Richard A. Norris, “Two Trees in the Midst of the Garden (Genesis 2:9b): Gregory of Nyssa and the Puzzle of Human Evil” in Blowers et al (eds.), *In Dominico Eloquio – In Lordly Eloquence: Essays in Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 220.

<sup>144</sup> *Hom. 12 In Cant.* (Norris, 229).

<sup>145</sup> *Hom. In Cant., praef.* (Norris, 230).

<sup>146</sup> *Hom. 12 In Cant* (Norris, 230).

<sup>147</sup> For example, *Conf.* 3.7.12, 7.12.18; cf. Frederick H. Russell, “Only Something Good can be Evil: The Genesis of Augustine’s Secular Ambivalence”, *Theological Studies* 51(1990), 698-716.

<sup>148</sup> Gregory’s *Anim. et res* (Norris, 231).

<sup>149</sup> See Norris, 231, n.42.

exceeds mere physical expiry but prefigures the unfathomable ‘death’ of encroaching shame and lost innocence. God’s interrogative “where are you?” elicits fear and concealment (3:7-10) for Adam’s ‘where’ has shifted. Fatally imagining another, tragically giftless, economy, he becomes oriented towards an illusory, *non-existent* state, “aiming at nothing else but not to be under God as his Lord and master.”<sup>150</sup> Ordered by and towards God’s gift-economy, Adam flourished, but in desiring mirage-like delusions he resembled the unrestrained *tohu wabohu*: formless, dissipated, void.

Prior to Adam’s fateful misjudgement, human beings possessed a free natural will, perfectly attuned towards divine ends, yet following the fall its mode of operation becomes divided, thereby necessitating ethical *decision-making*.<sup>151</sup> This so-called *gnomic*<sup>152</sup> will is ambivalent towards proper ends, engendering perilous indeterminacy. For Maximus, rational creatures can either be allied to destructive passions<sup>153</sup> or, through disciplined asceticism, subject them to the Spirit’s authoritative, transformative power towards God-given ends.<sup>154</sup> In deliberating, “the fallen *gnômê* ... cuts the common human nature into pieces,”<sup>155</sup> a disintegrative enslavement to unrestrained passions, akin to primal disorder. Vices represent unruly, misdirected desire, masking self-love (*philautia*) which inverts virtue’s principle, namely charity (*agapê*).<sup>156</sup> Maximus’ *philautia* echoes Augustine’s *concupiscentia*, enthroning enjoyment (*frui*) of matter above its use (*uti*), endeavouring to master things (unrecognised as divine *gifts*) Godlessly and thanklessly.<sup>157</sup> Sinners thereby become subservient to the gifts which pristine

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<sup>150</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, VIII.30, in *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002), 363. See also John Milbank, *Being reconciled: ontology and pardon*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 8.

<sup>151</sup> Tollefsen, 132-3.

<sup>152</sup> From *gnômê*, meaning ‘inclination’ or ‘opinion’.

<sup>153</sup> See, e.g. *Ad Thalassium* 21 (CMJC, 110).

<sup>154</sup> See Blowers’ introductory comments to CMJC, 32.

<sup>155</sup> Thunberg, 227.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>157</sup> Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 184.



Adam was appointed to rule (order), manifesting visionless egoism, which mysteriously intensifies *cosmic* distortion.<sup>158</sup>

Humanity's true freedom requires proper gift-giver alignment, receiving creation in its divine ordering rather than some (ultimately annihilative) parody. 'Spoken into' the gift's life-bestowing economy through *logoi* expressing God's creative will and extracted by the deluded, unfree will, malleable humanity faces crisis, moulded either by giftless ill-being or glorious well-being. Set between Eden's two trees, humankind is split between eternal freedom in the Good and creation's relative, limited goods<sup>159</sup>, potentially overwhelmed by the original sin of insubordination.<sup>160</sup> For Gregory, humanity's true end (*telos*) entails recovering the blissful beginning (*archē*) revealed in Christ's resurrection, for with divine image and likeness restored, humanity re-enters paradise, enjoying renewed access to the tree of life.<sup>161</sup> Through salvifically retracing – and thereby undoing – Adamic creatures' demise, Christ's uplifting purgation detaches humanity from ruinous non-gifts to receive God's authentic, deifying gift.

However, whilst fully determined human existence is *given* – indeed, *the* given – it may not be *received*. Maximus, like Gregory, teaches that human existence is inherently ambiguous, for Adam's fallen passions can either absolutise the non-life-giving creation or become harnessed, rendered captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).<sup>162</sup> Rightly oriented, desire leads towards humanity's appointed divine end (Pss. 16:15, 42:2; Phil. 3:11; Heb. 4:10), the rest which Christ offers (Mt. 11:28).<sup>163</sup> Whilst God remains "unmoved ... complete and impassible", creatures are "to be moved toward that end which is without beginning, and to come to rest

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> See *CMJC*, 29-30.

<sup>160</sup> See, further, Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 182-3.

<sup>161</sup> See especially Gregory's earliest work *De Virginitate*; cf. David L. Blank's "The Etymology of Salvation in Gregory of Nyssa's *de Virginitate*", *JTS* 37:1(1986), 77-90.

<sup>162</sup> *Ad Thalassium* 1, (*CMJC*; 97-8).

<sup>163</sup> *Ambiguum* 7 (*CMJC*, 49-50).

in the perfect end that is without end”, participating in the transcendent plenitudinous mystery in which freedom is perfected.<sup>164</sup>

## Christ as humanity

Actualised existence surpasses mere self-realisation, however, for a transfigured soul signifies and effects universal transfiguration, constituting “the workshop of cosmic unity.”<sup>165</sup> Following Gregory, Maximus regards the human being as the mediatorial “laboratory in which everything is concentrated”, possessing capacity “to be the way of fulfilment of what is divided ... the great mystery of the divine purpose.”<sup>166</sup> As cosmic unifier, humanity overcomes dissonance, enabling creation’s ascent towards union with God in whom there is no separation,<sup>167</sup> from whose blissful *šalom* it emerged, undivided.

Fallen humankind has, however, relinquished this vocation through what Elizabeth Theokritoff dubs the “cosmocentric turn”, deludedly idolising contingent creation as a self-contained system, unrecognised as divine gift, with *ill-being* the calamitous corollary.<sup>168</sup> For Maximus, such distortion necessitates the incarnation,<sup>169</sup> as Christ, in whom everything has been made (Col. 1:16), recapitulates creation in himself (Eph. 1:10), overcoming destructive ruptures<sup>170</sup> and manifesting “the mystery hidden from the ages” (Col. 1:26) through the matchless hypostatic union.<sup>171</sup> This human-divine configuration is entirely

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<sup>164</sup> *Ambiguum* 7 (CMJC, 50.)

<sup>165</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, “The High Word’s Mystery Play: Creation and Salvation in St. Maximus the Confessor” in Conradie, Ernst M. (ed). *Creation and Salvation: a Mosaic of Selected Classic Christian Theologies* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 101.

<sup>166</sup> *Ambiguum* 41 (trans. Louth, 157).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Theokritoff, 101.

<sup>169</sup> So unlike Cusa’s eternal incarnation, Maximus regards cosmic misalignment as the primary motivation.

<sup>170</sup> *Ambiguum* 41 (Louth, 158-9).

<sup>171</sup> *Ad Thalassium* 60 (CMJC, 123).

gratuitous, creation's greatest honour – pure gift – as Christ satisfies love's twofold command supremely.<sup>172</sup> Manifested as gracious Giver of eternal well-being,<sup>173</sup> Christ revitalises humanity's vocation as microcosm and mediator, exhibiting afresh its cosmic identity and reorienting it towards deification.<sup>174</sup>

Yet salvation is no mere remedy for ill-being, but, rather, enables creation (being) to be *completed* as intended “in the beginning” – Christ – through *theōsis* (eternal well-being). Restored in him, humanity's desire is re-ordered away from ephemerality towards “God from Whom I received being and toward Whom I am directed, long desirous of well-being.”<sup>175</sup> As *logoi* cohere in Christ (Col. 1:20),<sup>176</sup> in him alone can humanity regard creation aright, eucharistically receiving material gifts as instruments for divine communion.<sup>177</sup>

Authentic anthropology is therefore Christological, for only Christ exhibits true humanity, protologically and teleologically. Whilst creation in its entirety is described as “very good” (Gen. 1:30), humankind's sixth day lacks the resonant refrain “and God saw that it was good.” This omission, presumably deliberate, intimates that humankind awaits ultimate manifestation. Indeed, Paul maintains that humanity in Christ surpasses the original: rather than merely a ‘living being’, “the last Adam became a *life-giving* spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). So Christ's humanity does not simply *receive* life but *bestows* it, incarnating transparent trinitarian gift-exchange. Moreover, he enables those who “have borne the image of the man of dust” also to “bear the image of the man of heaven” (15:49), escaping constrictive ill-being for expansive transformation through well-being to eternal well-being. Thus the single arc of creation-deification becomes fully actualised and creation completed.

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<sup>172</sup> See Törönen, 172f.

<sup>173</sup> *Ad Thalassium* 60 (CMJC, 128).

<sup>174</sup> Tollefsen, 183-4.

<sup>175</sup> Maximus, *Mystagogia*, chapter 5, quoted by Tollefsen, 184.

<sup>176</sup> *Ambiguum* 41 (Louth, 161-2).

<sup>177</sup> Theokritoff, 105.

Genesis' creation-poem is an unfinished theological symphony pending the climactic movement of Jesus' passion. Here, on the *sixth* day of Christ's last week, a Gentile ruler declares "behold the man" (Jn. 19:5) and humanity is finally created.<sup>178</sup> Acclaimed as "King of the Jews" (19:14-15, 19-22) amid crucifixion's humiliating disorder, Jesus exemplifies true kingship, effecting God's royal purpose of cosmic alignment (19:30) in reconciling earth to heaven (Col. 1:20).<sup>179</sup> In the temple of his crucified and risen body (Jn. 2:19-22), Jesus presents the perfect offering expected originally of Adam and ritually of the king/high priest.

Humanity truly exists solely in Christ who recapitulates sinlessly (Heb. 4:15) Adam's half-life, transporting him beyond original ontological blessedness towards his divinely-appointed end in eternal well-being, a destination not 'beyond' Christ but truly 'in' him. For Cusa, "Jesus is the creation itself, for only in Jesus does the power of the Creator appear"<sup>180</sup> whilst Nicholas Cabasilas (c.1323-c.1391) claims that "it was for the new human being [*anthrōpos*] that human nature was created in the beginning ... the Saviour first and alone showed to us the true human being [*anthrōpos*]."<sup>181</sup> Thus, Christ realigns fallen Adam's tragic, misdirected desire and astonishingly surpasses even this glorious pre-lapsarian life: we 'read' Adam therefore only from Christ's resurrected, deified end. Humanity's God-given potency became obscured in blithe unawareness of intrinsic God-imaging giftedness; only in resurrection does its true pattern and end emerge, a gift more resplendent than the original.

Humankind's objective thus exceeds Eden's primal communion, desiring free, self-realisation through participation in the divine Good.<sup>182</sup> Maximus implicitly follows Origen in regarding humanity's divine *image* as its original dignity and its

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<sup>178</sup> See John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 107.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Sermo* 257, as quoted by McGinn, 167.

<sup>181</sup> *The Life in Christ* 6.91-4, quoted by Behr, 110.

<sup>182</sup> Nichols, 162.

divine *likeness* as teleological, as engraced ascetic discipline reorients passions to receive God's gratuitous, eschatological gift of divine sonship.<sup>183</sup> Image and likeness are therefore poles of authentic humanity existence, akin, in Thunberg's reading, to a potency-act relation.<sup>184</sup>

Reflecting upon Christ's transfiguration, Maximus shows that deifiable humanity is gathered to God in contemplation, granted an unconceptual vision of him and freed of disordered motion around created things.<sup>185</sup> The mind thus comes to rest in creatures' proper end by participating in the incarnation's divine-human union through Christ's historic redemptive work.<sup>186</sup> Christ himself *is* the wonderful exchange *in whom* rational creatures find their end. The ontological passage from well-being to eternal well-being happens insofar as divine gift – that wholly undeserved bestowal of divine likeness – meets human receptivity – a capacity for God excavated through purifying ascesis and contemplation, subjugating creaturely passions for divine union.

Maximus and Cusa both show that creation's continual temporal emergence is conceived not through abstracted, trinitarian gift-exchange alone but its enfleshed *appearance* in Jesus. Cusa exalts the coincidence of humanity and divinity to mysteriously eternal pre-creative status, discerning difference, distance and thereby union, within God's life. David Yeago observes how Maximus portrays salvation through the perceptible life of the enfleshed Logos in whom creation's panoply of providential *logoi* eternally cohere.<sup>187</sup> Energy, the self-display of being, is revealed hypostatically in Christ's specific acts and although he possesses two harmonious divine/human energies, there is "one single, concrete

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<sup>183</sup> Thunberg, 122.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ambiguum* 10 (trans. Louth, 101).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> David S. Yeago, "Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption: The Relevance of St. Maximus the Confessor", *Modern Theology* 12:2(1996), 163-193.

realization in act.”<sup>188</sup> Maximus differentiates therefore between the underlying *ousia* and its particular mode (*tropos*) of manifestation, contending that divine acts are accomplished in the human mode and vice versa, whilst upholding Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Hence Christ can “[endure] suffering divinely” and “[work] miracles humanly”<sup>189</sup>, revealing God in a new mode whilst disclosing humanity in well-being “that surpasses the human”<sup>190</sup>, reaching its deified pinnacle in resurrection. “Being God in a human way..... and human in a divine way” reveals a ‘theandric’ person, who incomparably expresses union-through-difference<sup>191</sup> and realises God’s ancient plan as “a wholly new way of being human [appears] .... [making] us like himself .... [allowing] us to participate in the very things that are most characteristic of his goodness.”<sup>192</sup>

Jesus thereby discloses radically transformative possibilities, “the character of a new energy of one living life in a new way,”<sup>193</sup> with complete self-consistency.<sup>194</sup> Christ’s giving-and-receiving translates eternal trinitarian gift-exchange into his distinctive context, yet without imprisoning it within particularity. For human beings, however, giving *oneself* is inherently ambiguous, because, as Rowan Williams indicates, the ‘self’ is not some stable centre from which achievements securely emanate but “a *made* self .... a process, fluid and elusive” utilizing “a resource of given past-ness out of which the next decision and action can flow.”<sup>195</sup> The self determined through memory depends *not* upon some indomitable will or impervious inner reason, but the liberating truth that the present can be different *because* of the past. For fallen creatures, the somewhat capricious ‘self’ given *may* exhibit costly, compassionate altruism or equally be indifferent, callous or

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<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>189</sup> *Ambiguum* 5, cited by Yeago, 176.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ambiguum* 7 (CMJC, 70).

<sup>193</sup> *Ambiguum* 5, cited by Yeago, 176.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>195</sup> Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: interpreting the Easter Gospel* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), 23; italics original.

vindictive. Only through a coherent shared memory of ceaseless, unfailing love, could my sinful, vacillating ‘self’ be transformed. Christ alone, with matchless *trinitarian* depth, provides that unwavering, ‘inhabitable’ alternative. Precisely as incarnate, Christ truly experiences humanity in its fullness “from beneath, and from within” whilst calibrating its relation to God “from above”<sup>196</sup>, thereby recapitulating in himself *all* things and comprising “the only *concrete* analogy of being, since he constitutes in himself, in the union of his divine and human natures, the measure of every distance between God and man.”<sup>197</sup> Hence, as López perceives, Christ’s observable life reveals humanity’s truth against the absolute truth of God<sup>198</sup>, “both the icon of the Father’s love and the true face of man.”<sup>199</sup>

No abstract concept, “redemption is *what happens in the story of Jesus*”<sup>200</sup>, signifying that his life, death and resurrection are not merely fitting, salvifically necessary, adaptations; rather, his observable giving-and-receiving discloses human nature most truly, both as imitable model and means-for-achieving this (eternal) well-being. This divinely-suffused human life responds unreservedly to God’s gift with flawless return-gift, demonstrating innate reciprocity. Christ’s manifestation is redemptive because he recapitulates Adam’s flawed relationship to the gift: rather than eschewing God’s gift-of-self in an ungiven, *illusory* non-space, Jesus inhabits the ‘really real’, personifying absolute receptivity balanced by instinctive, altogether *natural*, return. He is therefore the supreme priest-king who realigns earth perfectly with heaven, the true temple in whom life and love flow between creator and creation. Moreover, in the awesome interplay of human/divine energies within and through him, he embodies the gift whose essence *is* ceaseless trinitarian circularity: Jesus *is* God’s good gift to creation,

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<sup>196</sup> Hans urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, trans. unnamed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 65.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 74; italics original.

<sup>198</sup> See López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 154.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>200</sup> Yeago, 177; italics original.

bearing those who receive him into eternal life (Jn. 3:16). Furthermore, the ‘*content*’ of that life is sheer gift and counter-gift in-and-of-itself, a graced participation in the kenotic, plerotic communion of Father and Son in the Holy Spirit.

## Conclusion

Cusa depicts creation as God’s gift-of-self, imparted through descent (James 1:17) and mediated by the universe’s forms, constituting finite creatures in contracted reception of the infinite. Creation is no freestanding entity divinely fashioned in some remote age and then left to its own devices. The world is because it receives the gift-of-being *continuously* and that gift is God himself, imparted non-pantheistically as descending donation. There are not multiple gifts but one alone.

That God’s self-bestowal happens through descent means that creation’s constitutive gift possesses not merely magnitude but also a *target* – mathematically, akin less to a (directionless) scalar as to a (directional) *vector*. Therefore, a gift is not simply quantitative but is given *to* someone/something, composing *this* particular thing in *this* God-given capacity. This is, perhaps, unsurprising for the true gift is trinitarian, rooted in Father-Son mutual self-giving which constitutes *real* relations having inherent ‘directionality’: the Father’s absolute gift-of-self in the Spirit is addressed *solely* to the Son and this *alone* establishes him as Father, in kenotic outpouring matched absolutely by the Son’s counter-gift. As *possest*, the Son is *eternally* united to the possibility of incarnational descent, enfleshing God’s perfectly reciprocal gifting and revealing consummately humankind’s divine image and likeness bestowed in creation, veiled in Adam’s forfeited, royal priesthood and mystically disclosed in Ezekiel’s chariot.



Yet Christ not only manifests humanity but draws those who receive him, who are truly ‘in’ him, to *share* in his inherent divine giving-and-receiving. Christ’s gift-of-self is not merely vectored prior to reception but also *subsequently* so that it may be transmitted onwards rather than being merely ‘absorbed’ acquisitively into some inert recipient.<sup>201</sup> God’s gift has its own ‘momentum’, its direction determined so that others may flourish by being transported onwards to their divinely-appointed ends. So Christ’s temporal giving-and-receiving translates eternal giving-and-receiving, manifesting his counter-gift to the Father through generous giving to deficient sinners. Similarly, humanity’s reception of its salvific end subsequently entails giving *itself* for creation’s progressive transformation, not through ‘circular’ exchange but the spiral of charity in which Milbank discerns humanity’s fitting reciprocation.

Creation (forever) comes-into-being through participating in being-itself. Yet participation itself implies that divine gifts are vectored, imprinted with intentionality which causes solid existence, expanding incursively and purposefully into the void. So whereas trinitarian self-giving is forever replete, ‘circular’ and therefore ‘complete’, creation’s coming-to-be in Christ entails sharing divine fullness amid contractedness. Creation’s end is participation in the originating *circle* of trinitarian love, where gift and counter-gift are indistinguishable apart from the Person-constituting ‘direction of flow’. Penultimately, however, creation inhabits charity’s responsive *spiral*, unfinished yet called towards intensifying participation in God’s ‘circular’ perfection. Here is creation’s time-space ordering, rejected by Adam, intimated in Jerusalem’s cosmic liturgy and revealed only in Christ, the true king and high priest. Whilst the trinitarian circle has but one superexpansive, urkenotic ‘form’, creation’s spiral ‘improvises’, either rightly disclosing love’s mutual giving-of-self ‘three-dimensionally’ or sinfully unravelling into an abyssal, degenerative vortex.

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<sup>201</sup> This is a key conclusion of Stephen H. Webb’s *Gifted God: a Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Creation's emergence heralds danger, for the ambiguous primal waters may remain constrained through kingly and priestly sacral action or engulf devastatingly should humanity abandon its liturgy of righteousness, degenerating charity's disciplined spiral into the pre-creative nothingness. So whilst creation's holy descent is grounded in trinitarian reciprocal 'motion', this risks also its potentially annihilative, unholy *collapse*.

The remaining chapters take *displacement* as a principal theme in its positive and negative scriptural connotations. Affirmatively, creation emerges from divinely displaced waters which concurrently portend later disarray. Adamic humanity forfeits blessings and, banished from Eden, epitomises tragic incompleteness: promised territory and descendants, it endures dislodgement, enslavement, exile, dispersal and persecution alongside celebrated liberation, possession and post-exilic restoration. Israel's magnificent and catastrophic displacements show the divine gift to be intensely directional. Even the Deuteronomistic Historian's accounts of the united monarchy with single sanctuary augur impending separation and eviction, not simply through historico-political turmoil but the pervading sense that, having misplaced Adam's universal, gift-returning priestliness, both individuals and community are internally divided, existentially exiled, living disjointedly with God and, thereby, creation. In Adam, humanity's giftedness is fractured, misguidedly absolutising terrain, monarchy and progeny rather than desiring graced participation in God's very life which reorients creation to its source.

Nevertheless, the Messiah heralds David's kingship fulfilled and hyperexpanded into *God's* kingdom, tantalisingly 'beyond' yet mysteriously imminent (Lk. 17:21), embodied in Christ (Mk. 1:15). As new Adam, finally manifesting harmonious gift-rapport and healing fallen humanity's disjointedness, he inaugurates another – altogether definitive – displacement: for "after expulsion from paradise, *only the arrival of the goal in the midst of the way reveals again*

*the way.*”<sup>202</sup> Christ’s advent exceeds merely manifesting creation’s *archē* and *telos*, providing, furthermore, redemptive means whereby humanity – and the entire cosmos – may overcome sin’s ruinous chasm. Christ displays that stable, gift-inscribed self that fallen creatures woefully lack and, being truly ‘inhabitable’, graciously offers salvific participation in that elusive wholeness.

John’s gospel, supremely, portrays human transformation through Christ’s missional descent (3:31; 8:23) and believers’ correlative ascent in being born ‘from above’ (3:3,7; 6:41,51,58) – marvellously ‘vectored’ gifts-of-self. Moreover, Christ reveals participation in eternal, trinitarian gift-exchange as humankind’s true end, and, more fundamentally, its very beginning, spoken forever ‘in’ the eternal Word. His salvific work entails sinless displacement into sinful, deathly realms, inaugurating the definitive exodus-exile through – and into – his own pristine humanity. Trinitarian *ekstasis*, that timeless, constitutive standing-beyond-self through giving-and-receiving, grounds Christ’s salvific standing-in-the-place-of-another and announces the call to imitate. Through his temporal displacements, creation is redirected towards its appointed end and his own kenotic, priestly directionality imparts a derivative vocation upon privileged recipients, awakening humanity’s on-going, shared mission to lead the world into the kingdom. To that narrative of resultant, cosmically transformative, dislocation I now turn.

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<sup>202</sup> John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 61; italics added.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# Christ's Generous Crossing

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### Introduction

Jesus of Nazareth's incarnate mission maps the Son's eternal procession into time and space and thereby translates into visibility the transparent giving-and-receiving that characterise the divine life. Hence, in Christ the gap between the pure, trinitarian gift and the gift-as-observed is bridged: neither Derrida's desperately remote *l'impossible* nor Marion's curiously disembodied saturated phenomenon, but a perceptible human-divine life ('gift-object') consciously and explicitly handed over, thus awakening the remembrance and rejoicing which concretely constitutes the Church.

In this chapter, I observe how Christ's pre-passion life exhibits the crucial gift traits that emerge from critical engagement with philosophical readings. I shall be particularly concerned to show how Christ's reception of gifts is completed by a counter-gift transformative for recipients, allowing them to participate more fully in the divine gift economy. Whereas the eternal trinitarian exchange is a circular, mutual self-giving of equals, Christ's vectored self-giving is offered to a sin-stricken, gift-deficient humanity whose capacity for priestly response is inhibited. Hence, recipients do not merely *accept* Christ's gift, for its inherent 'momentum' enables them to *offer*, in the power of the Spirit, their own improvised, non-identical gift-of-self within charity's ongoing spiral. So as Christ receives-in-order-to-give, so the same principle operates in the Church to ever-intensifying degrees until creatures participate in trinitarian giving-and-receiving in divinely-appointed measure.

Demonstrating such reciprocity involves two main sections, examining biblical narrative through ancient and contemporary exegetes. The first maps the context for events depicted in the second, showing how Christ receives Israel's genealogically calibrated history, a particular, limited, gendered body and a wondrous name to respond with a capacious, salvific counter-gift that will transform human history, bodies and names. Displaying the sinless, gift-transparent nature originally given to Adam, the incarnate Jesus is the place to which all things tend. But how does this happen? The second section examines the 'texture' of Jesus's receiving-to-give, charting evidence of this dynamic reciprocity from conception to transfiguration, thus setting the scene for the yet greater self-giving depicted in chapter five.

Throughout the notion of *displacement* will be vital. John interprets Christ through metaphors of descent/ascent, whilst the synoptics depict him freely associating with sick, possessed, sinful, impure, deficient, foreign recipients, with astounding transformative results. So Christ's multiple displacements effect humanity's expansive displacement into God's kingdom, the new creation of divine fullness unstintingly outpoured, joyously received and eagerly reciprocated. His generous crossing enables our graced crossing, from feverish deficiency to serene richness.

## **Translating the Exchange**

How does Jesus of Nazareth translate this trinitarian exchange, inhabiting his people's tumultuous, Adam-bound history in order to realign it not simply to Eden's beginnings but to a greater, deified end?

Intrinsically ordered towards self-giving sacrifice, his body anticipates its magnanimous expansion in eucharistic, ecclesial hospitality that signals the

transformation of all bodies in resurrection. Awesome and redolent, his name suggests divine salvific endeavour, the eschatological renaming of God's chosen people through relocation into him. His sinless, gift-receptive humanity provides this very place of transformation where all creation's motion finds its God-given rest in the motionless motion of divine love.

Christ's reception, whilst never illusory, always presents a counter-gift which intensifies sinners' participation in God's life-giving purposes. As Son, eternally receiving from the Father's plenitude, Christ translates that procession into his visible mission with a return offered to the Father through giving salvifically to Adam's fallen race. This response is thus doubly generous for Christ gives himself superabundantly in eucharistic return whilst the Father demands no 'direct' recompense but is content to see Christ's self-donation directed to the utterly undeserving for their vital enrichment. Moreover, whilst there is no 'gap' within the Father and Son's timeless giving-and-receiving, its time-space translation to a fallen cosmos, entails the crossing of chasmic boundaries, a self-displacement that augurs the ultimate interchange that embraces death, hell and resurrection.

### ***Jesus, the 'where'***

Meister Eckhart reinterprets Psalm 42:3 – “Where is your God?” – as a statement – “God is your where” – and, through christological extrapolation, takes the question “Rabbi... where are you staying?” (Jn. 1:38) to mean “Teacher, you inhabit the where”, thereby proposing Jesus as “the where (*ubi*) and the place (*locum*)” not simply of the soul but “of all things.”<sup>1</sup> Aspiring to return to its

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Brient, “Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa on the ‘Where’ of God” in Thomas M. Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto (eds.), *Nicholas of Cusa and his Age: Intellect and Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 129.

ordained location of safety and rest<sup>2</sup>, creation is engaged in transformation-through-motion, discovering its true dwelling-place in God who, lacking nothing, nevertheless grants creatures participation in him.<sup>3</sup> God, who inhabits all things whilst residing “in heaven” (e.g. Jos. 2:11; 1 Kings 8:23ff; 2 Chr. 20:6; Pss. 11:4, 73:25), is understood, most properly, to dwell *in himself*. Creatures therefore undertake motion *into God* through receiving an intensifying share in divine being.<sup>4</sup>

In his Epiphany sermon *Ubi est qui natus est rex Iudaeorum?* (Mt. 2:2)<sup>5</sup>, Cusa adopts Eckhart’s theories, regarding God as being-itself, “the source of everything which exists ... the goal, place and rest of all things.”<sup>6</sup> As infinite unity *unfolds* through temporality, motion and multiplicity, so this manifestation is, finally, *enfolded* into unity, in eternity, rest and oneness.<sup>7</sup> Yet whilst Eckhart regarded creation’s journey into God to involve detachment *beyond* temporality, motion and multiplicity *towards* eternity, rest and oneness, Cusa emphasises transformation *within* time, movement and number through the *incarnate* Word whom the wise “[seek] out, recognize and [adore].”<sup>8</sup> Recognised thereby as God, “the place of all things,” the newborn King “is ‘where’ or ‘place’ in the absolute sense.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus is the maximal individual who makes possible creation’s unfolding-enfolding,<sup>10</sup> the joint between finitude and infinitude, the *limit* (fulfilment) of creaturely becoming, perfectly united with the plenitudinous perfection of absolute being.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Clyde Lee Miller, “Meister Eckhart in Nicholas of Cusa’s 1456 sermon *Ubi est qui natus est rex Iudaeorum?*”, in Izbicki and Bellitto, 107.

<sup>3</sup> Brient, 132-34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter, *UEQN*. Subsequent references in square parentheses relate to page numbers in the translation given in Miller, 115-125.

<sup>6</sup> *UEQN*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *UEQN*, 5[116]; cf. *DDI* II ; cf. Brient, 139.

<sup>8</sup> *UEQN*, 3[115].

<sup>9</sup> *UEQN*, 4[116].

<sup>10</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>11</sup> Brient, 141.



Human wayfaring is defined according to the unlimited way which is God's incarnate Word (Jn. 14:6), *from* whom we come, *on* whom we journey and *to* whom we tend.<sup>12</sup> This living way is, moreover, nourishing truth and revelatory light<sup>13</sup>, disclosed concretely in Christ who offers participation in his divine sonship: Jesus came "from the heavenly life that is our future" that we might "live more abundantly through Him than through nature."<sup>14</sup> So as Magi seek the infant king, "to adore Him as God and to see Him as man", they discover "the place where every movement of nature and grace finds rest."<sup>15</sup> They discern the long-awaited, pure divine gift laid out in stark vulnerability and unimaginable communicability.

But how does scripture describe this place? In particular, how is Christ salvifically associated with Israel's story and to deficient creatures seeking their true 'where'?

### ***Connected***

Matthew locates Jesus within his nation's family tree (1:1-17), affording the *biblos geneseōs* (1:1) a threefold fourteen generation pattern corresponding to the patriarchal, royal and priestly periods, thereby presenting Jesus, born 'in the fullness of time' (Gal. 4:4), as fulfilling Israel's kingly sacrificial priesthood.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Krister Stendahl claims that Matthew intentionally omits the fourteenth name from the third block, thereby intimating Daniel's eschatological Son of Man, awaiting glorification (cf. 28:16-20).<sup>17</sup> Matthew's subsequent fulfilment citations intensify this providential genealogical continuity: Jesus is God's long-

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<sup>12</sup> *UEQN*, 9-10[117].

<sup>13</sup> *UEQN*, 11[118-9].

<sup>14</sup> *UEQN*, 13[118-9].

<sup>15</sup> *UEQN*, 14-15[119].

<sup>16</sup> See Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., 'Making sense of the Matthean Genealogy: Matthew 1:17 and the Theology of History' in Jeremy Corley (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Nativity* (London: Continuum, 2009), 108.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

awaited gift, delivered to a stricken people. Indeed, his ancestry is interrupted through four foreign, sexually impure, women, who, in Jerome's estimation, reinforce his role as saviour of sinners (1:21)<sup>18</sup>, whilst heralding theologically the universal incorporation promised through Abraham (1:1), in whom "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 18:8; cf. Mt. 3:9; 8:11).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Joseph's absence (1:16) disrupts the male lineage, emphasising instead Mary "in whom a new beginning takes place, in whom human existence starts afresh."<sup>20</sup>

Luke heightens this all-encompassing scope, presenting Jesus descended from Adam, the universal forebear (3:23-38), as the new Adam in whom the fullness of time dawns, fulfilling humankind's story recapitulatively.<sup>21</sup> John expands yet further, declaring Jesus to *be* the divine connection, that universal beginning *from whom* all else flows (1:3; cf. Gen. 1.1-3; Col. 1:15-17), offering receptive believers new birth through participation in his own origin (1:12-14). 'Receiving' the flesh to which he is, as Cusa taught, forever united, Jesus delivers a salvific counter-gift, offering that flesh "for the life of the world" (6:51) so that recipients may be raised to life, abiding in him as he abides in them (6:54-56).

### ***Embodied***

Aquinas teaches that this enfleshment is genuine, as Christ assumes human nature in its dignity and need,<sup>22</sup> a nature that "cannot be without sensible matter"<sup>23</sup> but possesses an entirely real body, thereby ensuring salvific efficacy.<sup>24</sup> Thus Christ's body is not heavenly, impassible or incorruptible – unconnected to humanity's

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: a Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (new updated edition)* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 71-72.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-74.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: from the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, tr. Adrian J. Walker (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 8. (Hereafter, *JNI*).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> *ST*, IIIa.4.1.responsio.

<sup>23</sup> *ST*, IIIa.4.4.responsio.

<sup>24</sup> *ST*, IIIa.5.1.responsio.

determinate matter<sup>25</sup> – nor soulless – for flesh is ‘received’ from the soul<sup>26</sup> in being proportioned to it<sup>27</sup> – nor lacking intellect – for humanity’s justification depends upon a rational mind directing rational flesh.<sup>28</sup> Aquinas thus insists that Christ’s humanity is entirely real, echoing the patristic maxim that “the unassumed is the unhealed.”

Truly enfleshed, the eternal Word embraces mobility, ‘living in a tent’ (*eskēnōsen*, Jn. 1:14), like YHWH’s wilderness dwelling (Ex. 25:8; 29:46),<sup>29</sup> disclosing the reality towards which the desert tabernacle and Jerusalem temple pointed<sup>30</sup> and purposefully encamping in arid terrain for salvific ends. Christ reveals divine glory (Jn. 1:14) that it might be shared, enfolding believers in the filial-paternal love, a new, trinitarian dwelling-place (17:22-24). Emerging from eternity, his life becomes not simply embodied, but timed, offering an arena for the practice of the authentic gift which occurs within a spaced reciprocity. Nevertheless, his constant prayerfulness reveals the meaning of time as not the succession of endless moments but participation in eternity, the truth of the trinitarian gift’s permanence.<sup>31</sup> Yet this represents no disembodied escape for it happens through Christ’s sacrificial, sacramental flesh and blood (6:51-58), visibly outpoured from his impaled side (19:34).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, exposing these wounds causes disciples to rejoice (20:20) whilst Thomas utters Scripture’s highest Christological acclamation in penetrating the nail-pierced body (20:27-28).

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<sup>25</sup> *ST*, IIIa.5.2.*responsio*.

<sup>26</sup> *ST*, IIIa.5.3.*responsio*.

<sup>27</sup> *ST*, IIIa.5.4.*responsio*.

<sup>28</sup> *ST*, IIIa.5.4.*responsio*.

<sup>29</sup> C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1955), 138.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* (hereafter, *JNIN*), trans. Philip J. Whitmore (London: Burns and Oates, 2012), 11.

<sup>31</sup> See López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 179 (hereafter, *GUB*).

<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, such astounding physicality causes offence and division (6:60-66; cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-4; 1:7; 2:22; 4:10; 2 Jn. 7).

From conception, Christ's body is ordered towards salvific self-giving (Mt. 1:21), fulfilling God's will not through ineffective sacrifice but complete corporeal self-offering undertaken for humanity's sanctification (Heb. 10.5-10). Given-in-order-to-be-given-up, Christ's body forever seeks recipients: predestined for Calvary and – as Hebrews emphasises – a greater journey, into no earthly sanctuary but heaven itself. Moreover, Christ's embodied displacement causes beneficiaries' own displacement, an enfleshed communicability witnessed graphically in eucharistic self-giving.

From infancy, this salvific transfer resounds: through circumcision Jesus's body *fulfils* covenantal obligation (Luke 2:21) whilst *liberating* the legally-bound into adoptive freedom (Gal. 4:4-5).<sup>33</sup> His circumcision represents the initial blood-letting which foreshadows Calvary and, occurring on the eighth day, presages the resurrection when bodies – even creation itself – discover fulfilment, “the baby body prefiguring the adult body, the adult body figuring the ecclesial body in a march to its resurrection.”<sup>34</sup> Such corporeal expansiveness indicates Christ's remarkable hospitality, given-up so that Adam's alienated race might be (literally) reincorporated, eucharistically inscribed within perfect trinitarian giving-and-receiving. Receiving a body, Christ offers the most extraordinary corporeal counter-gift.

### ***Named***

On the eighth day, Mary's son also receives a *name* which both “[signifies] some gratuitous gift”<sup>35</sup> and imposes a redemptive vocation, initially directed towards “his people” (Mt. 1:21; cf. Acts 2:38; 4:12; 10:43) and subsequently expanded to “all nations” (28:19). Indeed, receiving “the name .... above every name”,

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ST*, IIIa.5.3.*responsio*

<sup>34</sup> Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 99.

<sup>35</sup> *ST*, IIIa.37.2.*responsio*.

unequivocally bound to kenotic servanthood (Phil. 2:6-8), prompts universal homage and proclamation (2:9-11; cf. Isa. 45:23). *Iēsous*, derived from the Hebrew *Yḥōšûâ* ‘(YHWH helps)’<sup>36</sup>, connects Jesus to Joshua, commissioned to lead Israel into the promised land beyond Jordan (Deut. 31:23; Josh. 1:2), whose waters are miraculously displaced before the ark-bearing priests (Josh. 3:13-17). Richard Ounsworth, building on Austin Farrer, dismisses the popular view that Matthew’s gospel possesses a fivefold, Pentateuchal, Mosaic construction in favour of a sixfold, Hexateuchal, Joshuaic structure.<sup>37</sup> Through death and resurrection – Matthew’s sixth ‘book’ – this new Joshua “[leads] his people into the real promised land, not through the waters of the Jordan but through the waters of death, not into Canaan but into the Kingdom of Heaven”<sup>38</sup>, a victory won not at Jericho but in Jerusalem, whose temple falls (24:2) and whose curtain is rent (27:51).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Jesus perfects Israel poised to enter Canaan by drawing believers to participate in God’s eternal rest (Heb. 3-4), a passage through the heavenly veil which transcends privileged priestly entry into Jerusalem’s sanctuary on Yom Kippēr.<sup>40</sup> Jesus receives his evocative Joshuaic name at circumcision, an act which certain medieval mystical texts understand as inscribing the Tetragrammaton’s first letter (*yod*) upon the phallus to guarantee *freedom from Gehenna* and *entry into Eden*,<sup>41</sup> a displacement perfecting Israel’s foundational liberation (Ex. 3.14).

John’s Jesus, however, does not *receive* the divine name as bear it *intrinsically* (17:11), *making it known* (17:6, 26) and *declaring* it freely, unlike the high priest’s concealed announcement at Yom Kippēr. Jesus assigns the name to

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Richard J. Ounsworth OP, ‘Joshua and the Pilgrim People of God in the New Testament’ in *New Blackfriars*, 84.987(2003), 243.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>40</sup> See Richard Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), chapters 3-5.

<sup>41</sup> See Elliot R. Wolfson, ‘Circumcision and the Divine Name: A Study in the Transmission of Esoteric Doctrine’ in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 78(1/2)(1987), 77-112.

*himself* absolutely (e.g. 8:58) as criterion for eternal life (4:26; 8:24, 28; 13:19), revealing the Father (1:18) through words (7:16; 14:24; 17:8) and works (5:17,30,36; 17:4).<sup>42</sup> His divine *egō eimi* arouses both rejection (8:58-9) and prostration (18:5-8), the ‘gift’ of recognition, like priestly adoration at the tetragrammaton’s annual pronouncement.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Jesus’s reassurance in Mark’s miraculous sea-walking – “it is I (*egō eimi*); do not be afraid” (6.50) – confirms his divine creative power, whilst echoing divine ‘I’ statements from the Mosaic Exodus (Ex. 14.4,18) and anticipating a *new* Exodus (Isa. 43.1-25; 51.10-12).<sup>44</sup>

Accepting Jesus’s offer of eschatological salvation means receiving the abundant life (Jn. 10:10) which is his inherently (5:26; 6:57).<sup>45</sup> Like Mark’s Exodus allusions, John’s *egō eimi* statements announce transformation: eating the living bread causes eschatological raising-up (6:54); following the light of the world means walking in light (8:12); entering through the gate, brings salvation, free movement and verdant pasture (10:9), whilst knowing the good shepherd, who undergoes paschal displacement (10:11-18), means being drawn into a single flock (10:16); believing in the resurrection and the life heralds victory (11:25-26); coming to the Father happens only through Jesus, the way, the truth and the life (14:6) who pioneers the journey to the Father’s house (14:2-3). Their joy complete, disciples become fruitful branches abiding (*menein*, remaining, resting) in Jesus, the true vine, who himself abides in the Father (15:1-11). Bearing his eternal divine name, Jesus offers believers these counter-gifts of intensifying participation in trinitarian life.

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<sup>42</sup> Catrin H. Williams, *I am He: the interpretation of ‘anī hū’ in Jewish and early Christian literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 303.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

## ***Sinless***

Nevertheless, these seemingly smooth transitions effect the reconciliation of an *alienated* race. So how does God in Christ engage transformatively with sinful humanity whilst remaining uncontaminated by such perilous giftlessness?

Trinitarian life, in dynamic, transparent reciprocity, involves standing-beyond-‘self’ (*ek-stasis*); so Christ incarnately manifests this kenotic ‘hypergenerosity’ through perpetually ‘going beyond’, bestowing upon sinners his own human-divine self, a comprehensive giftedness that explodes Derrida’s prohibitions. Yet such expansiveness questions the human nature he assumed: is it the gift-receptiveness of pristine priest-king Adam, or fallen humanity’s tragic gift-ignorance? Scripture repeatedly affirms Christ’s *sinlessness* (Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22, 3:18; James 5:6; 1 Jn. 3:5) whilst boldly asserting that God sent his Son “in the likeness of *sinful* flesh” (Rom. 8:3), making him “to *be sin*” (2 Cor. 5:21). How can Christ be both perfectly aligned to the gift and also touch transformatively estranged humanity’s pervasive giftlessness? Furthermore, is his humanity something ‘static’ or does it become progressively ennobled? Does Christ recoup unsullied Adam by recapitulation or embody previously *unrealisable* beauty?

In response, I wish to argue that Christ’s human nature was *real* in two distinct ways. First: as sinless, Christ lacks that which severs communion and can therefore connect intimately with sinful human creatures to restore the gift they lack. Hence, he embraces – and thus transforms – humanity’s gift-denying capacity by perfectly enacting – and communicating – filial obedience. This educes my second claim. Descended from Adam (Lk. 3.23-38), the sanctifier must be of the same stock as those sanctified (Heb. 2.11-15), inhabiting humanity’s ‘real’ condition. Yet the ‘real’ divine ‘given’ is not deluded humanity’s shadowy half-life but an obscured, *yet retrievable*, ‘reality’ of unhindered reception-

donation. As Adam fatally imagined another *illusory* economy, so Christ ‘imagines’ and ‘performs’ an ‘alternative’ which is the exact *original*, the ‘*really real*’, the kingdom of God.

However, this does not render Christ’s humanity extraordinarily artificial. Whilst repudiating Pelagianism, I deny an unbridgeable abyss between nature and grace, contending that grace is that *thoroughly indispensable gift* which *perfects* human nature, surpassing Adam’s spotlessness through bestowing Christ’s undeserved fullness. Were human nature a given ‘preceding’ incarnation, then this nature-grace continuum appears incongruous. However, as it is *Christ* who forever defines humanity, revealing it in Bethlehem, Jordan, Capernaum, Tabor, Gethsemane, Golgotha, Emmaus and at the Father’s right hand, then he does not so much *receive* human nature as *bestow* it in its otherwise unattainable *fullness*. Furthermore, receptive creatures, always-already ‘in’ him, can be refashioned through participating in his resurrected, glorified humanity.

Inhabiting both the divine realm of perfect giving-and-receiving and humanity’s common ‘currency’ of flesh, Christ enacts redemption’s exchange. Such transformation is possible only inasmuch as the necessary gift – nothing less than God himself – is available and conveyable. Moreover, Christ reveals salvation’s ‘content’ as gift and counter-gift, outpouring himself abundantly unto death and evoking the Father’s resurrective response, the precursor to humankind’s deifying glorification.

Furthermore, *in him* humankind’s otherwise irreconcilable extremes inhabit the *same* continuum because the most distorted, alienated soul can be ‘touched’ – and thereby *redeemed* – whilst unimaginable splendour can be manifested – and thereby *offered*. Transcending humankind’s imagined ontological span – from legally ‘perfect’ well-being to damnable woe-being – the paschal mystery’s ultimate giving-and-receiving reveals *eternal* well-being in the resurrected body



bearing wounds of inclusive, communicable love. Christ's risen humanity is attainable only by grace and yet because it *he* who defines humanity this represents humanity's *perfection*. Hence, Sheol's condemned malefactors and the ascended Saviour share a single, inseparable human nature, the humanly unbridgeable chasm divinely traversed by Christ's entire gift-of-self. This unified movement of love is enabled through intra-trinitarian donation-reception, that eternal life which 'finds' itself in the other, the wholly 'necessary' *ekstasis* which grounds all gift-exchange.

'Standing outside' himself in human flesh, God transcends the separation marked by absence and scarcity, salvifically outpouring from divine plenitude. As Maximus contends, the incarnate Son reveals divinity in a new mode so that humanity can consequently rediscover itself, incorporated *into* Christ. *Enfleshed* beings perpetually risk being *enmeshed* by the unfree will, trapped in demeaning lifelessness. Flesh is not inherently sinful, but God's good – extraordinarily malleable – gift, orderable towards fuller participation in divine life. In itself, flesh is contingent and untransformative (Jn. 6:63); yet the Spirit-saturated flesh *of the Son of God* does not merely *receive* life but also *gives* life (6:51-59), defining what flesh *truly* is, displacing Adam not simply back to Eden but into Christ's own eternal rest.

## **Navigating the Interchange**

That blessed resting place is the Trinity's eternal superabundance, the 'motionless motion' of perfectly replete, reciprocal giving-and-receiving. Enacted amid creaturely privation, divine giving finds meagre evidence of the magnificent counter-gift of friendship that Aquinas intimated as humankind's true, deified end. Indeed, many reject God's gift (Jn. 1:12), demanding crucifixion (Mt. 27:15-26). The best human beings can offer Christ is contrite recognition of inner

poverty, whilst longing for divine fullness hitherto possessed in tragic limitation. Thus, this is no *exchange* of equals – as in the matchless, non-identical mutuality of Father and Son in the Spirit – but an *interchange*, whereby privated creatures receive transformative abundance. Nevertheless, this asymmetric interchange participates in the balanced trinitarian exchange, yielding charity’s ongoing spiral, to be perfected through the sanctifying Spirit who alone enables the ultimate counter-gift that Aquinas imagined.

Here I consider key events in Jesus’s life, from conception to transfiguration, to show how he manifests true (trinitarian) reciprocity, with redemptive consequences for human recipients. I focus particularly on how he receives God’s gifts – of which he has no need – in order to bestow counter-gifts which humanity desperately needs. Moreover, I highlight the *vectorhood* of these gifts, directed precisely to the perilously *deprived*, such efficacious delivery requiring Christ’s prior displacement into particular existential conditions, thereby enabling recipients’ onward displacement into God’s life. Furthermore, as chapter seven demonstrates, this vectorhood is sustained as human beneficiaries continue to transmit the gracious fullness received (Jn. 1:16), for the world’s enrichment.

Whereas the Trinity’s underlying eternal gift-exchange might be imagined (with obvious limitations) as two straight roads crossing uncomplicatedly, Christ’s salvific transfer within a fallen creation resembles a labyrinthine interchange. Here, motorways, dual carriageways and trunk roads converge convolutedly on different levels through an array of bridges, slip roads, dedicated lanes, traffic lights and restrictions. What sinful humankind lacks is participation in God’s being and that is remedied through Christ’s gift-of-self, a strictly one-way transfer like traffic circulating the elaborate interchange roundabout. That self-giving involves not a simple handing-over but full engagement with humanity’s intricate predicaments. Hence redemption concerns Christ *rejecting* the non-gift to which Adam submitted, alongside *offering* God’s plenitude amid humanity’s

multifarious poverties, thus enabling movement from alienation to filiation, lovelessness to compassion, sickness to health, scarcity to feasting, dullness to splendour. The gifts Christ receives become the vehicles through which he, through redemptive crossing, bestows an ever more expansive counter-gift which enables humanity's crossing towards fullness of being.

### ***The gift revealed***

Where is this true gift economy initiated? Even before conception, Christ causes displacement-within-continuity in service of the greater displacement to be accomplished. Luke's first characters embody venerable ties to Israel's priestly heritage, electrified by extraordinary newness disclosed amidst ancient temple rituals. Learning of Elizabeth's emancipation from barrenness to motherhood (Lk. 1:13-17), awestruck Zechariah becomes mute (1:20) and then, after the birth, offers exultant prophetic praise of Israel's God who causes seismic salvific crossing (1:68-79).<sup>46</sup> John the Baptist, God's Spirit-filled hinge between old and new (1:15), possesses great stability, "[living] permanently.... 'in the tent of meeting'", a priest "with his whole existence .... [proclaiming] the new priesthood that will appear with Jesus."<sup>47</sup> Yet God's eschatological messianic forerunner (cf. Mal. 3:23) and prophet (Lk. 1:76) instigates disruptive, anticipatory conversion (Lk. 1:17-18) to the sacrificial Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29-36), in joyful Christ-augmenting humility (3:28-30). Here, contra Derrida, is a matrix of joyful people remembering, celebrating and anticipating God's gift.

In an uncelebrated town, an insignificant young woman is conveyed miraculously, yet willingly, into unprecedented virginal motherhood. Greeted with the Greek *chaíre* (1:28) – rather than the Hebrew *šalom* – Mary signals Gentile inclusion as

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<sup>46</sup> C.F.Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 152

<sup>47</sup> Ratzinger, *JNIN*, 22-23.

she becomes the Ark of the Covenant, the joyful shrine of Israel's king (Zeph. 3:14-17).<sup>48</sup> The Spirit (Lk. 1:35) supervenes invasively<sup>49</sup>, announcing a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30)<sup>50</sup> as the overshadowing divine power (Lk.1:35) – prefiguring synoptic transfiguration accounts – brings near an otherwise unapproachable, intensely sanctifying presence.<sup>51</sup> As divine Son (1:32, 1:35; cf. 1:76), Jesus receives David's ancient throne in perpetuity (1:32-3; cf. Ps. 89), restoring Israel's lost glory following chronic demise, destruction, exile and subjugation.

Readily submitting to intense upheaval (1:38), Mary is extraordinarily *free*, embodying the spiritual/physical receptivity that Eve eschewed. Her openness to the Spirit is, moreover, replicable. With patristic endorsement, Eugene Rogers stresses the annunciation's sheer excess, as the Spirit who comes to 'befriend' matter, resting on Christ in Mary's womb, announces the Son's eternal resting "in the womb of the Father."<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the Spirit, who rests in the womb of Christ's lacerated side and the womb of the eucharistic wine, thereby anticipates his sanctifying rest in all expectant, fertile 'wombs'.<sup>53</sup> As chapters six and seven will demonstrate, the Spirit – that which Augustine called *the gift (donum)* – comes to permeate receptive 'Marian' believers: no embarrassing impossibility, the trinitarian gift enables creation to reach its end in perfect communion.

Mary journeys to Zechariah's house to celebrate this extraordinary divine union. Unborn John acclaims Christ through joyful *in utero* displacement (1:41) and Elizabeth ecstatically acclaims mother and child as *eulogemenē* – both blessing God and conveying God's blessing to humanity (1:42) – whilst proleptically

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-30.

<sup>49</sup> Evans, 163.

<sup>50</sup> Brown, 314.

<sup>51</sup> Evans, 163-4.

<sup>52</sup> Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *After the Spirit: a Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (London: SCM, 2006), II.2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

hailing Jesus as the victorious, risen *kyrios* (1:43; cf. John 20:28).<sup>54</sup> Mary is blessed, furthermore, in believably embracing future divine fulfilment (1:45) and offering her jubilant *Magnificat* that proclaims radical reversals, anticipating the kingdom's seismic socio-theological transpositions (1:46-55).

Joseph's displacement complements Mary's. This righteous Davidic inheritor (Mt. 1:16,19) is to name (1:21), and thereby adopt, God's Spirit-conceived child (1:20) whose 'relocation' causes human redemption from sin (1:21). Outrageously *excessive* – shockingly ascribing Jesus divine origin and name – yet seemingly *disappointing* – entailing no messianic political overthrow – Christ's crossing realigns humanity to its appointed order where lesser kings and priests had failed.<sup>55</sup> As the virgin bears Emmanuel, God-with-us (1:22-3), Isaiah's baffling 'word-in-waiting' is 'completed', catalysing Matthew's succession of prophetic fulfilments as the gift appears to inaugurate his displacing interchange.

The Lukan nativity reinforces these astounding reversals. Whilst Caesar Augustus superciliously postured as saviour (*sōtēr*) and harbinger of peace,<sup>56</sup> the world's true *sōtēr* (2:11) is recognised not through self-aggrandisement but in heavenly salutation to inconsequential shepherds on Israel's allegedly lawless peripheries.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Augustus' imposed census displacement (2:1-3) serves Jesus's messianic alignment with David's city whilst keeping him relentlessly mobile in homeless dispossession (2:4-7). Such 'horizontal' dislocation contrasts the astounding 'vertical' incursion of theophanic glory, announcing universal peace not through political machination but the anointed messiah-king bearing YHWH's name (2:9-14).<sup>58</sup> Following the angels' withdrawal, the shepherds journey

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<sup>54</sup> Evans, 169-170.

<sup>55</sup> *JNIN*, 42-3.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, 415.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>58</sup> Evans, 204-7.

obediently to the newborn, recognising their Lord<sup>59</sup>, whilst subsequently bearing witness and praising God (2:16-20). The adored Christ-child receives symbolic gifts signifying, for the Fathers, his extraordinarily greater return-gift: humble lodging represents humankind's existential poverty which Christ makes exceedingly rich (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9); swaddling-cloths constitute bandages or grave-clothes announcing sacrificial victimhood and burial, whilst the animals' feeding-trough symbolises God's table, laden with heavenly bread, raising undeserving guests to eternal life (Jn. 6:35-59).<sup>60</sup>

Circumcised and named, Mary's firstborn is, furthermore, consecrated as return-gift to God (Lk. 2:23; Ex. 13:1-2), sharing ritually in the on-going 'redemption' first granted to Israel's firstborn at the Exodus (Ex. 13:13-16). Receiving this unnecessary 'gift', Christ guarantees a far greater counter-gift as he is 'presented' (*paristánai*) to the Lord (2:22).<sup>61</sup> Not merely united with God's ancient emancipative action, Jesus is to pioneer a *new* redemptive *exodos* (9:31), passing through suffering to glory (24:26). Hence the rite does not bestow redemption on Jesus but prefigures *his* redemptive self-giving. Devout, Spirit-filled Simeon prophetically hails him as the contradicted, crucified sign whose suffering Mary will share and who will instigate profound reversal (2:34).<sup>62</sup> Simeon, moreover, awaits Israel's eschatological consolation (*paraklēsis*) (2:25; cf. Isa. 40.1<sup>63</sup>) and envisages God's glory shining upon Israel so that Gentile darkness becomes radiant (cf. Isa. 60).<sup>64</sup> Thus as Christ is offered, multiple crossings are initiated: Israel's definitive end approaches, causing some to rise and others fall, whilst the nations become enfolded into God's saving purposes. Furthermore, Mary's firstborn (*prototokos*) is hailed as "*prototokos* among many brothers" (Rom.

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<sup>59</sup> Brown (419) suggests that at the manger mere shepherds made the recognition that eluded Israel (Isa 1:3)

<sup>60</sup> *JNIN*, 68-9.

<sup>61</sup> *Paristánai* implies temple sacrifice and priesthood (*JNIN*, 82).

<sup>62</sup> Evans, 218.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. John's depiction of the Spirit as *paraklētos*.

<sup>64</sup> Evans, 217.

8.29), forging resurrection's path to glory and "*prototokos* of all creation" (Col. 1.15), the world's beginning and completion, implicitly magnifying Luke's narrative to cosmic proportions.<sup>65</sup>

The Magi expound a similarly expansive vision, representing definitive Gentile displacement into Israel's heritage, prompted by the rising star (Mt. 2:2; cf. Num. 24:7; Rev. 22:16).<sup>66</sup> Patristic writers observed how misguided hopes in astral divinities are overturned as creation's true sovereign is manifested (cf. Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:16-17)<sup>67</sup> and the Magi relinquish their own esoteric philosophies before Christ in prostrated homage (Mt. 2.11). Their mysterious gold, frankincense and myrrh – traditionally interpreted as honouring Christ's kingship, his divine sonship and his impending passion – epitomise vectored gifts, ultimately demanding much more of Christ in return as he establishes his kingdom through sacrifice.

As the Magi return, transformed, along a *different* route (Mt. 2.12), Jesus, like Moses, escapes tyrannical massacre (2:13-14), crossing into Egypt, to inaugurate the ultimate exodus (2:15; cf. Hos. 11:1), with communicable, liberating force not merely for Moses' people but all Adam's enslaved children.<sup>68</sup> Herod's monstrous slaughter evokes Rachel's prophetic lamentation (Mat. 2:18; Jer. 31:15), whilst curiously postponing Jeremiah's hopes of restoration, suggesting that Bethlehem's infant martyrs must await ultimate vindication in resurrection.<sup>69</sup> Jesus's eventual return realises the mysterious 'prophecy' of "Nazorean" identity (2:23), in Ratzinger's opinion both fulfilling superlatively the consecration of the nazirite judge-deliverer Samson (Judg. 13:5) and Isaiah's vision of a shoot (*nezer*) springing from Jesse's stock (11:1).<sup>70</sup> From the ancient stump emerges a new,

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<sup>65</sup> *JNIN*, 70-71.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-101.

<sup>68</sup> See, moreover, Brown, 215-6.

<sup>69</sup> *JNIN*, 113.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-7.

divinely-consecrated beginning who re-enacts history with recapitulative power, acclaimed, finally, as *ho Nazōraios* at Golgotha (Jn. 19:19) where his lifelong self-displacement (cf. Judg. 16:17) reaches its extremity.<sup>71</sup> Forever inhabiting his eternal filial ‘place’, Christ embodies the true Israel, representatively and salvifically retracing the ancient Exodus, anticipating completion in yet greater emancipation from alienation to sonship.

Whereas the prophetess Anna was ‘at home’ in the temple, proclaiming Jerusalem’s redemption (Lk. 2:37-38), Jesus’s location therein is far profounder for he “must be (*dei*) in [his] Father’s house” (2:49; cf. Jn. 1:18; 14:3; 14:10-11 etc.). Cleansing the temple and prophesying its destruction, Jesus inaugurates a paschal journey, “the temple of his body” fulfilling and surpassing Jerusalem’s sacrifices (Jn. 2:19-21). The temple itself is therefore ‘displaced’ into Jesus as he becomes the meeting-place of heaven and earth. ‘Lost’ in Passover sacrifice, ‘transferred’ into eucharistic signs and rediscovered “after three days” (Lk. 2:46) as Easter’s new creation, he will enact a comprehensive passing-over. Pioneering humanity’s passage from entombed alienation into God’s resurrective sonship, his journey’s communicable endpoint is entry into his own eternal ‘place’ (cf. Eph. 1:13).

### ***Imparting the filiating Spirit***

So how does Christ begin to deliver this sanctifying gift to humanity in its deficient alienation?

Baptism narratives (Mat. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:10-11; Lk. 3:21-22) portray him proleptically standing amid humanity’s grave-like disorder, there receiving the Spirit and the Father’s revelatory affirmation, a trinitarian ‘Christo-theophany’

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.



that, furthermore, discloses true humanity. Matthew depicts Jesus receiving an identity fully ‘activated’ only through salvific counter-gift: as kingly Son (3:17; cf. Ps. 2:7), Deutero-Isaianic servant (cf. Isa. 42:1) and the one who “fulfils all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15), he inaugurates the new exodus (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-5) and the new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17), recalling the Spirit’s primal descent (Gen. 1:2) and fulfilling Isaiah’s eschatological exodus/creation prophecies.<sup>72</sup> The Spirit is Jesus’s abiding possession (Jn. 1:32-33), recognised for his animating power (Lk. 4:18): the gift given, received, ‘activated’ and acclaimed.

For Justin Martyr, the replete, sinless Word receives baptism only to *manifest* his eternal sonship, thereby inviting sinful humankind to receive baptism’s soteriological power.<sup>73</sup> He crosses into chaos that the chaotic might cross into peace. Similarly, for Aquinas, Christ’s baptism happens fittingly<sup>74</sup> “that he might sanctify baptism”<sup>75</sup>, cleansing the waters by his sinless flesh<sup>76</sup> and receiving superfluously so that the genuinely deficient might be enriched.<sup>77</sup> However, Irenaeus regards the baptism as *Christologically* significant: countering Gnostic claims that the ‘Christ’ descended upon Jesus, he affirms the *Spirit’s* genuine descent<sup>78</sup> whilst stressing that the divine nature *already* dwells ‘within’.<sup>79</sup> Jesus receives in his humanity that which is forever his as eternal Word, thereby pioneering humanity’s recapitulative journey towards sonship in the Son and Spirit possession.<sup>80</sup> Hence, whilst the *Logos-sarx* union forged at conception is “‘personal’ and incommunicable”, the *Pneuma-sarx* union is “dynamic and communicable,” allowing humanity’s participation in Christ’s unique identity.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Volume I (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 344-5.

<sup>73</sup> Daniel A. Smith, ‘Irenaeus and the Baptism of Jesus’, *Theological Studies* 58.4(1997), 619-21.

<sup>74</sup> *ST*, IIIa.39.1

<sup>75</sup> *ST*, IIIa.38.1

<sup>76</sup> *ST*, IIIa.39.1

<sup>77</sup> *ST*, III.39.2, ad.1

<sup>78</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.9.3 and 3.16.1, quoted by Smith, 623-624.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.16.2 (Smith, 625).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.9.3 (Smith, 621) and 3.16.6 (Smith, 618).

<sup>81</sup> Smith, 629-30.

As Christ receives representatively, so *in him* Adamic humanity retrieves misplaced riches. Moreover, as Christ receives-in-order-to-give, those who share Christ's filial Spirit themselves become givers, recovering Adam's original priesthood. Furthermore, as the Son *eternally* receives himself from the Father, perpetually presenting his counter-gift, so Jordan, that fluid frontier between wilderness and fulfilment, foretells the divine communion promised. "Fully [realizing] the mysteries of human salvation" and disclosing "the order of the heavenly, hidden mystery,"<sup>82</sup> Christ 'receives' sonship to *manifest* his eternal identity *so that* humanity might participate therein. The one on whom the Spirit *abides* (*menein*)<sup>83</sup> himself imparts the Spirit (Jn. 1:32-33) through his glorifying self-giving (7:39, 19:30, 21:22), to rest derivatively on believers (Acts 2:3), providing "rest for [their] souls" (Mt. 11:28-29) and enabling participation in his eternal sonship (Rom. 8:14-17).<sup>84</sup> Whilst Jesus's baptism is Christologically unique, it is sacramentally *communicable*: those baptised 'into Christ' participate in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4) and, adoptively, in his own sonship (8:14-17), transferred from privative Adamic compulsions towards full, gift-constituted identity. As Christ's baptismal 'self-reception' enables believers' so the gift's reciprocity is demonstrated.

Although the Spirit "transforms chaos into cosmos"<sup>85</sup> (Gen. 1), sinful Adam forfeits divine inbreathing, tragically resembling the pre-creative confusion. Christ "[fulfils] all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15) by proleptically enacting sacrificial reconciliation, "[purifying] the water by his passion,"<sup>86</sup> and vivifying its tomb-like depths. As sin entails 'overstepping' divine order, so Christ, in complete *freedom*, enters the chaos and *sanctifies* it. Thus, whereas the people are baptised "in" (*en*) the Jordan (Mk. 1:5) Christ enters "into" (*eis*) its turmoil (1:9), identifying fully,

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<sup>82</sup> Hilary of Poitiers (c.315–367), *On Matthew* 2.5, cited by McDonnell, 'Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan', *Theological Studies* 56(1995), 213.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. the farewell discourses' emphasis on (trinitarian) abiding (*menein*).

<sup>84</sup> McDonnell, 225.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>86</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians* 18.2, cited by McDonnell, 217

yet sinlessly, with flawed humanity.<sup>87</sup> Voluntarily undergoing such unnecessary ‘relocation’, Christ resolves *sinlessly* to ‘transgress’ – ‘go beyond’ – his own nature in “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3), exposing the established ‘order’ as ruinously deficient and rendering ‘disordered’ rejection, suffering and death the place of profoundest healing and unity (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20).

Hence, Christ sinlessly ‘oversteps’ the divine-human ontological divide, restoring Adam’s forfeited gift amid Jordan’s disordered depths. Christ’s crossing releases divine, reconciliatory fullness and accomplishes “the return of all to God....gathering up and making new, that everything might become in him and he in all.”<sup>88</sup> Jordan’s dramatic Christophany is an ‘inhabitable’ eschatological icon in which God’s uncreated, eternal, perfect, superabundant outpouring meets creation’s contingent, temporal, sinful, gift-rejecting disorder, thereby effecting transformation. Christ’s baptism is thus a proleptic ‘cosmophany’, announcing typologically a restored creation, to be fulfilled through resurrective victory, as all things find their rest in him.<sup>89</sup>

Such cosmic transformation proceeds incrementally through believers becoming “clothed .... with Christ” (Gal. 3:27) for participation in the nuptial feast.<sup>90</sup> Ephrem of Syria writes that the Merciful One

[stripped] off [glory] and [put] on [a body]; for He had devised a way to reclothe Adam in that glory which Adam had stripped off. He was wrapped with swaddling clothes, corresponding to Adam's leaves. He put on clothes instead of Adam's skins; He was baptized for Adam's sin, he was embalmed for Adam's death, He rose and raised up Adam in his glory. Blessed is He who descended, put Adam on and ascended.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Weinandy, 93.

<sup>88</sup> Philoxenus, *Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* 11; cited in McDonnell, 218.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> See Rogers, 138-140.

<sup>91</sup> *Hymns on the Nativity* 23.13, quoted by McDonnell, 233.

Christ's enfleshed 'reception' of Adam is exceeded in his counter-gift, outpouring (without losing) divine glory to array Adam in forfeited splendour. Syrian baptismal liturgy depicts a *threefold* incarnation through nativity, baptism and post-mortem descent, indicating God's descent into the three successive 'wombs' of Mary, Jordan, and Sheol: entering the Virgin's body makes Christ the Second Adam who, through embracing Adam's disordered existence in watery turmoil, deposits there for catechumens the glorious robe which denotes proleptic sacramental clothing in resurrectional splendour.<sup>92</sup> Christ's descending reception of humanity causes humanity's yet-greater ascent in him.

### ***Declining the illusory***

Whereas the baptism portrays Christ receiving Adam's squandered riches so that they might be re-imparted, his testing depicts him rejecting the illusory non-gifts which Adam deludedly seized. As the heavens are violently "torn apart" (*schizein*; Mk. 1.10) to release the Spirit, so immediately he "throws out" (*ekballein*, 1:12) Jesus, exposing him to satanic desires to wrest him from fertile giftedness into arid scarcity. These are no docetic theatrics but inflict strenuous vocational probing, superconcentrating Israel's wilderness testing: eschewing giftless, idolatrous woe-being, the second Adam fashions a new Israel through his excruciating passage into resurrectional well-being.

Like emancipated Israel entering barren spaces of undetermined response, Jesus's filial identity is scrutinised. Matthew's repeated "if you are the Son of God" (4.3,6)<sup>93</sup> scornfully mimics the Father's baptismal proclamation, insinuating that sonship demands spectacular displays. In the Spirit's freedom, Jesus counters the snares of sham miracles and self-annulling idolatry, recapitulating Israel's

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<sup>92</sup> See McDonnell, 232-3.

<sup>93</sup> This formula recurs in the Matthean passion (27:40), polemically judging Jewish rejection of God's filial gift.

formative forty years, hungering for YHWH's word alone and proving himself allied with God's gift-economy (cf. Deut. 8:2-3). Christ inhabits the 'really real' and emerges as Israel's anticipated light, demanding repentance for collusion with counterfeit economies and announcing the kingdom's life-bestowing imminence (Mt. 4:13-17).

Aquinas reinforces the salvific 'counter-correspondence' between Adam's giftlessness and Christ's plenitude.<sup>94</sup> As Christ *refuses* to transform non-food into food (Mt. 4:3-4), abundantly gifted Eve offered *chooses* the non-gift as "good for food" (Gen. 3:6). Christ *repudiates* self-aggrandizing acrobatics (Mt. 4:5-7) whilst Eve *falls prey* to vainglorious, deathly illusions (Gen. 3:5). Finally, whereas Christ understands creatures to be rightly ordered in true worship (Mt. 4:9-10), Eve trusts Satan's fallacious hubris (Gen. 3:5), overlooking humanity's *given* divine likeness (Gen. 1:28) for falsehood illicitly *seized*, imagining a shrunken ontological divide that renders fitting worship superfluous.

Christ, the eternal Son, has no need to grasp glory but reveals greatness kenotically (Phil. 2:6-7). His resolute gift-alignment demonstrates true *freedom*, whereas unfree Adam craved mere parasites of the gift, feeble parodies of the truly given. As beloved Son, enthroned above the baptismal flood (cf. Ps. 2:7), all nations are his (Mt. 28:19), rendering Satan's vacuous – yet mesmerizingly 'solid' – illusions deeply ironic. Transcending political empires (Jn. 19:36), Christ's divine purposes are accomplished not through acquisitiveness but in the abiding glory of self-giving kingship (19:19-22).

Nevertheless, Christ responds through faithful law-observance rather than suprahistorical divine power.<sup>95</sup> Yet whilst his testing benefits afflicted believers (Heb. 2:18, 4:15), his trials exceed commonplace temptations, culminating in

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<sup>94</sup> *ST*, IIIa.41.4.*responsio*.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Calvary's ultimate ordeal (Lk. 22:39-46). Gethsemane therefore displays perfect accord between his human and divine wills, even unto death (Phil. 2:8).<sup>96</sup> So Christ's desert victory both reverses Israel's defiant intransigence and 'expands' to embrace – and thereby overcome – the devil's ghastliest subterfuge: possessing the Father's baptismal gifts, Christ also 'receives' humanity's lawless insubordination and delivers a gracious, salvifically *communicable* counter-gift of imputed righteousness.

### ***Exceeding ethics***

However, does this suggest an antinomian (or 'supranomian?') stance, far closer to Paul (e.g. Rom. 10:4) than to Matthew? Indeed, Matthew's Jesus consistently aligns himself with God's law, fulfilling, not abolishing, the law and the prophets (5:17). Moreover, the Beatitudes' ninefold *makarios* seemingly implies replicable ethical endeavour as the touchstone of Christ-like fidelity. Is there a possible resolution?

Rabbi Jacob Neusner applauds Christ's attitude to the law, yet finds his antithetical reformations (Mt. 5:21-48) troubling, for they imply that human excellence, mirroring divine perfection (5:48), comes through meticulous legal observance *as Christ himself teaches*.<sup>97</sup> Jesus advocates 'transgressive' righteousness, exceeding the Mosaic 'letter', aspiring towards human-divine alliance in which *he himself* has centrality: whereas "at Sinai, God spoke through Moses .... Jesus speaks for himself .... as Moses, or as more than Moses."<sup>98</sup> For Neusner, Jesus's high self-regard (7:24-29) scandalously over-amplifies his

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<sup>96</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum* 6, trans., Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 173-176.

<sup>97</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), especially chapter 3.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

relationship to Torah, proposing three unashamed legal contraventions, setting discipleship (Mt. 10:34-37) against family order (Ex. 20:12), violating the Sabbath (Mt. 12:1-8) of Israel's participation in God's climactic rest (Ex. 20:8-11) and suggesting that Israel's sanctifying perfection (Lev. 19:2) comes through following *him* (Mt. 19:16-22).<sup>99</sup>

For Neusner, the ultimate outrage is not that Jesus reinterprets Mosaic law but places *himself* intrinsically within the divine revelation. Whilst others, such as David, Isaiah and Habakkuk, distilled the law with increasing concentration, Jesus *omitted nothing* but, shockingly, *added himself*.<sup>100</sup> Jesus legitimates Sabbath infringement through appealing to David's action in the temple (12:1-4), concluding, astoundingly, that "something greater than the temple is here" (12:6): Jesus and his disciples "now stand in the place of the priests in the Temple; the holy place has shifted, now being formed by the circle made up of the master and his disciples."<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Jesus beckons those burdened (by the law?) to *himself* so that through him they may "find *rest* for [their] souls" (11:28-29). As Israel's Sabbath meant participation in *God's* rest, Jesus makes *himself* the divine giver and usurps the Torah<sup>102</sup>, or, in Ratzinger's extrapolation, understands himself as John's personified Word.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, such realignment alters societal bonds not through family and land (Ex. 20:12) but through relationship to Jesus, thus establishing an expanded, 'democratised' people gathered around *himself* (28:20).<sup>104</sup>

Hence, fundamental aspects of Jewish faith – temple, Sabbath, law – become intently focused *in* Jesus: he does not merely *interpret* the law definitively or *lead* believers into the eternal Sabbath, but *is* God's very Word, the eschatological

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 108

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>103</sup> Ratzinger, *JNI*, 110.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 112f.

temple, the rest towards which creation's motion tends. So YHWH's gifts become startlingly concentrated *in* Jesus, who constitutes the new Israel through displacing its ancient signifiers *into* himself whilst multiplying potential recipients indeterminately (28:19). Moreover, through mountaintop theophany, viewed by Moses, his elevated status is confirmed as *divinely* bestowed: "this is my Son, the Beloved ... listen to *him!*" (17:5).

Aquinas explores meticulously how Jesus fulfils both Torah and temple in himself, realizing moral, judicial and ceremonial precepts.<sup>105</sup> Whilst others taught that Christ satisfies each category superlatively, for Aquinas this threefold accomplishment happened precisely in his *passion*, revealing and fulfilling the law's literal and spiritual meaning: Christ exhibits perfect charity (moral), freely suffers the penalty due to sinners (judicial) and offers himself to God as perfect sacrifice (ceremonial).<sup>106</sup> Christ's cross therefore consummates Israel's legal observance in a single, super-concentrated, soteriologically effective act of obedience and love, bearing transformative power for its 'recipients' in righteous living.

Hence, Matthew might not be that far from Paul. Ed Sanders' influential 'new perspective' on Paul defended Judaism as founded upon God's *gratuitous* election with legal observance entirely secondary, a 'covenantal nomism' grace-attained and law-sustained.<sup>107</sup> Righteousness (*dikaïosynē*) implies not some Greek, pre-defined ethical gauge but the Hebraic sense of honouring obligations within an existing relationship.<sup>108</sup> Hence, "the righteousness of God" (e.g. Rom. 1:17, 3:21ff) fulfils God's responsibilities to humanity through specific pledges made to Israel's forebears.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, such faithfulness both *reckons* disloyal covenant

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<sup>105</sup> See Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>106</sup> See *ibid.*, for a detailed exposition.

<sup>107</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 420.

<sup>108</sup> See James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 341-2.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.



partners as righteous through undeserved divine gift and also *makes* them righteous through renewed, transformative relationship with their promise-keeping God. Entirely gratuitous imparted righteousness, received through faith (e.g. Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16), nevertheless anticipates consonant ethical response: the free gift is vectored, expecting a non-identical charitable return, as Milbank contends. Such mutuality rests upon Christ's prior reciprocity in 'receiving' the law (Mt. 5:17) and responding expansively through inherently being Israel's inclusive temple, the divine Word and creation's final rest, fulfilling these vocations through his cross. At Calvary, God's perfect law and covenantal righteousness are revealed communicably.

### ***Participating in the flows***

Yet humankind's *telos* exceeds Jesus's daring gift of a new 'transgressive' law, embodied in crucifixion. The *miraculous*, supervening legal assiduousness, signals something entirely *other*, enabling recipients' graced crossing into a space unattainable through the law. Through analysing John's announcement of plentitudinous wine, water and bread and Mark's accounts of salvific relocation for Legion and the haemorrhaging woman, I shall show Christ giving abundantly from his inherent fullness and humanity joyfully receiving with thankful recognition whilst called to transmit this divine gift transformatively. This represents neither Derrida's unanticipated, unremembered, unreciprocated gift nor Marion's partial, bracketed gift but gratuitous participation in trinitarian exchange, enabled by Christ's willed, displacing donation.

Insistently mobile, Jesus crosses sacrificially to enact kenotic self-giving so that recipients might cross into unearnable plenitude. Thus the hypostatic union is not some 'static' human-divine convergence "but *an eschatological operation* ...

identified *only in the mission*.”<sup>110</sup> Eternally receiving the Father’s fullness and seamlessly reciprocating, Christ demonstrates that ‘inhabitable’ superabundant mutuality, receiving-in-order-to-give and giving-in-order-to-receive.

As Samuel Wells observes, John’s Jesus provides divine copiousness amid human scarcity.<sup>111</sup> Physically parched in alien terrain, Jesus addresses the Samaritan woman’s spiritual, ethical and political dehydration,<sup>112</sup> offering an inexhaustible inner life-giving spring (4:14). Flowing from within (7:37; 19:34), the Spirit represents no ‘external’ commodity but God’s self-gift, ‘relocating’ true worship from competing earthly sites to participation in trinitarian mutual indwelling (4:23; 17:21-23). Not merely *mediating* divine abundance, Jesus truly *is* that gratuitous, communicable plenitude, inherently “full (*plērēs*) of grace and truth” (1:14), enabling human reception “from his fullness (*plērōmatos*)” (1:16).

Imbued with Mosaic allusions, John’s feeding narrative emphasises Jesus’s deliberate ‘beyondness’ (6:1) and superabundant reciprocity, from meagreness providing lavishly both for Israel and its dubious neighbours (6:11-12). Through miraculous sea-crossing he negotiates perilous peripheries unthreatened and undepleted, proclaiming the reassuring divine *egō eimi* (6:20). Extraordinary nourishment is announced, exceeding the perishable (6:27), surpassing Mosaic manna (6:49,58) and satisfying perpetually (6:35), promising (6:51) and guaranteeing eternal life (6:53) through his sacrificial own gift-of-self. Both objectionable (6:60) and divisive (6:66), Jesus’s self-gift transgresses geographical, social and ontological boundaries: as the Word becomes flesh in an ‘alien’ space, that flesh becomes life-giving bread that heralds participation in the trinitarian gift.

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<sup>110</sup> Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 63; italics added.

<sup>111</sup> Samuel Wells, *God’s Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 18-23.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Flooding divine plentiude into human deficiency, Jesus's self-giving provokes either delusional rejection or trustful reception (10:10). Cana's wedding-feast exposes such poverty/potency of imagination, ironically misattributing the magnificent provision to human origin (2:10) rather than the divine Bridegroom inaugurating the eschatological banquet on this Sabbath-like climax to the gospel's first 'week'. Balancing fulfilment of resurrection fullness (2:1) with the gift's 'now-but-not-yet' nature (2:4), Cana reveals Jesus's glory proleptically signified (2:11), awaiting full embodiment in his crucifying "hour" (2:4) and recognised only on creation's 'actual' eighth day in resurrection.

Wells observes that John's narrativial techniques of original sufficiency running short and subsequently vanishing, only to be replaced with superabundance, mimics Israel's story of a good creation becoming sinfully disfigured, suffering exile and eventually receiving restoration.<sup>113</sup> Jesus himself recapitulates Israel's history: initially acclaimed, then rejected and crucified, his resurrective climax radically surpasses mere reinstatement in impoverished, kingless post-exilic terrain.<sup>114</sup> So, in Maximian terms, Jesus does not simply embrace the continuum from woe-being to well-being but expands it superlatively towards the otherwise unattainable heights of *eternal* well-being.

Mark's gospel similarly highlights excessive self-donation. As misplaced, gift-ignorant Adam participates in creation's primal disarray (cf. Gen. 3:7-10), so Mark depicts the strong (3:27) and powerful (1:7) one who, eluding Satan's grasp, reverses disorder, rebuking and silencing unclean spirits (1:25) and the untamed deep alike (4:39; cf. Gen. 1:1),<sup>115</sup> demonstrating YHWH's awesome confining power (Gen. 1:9; cf. Ex. 14:21-31; Job 38:8-11; Pss. 89:8f; 107:23-32; Prov. 8:27-29; Jon. 1.1-6).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> See Morna D. Hooker's *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: A&C Black, 1991), 139.

<sup>116</sup> Hooker, 138-9.

Striking parallels emerge in healing the crazed, self-harming Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20). Christ purposefully self-displaces (4:35)<sup>117</sup> to an *alien* place of impure animals (5:11) and people (5:14), where tormented Legion resides among contaminated tombs (5:3-4). Exhibiting symptoms of insanity<sup>118</sup>, with a pluralised name, Legion is misplaced, dwelling literally ‘beside himself’, ‘out of his mind’. Only when the unclean spirits enter the impure, ill-fated swine (5:11-13) does he truly re-enter himself (5:15). Legion depicts humanity radically alienated, mislocated amid death and impurity (cf. Gen. 3:9), unrestrainable, ‘transgressing’ his true self, terrifying and oblitative, like the untameable primal deluge. Here is desperate Adam amid giftless woe-being, driven by unprescribed, misdirected longings far beyond Eden.

Whilst certain scholars would deny such interpretations, discerning instead subversive anti-Roman polemic<sup>119</sup>, Christopher Burdon commends Jean Starobinski’s ‘ontological-theological’ analysis of boundaries negotiated for “the *crossing* of the ‘frontier’ is the central event” as Christ “*goes to the other*: to the adversary, the unbeliever, and the suffering man.”<sup>120</sup> Mark repeatedly uses the preposition *eis*, denoting movement towards: Jesus crosses “*to* the other side” (4:35; 5:1; 5:21), demons pass *into* the swine and onwards *into* the sea (5:12-13) whilst “the man himself crosses from ‘living death’ to evangelistic life.”<sup>121</sup> Jesus, whose freedom “transcends and satirises the boundary markers of scribes and legions alike”, fearlessly transcends legality and boldly journeys towards Jerusalem’s death-bound descent and Galilee’s resurrective ascent. Embodying “persistent and dynamic facing of the Other and the courage to cross over and

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<sup>117</sup> See Joshua Garroway, ‘The invasion of a mustard seed: a reading of Mark 5.1-20’, *JSNT*, 32:1(2009), 57-75.

<sup>118</sup> See Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1:1–8:26* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1989), 278.

<sup>119</sup> For examples see Christopher Burdon, “‘To the other side’: Construction of Evil and Fear of Liberation in Mark 5.1-20’ in *JSNT* 27:2(2004), 157-160. Among them is Derrett who reads the waters traversed effortlessly by Jesus and in which Legion drowns as the sea of exodus, thereby casting Caesar as Pharaoh and Jesus as the new Moses.

<sup>120</sup> Burdon, 166; italics are Starobinski’s.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

engage with it”<sup>122</sup>, Jesus’s willed self-displacing gift conveys Legion into wholeness.

Following Jesus’s withdrawal, the healed man becomes a witness of the Lord’s deeds, causing amazement in the Decapolis (5:19-20). Joshua Garroway reads this testimony as dramatically enacting the parables of Mark 4, particularly that of the mustard seed (4:30-32): the kingdom of God, emerging from tiny, unpromising origins, penetrates peacefully, mysteriously, yet magnificently, as “the invaded becomes the invader .... the cured demoniac, like a solitary mustard seed, [reentering] the community from which he has been expelled and [preaching] a message that rapidly proliferates.”<sup>123</sup> This once alienated man infiltrates non-violently to evangelise the very community which maligned him, transformed through the power of one mightier than both Caesar and creation’s chaotic fury.<sup>124</sup> Jesus’s gift does not mean a healed, yet static, recipient for the gift remains active as Legion offers his own counter-gift.

Back in Jewish territory (5:22) where Mosaic purity holds sway, the restoration of the haemorrhaging woman, physically and financially depleted (5:25-26), offers similar, albeit more discreet, revelation. Daring to touch Jesus’s garments, her “fountain of blood” is staunches, bringing palpable, instantaneous healing (5:29), whilst Jesus perceives the outward emanation of power (5:30-3). Hailed as ‘daughter’ – rather than contagiously unclean (Lev. 15:19) – and enjoying disease-free *shalom* (Mk. 5:34), she is transferred from shameful diminishment to blessed plenitude, through Christ’s life-giving power ‘relocated’. The haemorrhage’s unholy ‘kenosis’ is overcome by Christ’s greater self-emptying, a physical, redemptive interchange simultaneously reciprocal and radically asymmetric.

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>123</sup> Garroway, 60.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Moreover, as Barbara Baert observes, *haptein* (meaning to ‘touch’, ‘approach’ or ‘come into contact with’) implies cultic resonance (Ex. 29:37) or taboos of interaction.<sup>125</sup> This unconsented, contaminative connection leaves Jesus unperturbed, liberally allowing sanative body-to-body flows. This ‘transgressive’, interruptive, mutually relocating contact conveys energy “from the supra-mundane to the mundane level,”<sup>126</sup> possessing fluidity reinforced in iconography depicting the haemorrhissa alongside Moses extracting water from the desert rock and Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman at the well,<sup>127</sup> themselves incidents of profound physical-existential crossing. Furthermore, certain exegetes intimate a ‘new exodus’, replete with baptismal, eucharistic and paschal themes, prophetically anticipating God’s Kingdom and Christ’s parousia as the woman “[undergoes] her eschatological pilgrimage to God.”<sup>128</sup> As Ward affirms,

Touch triggers a divine operation, an eschatological operation....in which the messianic is performed. The making-whole of the body is a salvific act that translates the recipient into a citizen of the Kingdom. Proleptically, each one cleansed or made whole receives intimations of their resurrected body.<sup>129</sup>

This ostracised woman, healed through touching and flowing in a fertile, mobile, jostling space, demonstrates humanity, made in Christ’s image, remaining vitally transformable, receiving Christ’s self-giving flow to participate in God’s fluid, life-giving economy. So Christ’s ecclesial and eucharistic bodies are sacrificial because Christ’s historical body was: translating the Trinity’s eternal, symmetric flows into temporal, bodily asymmetry, he invites participation in the divine flows, thus (re-)constituting God’s children and initiating reciprocation.

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<sup>125</sup> Barbara Baert ‘Touching the hem: the thread between garment and blood in the story of the woman with the haemorrhage (Mark 5:24b-34 par)’ in *The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 9:3(2011), 311.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>128</sup> John Cummings, quoted *ibid.*, 320.

<sup>129</sup> Ward, 65-6.

Mark's Jesus is perennially itinerant, his body the peripatetic conduit for divine power, mediated through touch, occasionally involving penetration and bodily fluids (e.g. Mk. 8:22-5).<sup>130</sup> Jesus's body is not inert, passive or simply 'there' (as suggested by the German *Körper*) but dynamically responsive (body as *Leib*), inherently focused towards the deficient in self-outpouring gratuity.<sup>131</sup> As Christ's kenosis achieves others' plerosis, his ecclesial body learns trustful, reciprocal giving-of-self. This crossing-over echoes charitable, mutual indwelling (Jn. 14:20; 17:23): as Christ in-dwells the world which emerged through him (1:9-10), he leads creatures to grasp (or, rather, be grasped by) intense reception, a divine operation akin to touch.<sup>132</sup> Being 'in Christ' involves no disembodied escape but discovering what corporeality actually means,

[attaining] the condition of being incarnate as the Word is incarnate....Human beings are not truly themselves, are not truly flesh, until they have become flesh as he became flesh. We are, then, seeking a body; through intimacy we seek an intimacy with the source of the 'emanation of all things'. It is a body prepared for us... 'his body, the fullness [*to pleroma*] of him that fills all in all' (Ephesians 1.23). It is a condition of enfleshment that is eschatological – a resurrection body, a new kind of embodiment....<sup>133</sup>

So Christ – mobile, fluid, self-imparting – defies construing bodiliness as solid, pre-determined autonomy, for his dynamic body – historical, sacramental and ecclesial – awaits further innovation Fed by the eucharistic body, which participates in Christ's sacrificed body, the Church *becomes* his ecclesial body (1 Cor. 10:16-17), desiring participation in his immortal and imperishable risen bodiliness (15:54-55).

Christ, forever pre-sent, awaits humanity's con-sent to share in his very being. He reveals creatures' end as becoming transparently receptive to God's plenitudinous

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-7.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

outflow *so that* such fullness ‘onflows’ for others’ enrichment, thereby participating in the timeless trinitarian to-and-fro.

### ***Sharing the splendour***

Jesus’s bodily transfiguration dazzlingly portrays his communicable baptismal identity, ‘receiving’ YHWH’s radiant splendour (Ps.104:1-2).<sup>135</sup> As Adam and Eve traded divine, light-bearing apparel for garments of skin,<sup>136</sup> so Jesus representatively recovers humankind’s ancestral loss, ‘fittingly’ displaying our magnificent ‘summit’.<sup>137</sup> Evoking myriad associations (Isa. 9:2; 60:1; Deut. 33:2; Mal. 4:2), Christ’s face “[shining] like the sun” (Mt. 17:2) suggests both Moses’ Sinai radiance (Ex. 34:29-35; cf. 2 Cor. 3:7-18) and YHWH’s glorious throne (Ps. 50:2; 80:1; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 8:4; 10:18).<sup>138</sup> So Christ’s graced disciples pierce the material veil to glimpse Christ’s hidden reality<sup>139</sup>, perfecting priestly temple visions and recovering the unclouded insight which humanity’s proto-priest forfeited. Whether Moses, called through ‘transfigurative’ vision (Ex. 3:1-6), saw God’s face (Deut. 34:10) or merely his back (Ex. 33:19-23), here he sees the divine *kabod*. Yet his prophetic seeing is eclipsed by Jesus, the ideal prophet (Deut. 18:15; 34:10), who enjoys and communicates “real, immediate vision of the face of God”<sup>140</sup> and as revealed Son merits humanity’s obedient listening (Mt. 17:5).

Christ bears Adam’s forfeited glory, granted superlative priestly vision and enthroned as eschatological king. Transparently receiving and luminously giving, “Jesus shines from within; he does not simply *receive* light, but he himself *is* light

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<sup>135</sup> See Margaret Barker, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, reprinted Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 65.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. *ST*, IIIa.45.1

<sup>138</sup> Barker, 65.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>140</sup> *JN1*, 5.



from light.”<sup>141</sup> Bestowing no ‘alien’ status, the transfiguration reveals his true splendour<sup>142</sup>, an inherent radiance surpassing Adam’s surrendered glory. As Christ receives his eternal Spirit (Jn. 1.32-33) in order to bestow it (19:30; 20.22), heavenly glory is likewise given (17:5) to be transmitted (17.22), thereby manifesting trinitarian exchange (17:1). Christ’s transfiguration thus exhibits humanity’s new ‘habitat’:

Transfigured, Thou hast made the nature that had grown dark in Adam to shine again as lightning, transforming it into the glory and splendour of Thine own divinity.<sup>143</sup>

Christ, the Father’s *eikōn*, perpetually reflects divine brilliance, in seamless self-giving from womb to tomb. Matthew’s ‘bright cloud’ (17:5), interpreted pneumatologically in patristic exegesis, ‘completes’ this trinitarian theophany, thereby ‘clarifying’ (making glorious) Jordan’s triune revelation, as Bede observes.<sup>144</sup> As Rogers argues, the Spirit resting on the praying (Lk. 9:29) Son in mountaintop transfiguration rests upon him eternally and, gratuitously, on the receptive, prayerful, eucharistic Church which desires both its own transfiguration and creation’s.<sup>145</sup>

Hence, Christ’s transfiguration reveals not only God but *humanity* and *creation* also, occurring either “six days” (Mt. 17:1; Mk. 9:2) or “about eight days” (Lk. 9:28) after Peter’s confession, suggesting possible allusions to the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>146</sup> Christ, inhabiting creation’s ‘sixth day’ (Jn. 5:17), is revealed as humanity perfected through Pilate’s ‘*ecce homo*’ (19:5) on the sixth day of his final week. Whilst Peter’s ‘day zero’ perplexity (Mk. 9:32//) understands Christ’s

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 310; italics added.

<sup>142</sup> *ST*, IIIa.45.2.

<sup>143</sup> From the *Aposticha* at Great Vespers on the Feast of the Transfiguration; cited by Solrunn Nes, *The Mystical Language of Icons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 133.

<sup>144</sup> See Kenneth Stevenson, “From Hilary of Poitiers to Peter of Blois: a Transfiguration journey of biblical interpretation”, *SJT* 61:3, 295.

<sup>145</sup> Rogers, II.4.

<sup>146</sup> See Ratzinger, *JNI*, 306.

suffering as meaningless, like the pre-creative *tohu wabohu*, viewed against humankind's true creation (day six) it appears gloriously divine, awaiting final revelation not on the temporal Sabbath (day seven) but God's eternal, resurrective Sabbath (day eight), a proleptic, eschatological 'exodus' (Lk. 9:31). Moreover, as Tabernacles culminated in symbolic enthronement, representing YHWH's triumph over chaos, kingless post-exilic celebrations became overlaid with mystical expectation of the Melchizedek-like messianic king (Ps.110:4; cf. Heb. 5:6), the king-priest perfected by Christ clad in resplendent vestments before the holy of holies.<sup>147</sup> The transfiguration thus discloses the triumphant, transcendent king-priest Adam in eschatological completion.<sup>148</sup> So here is true humanity, saturated by divine light; here is the kingdom, God's new creation.

Christ's transfiguration depicts humankind's *telos* against the memory of Adam's catastrophic loss, portraying Moses "the past, locating the disciples *in* their past", Elijah "the past-as-future, translating the disciples into the time of Messianic promise", with the Father's proclamation providing "a naming outside ... expectation; an ontological scandal" glorifying "one situated within another order, in an economy of loving and being loved."<sup>149</sup> This mutual love that was Adam's original 'place' is shown to be the Son's eternally and superlatively, a gifted trinitarian location displaced astoundingly into Christ's gendered, historical, transfigured body. Receiving the filial honour glimpsed in kingly ritual enthronement (Ps. 2:7),<sup>150</sup> he *is* the glorified son of man (Ps. 8:6), awaiting the parousia's universal acclaim.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 57-60.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-8; following Maximus.

<sup>149</sup> Ward, 101.

<sup>150</sup> Dorothy Lee, *Transfiguration* (London: Continuum, 2004), 23-4.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

Dorothy Lee argues that John's gospel is profoundly transfigurational despite lacking an explicit narrative and locating 'glory' in Christ's crucifying 'hour'.<sup>152</sup> Its panoramic prologue, evoking Genesis' opening *be-reshit*, witnessess divine truth comprehensively disclosed: "we have seen his glory" (1:14). Whereas Peter desired to prolong the transfiguration by constructing three *skēnē* (Mark 9.5//), John portrays the divine Word "tabernacled (*eskēnōsen*) among us", *abiding* in flesh, the site of true worship (4:24), heavenly ascent (1:51) and believers' enduring 'location' (15:4-10; 17:22-23).<sup>153</sup> So whereas the synoptic Jesus possesses "transcendent humanity that radiates divine presence", John's embodies a reverse metamorphosis, revealing divinity "[showing] itself in the material world, face to face"<sup>154</sup>, seeking transformable performers within his unfolding epic (20:31). Jesus's cross fulfils his metamorphosis, the glorious (re)ascension which heralds eternal life for those who know both the sender and the one sent (17:2-3). The synoptics echo this call to participation: unlike the baptism (Lk. 3:22), the Father's voice addresses the disciples (9:35) who fearfully 'enter' the awesome cloud (9:34).

Thus the Gospels complementarily depict Christ as *transfigured* and *transfiguring*, receiving 'unnecessary' glory representatively to supply the excessive counter-gift of human 'transfiguration'. Aquinas teaches that Christ's baptism and transfiguration both reveal Christ's "natural sonship" and humanity's adoption, yet whilst baptism initiates an "imperfect conformity", transfiguration consummates "perfect conformity", in seeing Christ, the "clarity of glory" (1 Jn. 3:2).<sup>155</sup> Regarded as prayer's quintessence (Lk. 9:28), the ascetic contemplative [longs] for humanity's "undying beauty"<sup>156</sup>, remaining "attentive ... until the day dawns and the morning star rises" (2 Pet. 1:19). Nevertheless, mere human

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-111.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-5.

<sup>155</sup> *ST*, IIIa.45.4.*responsio*.

<sup>156</sup> John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 284.

endeavour proves woefully insufficient. Jesus “[receives] honour and glory” (1:17) to manifest his *innate* splendour, transfiguring believers through *divine* power (1:3) in reoriented lives (1:5-11) awaiting the parousia (3.11-18). Metamorphosis, moreover, seems implicit in humanity’s awesome vocation to “become participants of the divine nature” (1.4): creation’s final reshaping involves believers’ transformation, heralded on the mountain and awaited eschatologically.<sup>157</sup>

Paul similarly espouses human transfiguration. Moses’s face became radiant (Ex. 34:29-35) even amid the ministry of death/condemnation (2 Cor. 3:7-8), yet with borrowed, transitory splendour (2 Cor. 3:7,13). Nevertheless, the ministry of the Spirit/justification causes superabundant glory (3:8-9) through Christ “the image (*eikōn*) of God” (4:4) who bears glory *eternally*. Beholding Christ’s divine splendour, believers are transformed (*metamorphoumetha*) through divine power “from one degree of glory to another” (3:18), discovering themselves remade in Christ, God’s image of “unimaginable intensity and inexhaustible abundance”<sup>158</sup> (2 Cor. 4:6) and receiving a glory exceeding Adam’s squandered riches (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22).

Even more expansively, Maximus imagines *cosmic* transformation. Christ’s mountaintop disciples understood his personal radiance to signify transcendent divinity and his resplendent clothing both scripture’s truth and creation’s regeneration.<sup>159</sup> Maximus depicted the Church as a Christocentric circular space whose circumference separates true being from non-being. Dwelling at this ambiguous Adamic periphery, human beings are, nevertheless, extensions of

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<sup>157</sup> Lee, 96.

<sup>158</sup> David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171.

<sup>159</sup> *Ambiguum* 10, trans. Louth, 109. Such symbolic coincidence of scripture and cosmos in Christ’s dazzling attire is consistent with his cosmology of divine *logoi* cohering in the Logos.

Christ's body, his salvific power drawing all towards himself (cf. Jn. 12.32).<sup>160</sup> His chosen apostles passed, before death, from flesh to spirit<sup>161</sup>, a shift suggesting neither ontological change nor dualism but the dissolving of materiality's veil as participants move *corporeally* towards the Christ-centre.<sup>162</sup> Maximus's analogy corresponds to iconography portraying Christ within a circular mandorla, Moses and Elijah on its penumbral periphery and the stunned apostles representing equivocal humanity's calling to ascend contemplatively from potential woe-being to transfigurative eternal well-being.<sup>163</sup>

## Conclusion

What can we glean from this consideration of Jesus' life prior to Calvary? Most fundamentally, it declares that Jesus, God's gift to his beloved world (Jn. 3:16) shows us what giving and receiving entail. Whilst Derrida asserts that the gift requires non-appearance, unreturnability and forgetfulness, the gospels implicitly insist that these demands are overcome and reversed in Jesus.

First, Jesus is shown as *receiving* – for example, the filial Spirit at baptism and the resurrection body at transfiguration – yet never due to some lack, but rather disclosing his eternal trinitarian identity whilst 'fittingly' imbuing communicable events and rites with transformative power. Moreover, in rejecting Satan's illusions he exemplifies perfect gift-alignment, unlike deluded Adam. Secondly, Jesus's reception invariably invokes a *counter-gift*: inheriting Israel's shadowy history requiring recapitulative reordering, bearing a momentous name which recounts and reactivates YHWH's salvific action and inhabiting a body given-in-order-to-be-given-up, his life is immediately oriented in self-giving, even before

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<sup>160</sup> *The Church's Mystagogy in Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George Berthold (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 187; cf. Andreopoulos, 151-2.

<sup>161</sup> *Ambiguum* 1, quoted by Andreopoulos, 152.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

birth. Thirdly, his return-gift entails *displacement*, both for him as giver, entering humanity's deficient spaces, but also for beneficiaries, crossing from lifeless alienation towards unprecedented fullness, participating in God's trinitarian exchange.

Just as Jesus offers gifts within the 'beyondness' of an alien ontological space (Jn. 8:23) so receiving that gift propels the bearer into yet more mysterious, uncharted, trinitarian terrain (14.20). Whereas the primal chaos threatened to engulf and decimate, the Son's compassionate 'going-beyond' happens in the perfect freedom of his eternal *ekstasis*, thereby salvifically conveying the gift, God himself, into creation's impoverished wastelands. This represents a kenotic movement, a going-beyond-self which is no loss-of-self but the very archetype of giving, mapping God's eternal gift-exchange into creation's delusions of scarcity, trapped within the inherited sway of Adam and Eve's self-limiting preference for the killer tree's poverty rather than bounteous grace. Christ's giving-from-superabundance happens in sinless 'transgression', persistently thrusting beyond boundaries imposed by gender, nationality, religion, history, purity, sanity, or infidelity to deposit gifts: healing, exorcism, forgiveness, cleansing, faith, eucharistic abundance and, ultimately, filiated, transfigurative participation in his resurrection. Divine plenitude, in astounding gratuity, meets human barrenness, in its visionless obduracy, and thus transforms it, revealing the extent of divine mercy.<sup>164</sup>

Such self-giving, moreover, fulfils the gift contentions proposed from the outset. In Christ, whose mission translates the eternal trinitarian gift into time and space, there is no chasm between the gift observed and the elusive, 'pure' gift. The giving-and-receiving that Christ instigates is, moreover, full and uninhibited, involving the 'gift-object' of his very body to transform the real, enfleshed life of his recipients. Furthermore, far from consigning this giving to radical

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. López, *GUB*, 261-2.

forgetfulness, its memory constitutes the Church's life and its hope for glorious resurrection.

However, lurking implicitly, yet insistently, through the entire account has been the golden thread of sacrifice: the Magi's myrrh and Simeon's ominous predictions herald the infant's cross-sealed destiny; entering Jordan's disordered depths anticipates his paschal immersion; after failing to tempt the Son to doubt his baptismal identity, the devil awaits an altogether more dramatic opportunity; Cana's wine proclaims the future hour of self-giving; the unending spring promised at the well will flow from his crucified side; the miraculous bread is his flesh given-up for the world; expelling demonic forces augers yet severer strife; a vitality-drained woman, healed through encountering yet-greater kenotic flow, receives indications of the resurrection body. That body, generously crossing into humanity's privation and dazzlingly foreshadowed on the mountain, will be revealed fully only after Christ's self-giving reaches its utmost depths.





## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Extent of Giving

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### Introduction

Consideration of Christ's pre-passion life reveals his body as given-in-order-to-be-given-up, possessing an inherent, concrete reciprocity manifested in joyous thankfulness, courageous witness and radiant anticipation of future glory. From conception to transfiguration, this singular life is overshadowed proleptically by Calvary's ultimate self-donation, Christ's vocation to translate his replete, filial procession into creation's privated 'half-life'. Such thinking inevitably elicits language of sacrifice, notions that remain deeply problematic. Whilst we might applaud a poverty-stricken parent who forgoes food to nourish her growing child or a spouse who relinquishes personal career aspiration for his beloved's vocational flourishing, many would find the prescribed ritual slaughter of innumerable animals in pursuit of divine blessing or propitiation to be abhorrent, not least in the objectionable divine image thus enshrined.

Modern scholarly anthropologies of sacrifice are immensely wide. Tylor (1871) regarded it as "a gift made to a deity as if he were a man"<sup>1</sup> which exceeds mere bribe, moving from "the idea of substantial value received to that of ceremonial homage rendered"<sup>2</sup> and beyond that to the belief that sacrifice involves "the worshipper giving something precious to himself"<sup>3</sup>, a tangible giving sometimes reciprocated through a shared human-divine meal.<sup>4</sup> Smith (1881) refuted gift theories, emphasising instead the worshippers' visible "act of communion" with

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, Volume II (London: John Murray, 1873), 375.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

the unseen divine engendered through participating in the mystical feast.<sup>5</sup> Other commentators, such as Hubert and Mauss (1898), objected to this sharp gift/sacrifice bifurcation, claiming that sacrifice's bewilderingly diverse rituals find unity through "establishing a means of communication between the sacred and profane worlds through the mediation of a victim" ceremonially destroyed.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding this vast scholarly backdrop, my concern is more modest, continuing on the explicitly theological trajectory hitherto established to examine the sacrificial nature of Christ's death. This is complicated, however, by tensions within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Key questions include whether true sacrifice entails externalised, bodily ritual or inward, incorporeal piety; whether sacrifice demands active *self*-offering or being passively handed-over; and, crucially, the extent to which Christ's death represents merely conspiratorial human collusion or intimates some veiled divine drama.

I will show how the events of Christ's passion convey human recipients from Adamic alienation towards a final gift more glorious than the original, a crossing surpassing the 'preparatory' interchanges described in the previous chapter. Receiving human poverty in return for divine richness, Christ's self-offering is graphically corporeal, allowing creatures to 'transcend' themselves on the basis of God's eternal triune *ek-stasis* and inviting the Church's perpetual, kerygmatic, eucharistic remembrance in responsive self-offering. As the final chapters will contend, Christ's humiliating self-donation finds reciprocation in the glorious resurrection body, thus allowing mere animated dust to await jubilant participation in the trinitarian life.

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<sup>5</sup> William Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites: first series: the fundamental institutions* (Edinburgh: Black, 1889).

<sup>6</sup> Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W.D. Halls (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 97 (quotation originally italicised). For a more detailed survey of sacrifice's disparate theorists see Douglas Hedley, *Sacrifice Imagined: Violence, Atonement and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 1-18.

## Hebrew sacrifice

Israel's sacrificial traditions hold together seemingly inconsistent tensions between substitutionary offering and the giving-of-self-unto-death. Might these dichotomous theories help us understand more fully where Christ's sacrificial death lies?

### *Giving another*

For the Pentateuchal priestly writer, humanity's holy, chaos-constraining, cosmic vocation entails cleaving fastidiously to God's moral/sacrificial code. Human sanctity is forever threatened by sacrilegious impurity, thus emphasizing the vital difference between God and Israel. Priestly sacrificial/mediatorial actions negotiate sacred-profane liminality, reinforcing divine-human separation and enacting God's guaranteed atonement and communion.<sup>7</sup> P prescribes various sacrifices, including the all-consuming holocaust (*'olah* or *kalil*; Lev. 1; Num. 28:3f) of an unblemished animal, expressing homage, thanksgiving and praise; various bloodless grain-offerings (*minha*; Lev. 2);<sup>8</sup> the celebratory peace offering (*zebah shelamim*; Lev. 3), requiring sacrificial blood to be dashed against the altar, with the fat burned in fragrant offering and flesh eaten in God's presence, symbolising both life's sacredness and death's reality; and the expiatory sacrifices *hatt'ah* ('sin-offering'; Lev. 4:1–5:13) and *asham* ('guilt-offering'; Lev. 5:14–6:7), involving sacrificial blood daubed on the altar horns and poured out at the base, fat burned and remaining flesh consumed by priests, the 'most holy' human-divine mediators.<sup>9</sup> So whilst certain offerings appear like pure 'loss', yielding no divine 'counter-gift', others provide tangible, alimentary benefits, a sacral

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<sup>7</sup> John Dunnill, *Covenant and sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 84ff.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: a Continental Commentary* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2004), 25-27

<sup>9</sup> Dunnill, 90-109.

physicality finding later eucharistic resonance. Moreover, the notion of ‘one-way’ sacrifice is erroneous for even the ‘unreturned’ holocaust is possible only because of God’s gratuitous provision.

Whilst early Hebrew tradition considered priests to represent the people to God *and God to the people*, Leviticus and post-exilic texts emphasise the ‘upward’ mediatorial role.<sup>10</sup> P’s atonement theology yokes sin to punishment and, if left unaddressed, to death:<sup>11</sup> endangered sinners require ransoming through appeasive sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> Inadvertent sins, moreover, *pollute*, contaminating both individuals and sanctuary, thereby necessitating sanitizing *blood*.<sup>13</sup> Whilst sacrificial efficaciousness remains mysterious, blood expresses God’s very life, possessing power to mend sin-ruptured relationships: “the life of the flesh is in the blood.... as life, it is the blood that makes atonement” (Lev. 17:11). Ritual purity, however, remains an intermediate, relative state, preserving the calibrated hierarchy of YHWH, priests and people.<sup>14</sup>

Never intended to extract maddeningly elusive divine favours, Israel’s sacrifices depend entirely upon – and joyously celebrate – God’s prior provision. Nonetheless, they represent gift-offering, the physical victim/mediator inhabiting simultaneously the spiritual domain and the sacrificer’s here-and-now.<sup>15</sup> Victim and sacrificer are intimately identified, the gift constituting no utilitarian commodity but “the subject in an objective form.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, outward rites

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<sup>10</sup> Dunnill, 105.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 11ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 44ff.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 80ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 126, n.62.

<sup>15</sup> Gary A. Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings: Old Testament”, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 5, 870-886; Editor-in-Chief: David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 871.

<sup>16</sup> Valeri, quoted by Anderson, 871.

represent no *inherent* remedy,<sup>17</sup> for atonement is divine *gift* rather than human sacrificial expenditure.<sup>18</sup> Sacrificial reciprocity is predicated upon inverse proportionality as God's transcendent generosity disproportionately overwhelms humanity's poor offering.<sup>19</sup> This undermines both Derrida's aversion to remembrance, exchange and anticipation and Marion's bracketed, objectless giving whilst reinforcing Milbank's thesis concerning the gift's concrete asymmetric reciprocity.

Through sacrifice, redemption is enacted: holiness is safeguarded, the people are delivered from the deathly pollution of unatoned misdemeanour, creation is preserved from unravelling (Isa. 24:5; Jer. 4:23) and covenantal peace and righteousness abound (Ps. 72; Isa. 11.1-9).<sup>20</sup> Actions performed in the *debir*, containing YHWH's throne, and surrounded by the *hekal*, representing Eden, the completed universe, constituted genuinely cosmic actions for creation's healing, preservation and ultimate perfection. Re-establishing human-divine communion through high-priestly rites reveals God himself graciously restoring creation, for whereas cultic texts depict the *priest* cleansing and consecrating some contaminated thing, non-cultic texts emphasise *God* eliminating sin: "a priest smearing blood in the temple 'was' God removing sins,"<sup>21</sup> for "the blood of the victim, into which all human sins are absorbed, actually touches the Divinity and is thereby cleansed", thereby purifying humanity through this ritualised divine 'contact'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Daly, Robert J., S.J. *The origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), 21-25

<sup>18</sup> R. Kevin Seasoltz, 'Another look at Sacrifice', *Worship* 74 (2000), 397.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, 872; Sklar, 45-6.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Barker, 'Atonement: the rite of healing', *SJT* 49:1(1996), 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10; quotation, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two: Holy Week: from the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, (Hereafter, *JN2*), (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2011), 39.

Through sacrifice God heals a breach, crosses some divide for true sacrifice “is designed to unite us to God in a holy fellowship.”<sup>23</sup> Sacrifice therefore points worshippers teleologically onwards whilst evoking ancient Israelite self-understanding embodied in Moses’ definitive covenant-sacrifice (Ex. 24). Whilst not inherently sacrificial, the Passover became imbued post-exilically with cultic significance, performatively fusing past, present and future, uniting Israel with God’s foundational emancipative action and enabling each generation’s self-identification as displaced Exodus people journeying towards eschatological victory.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Giving oneself***

Yet although the priestly writer vividly portrays a nation shaped, preserved and judged through ritualised sacrificial fidelity, the wider canon proposes a “multivalent entity” resisting uniformity.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, although P, the Deuteronomistic Historian, Ezra-Nehemiah and the Chronicler each align cultic rigour with sustained social meaning, the precise correspondence varies.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, certain texts explicitly relegate visible sacrifice before inward contrition (Ps. 51:17), thanksgiving (Ps. 50:23), obedience (1 Sam. 15:22; Jer. 7:22-23), steadfast love and knowledge of God (Hos. 6:6), alongside justice and righteousness (Isa. 1.16-17; Am. 5:21-24), manifesting kindness and humility (Mic. 6:6-8).

Influenced by Greek philosophies which allegorised sacrifice as the soul’s Godward progress, Hebrew offering became increasingly ‘spiritualised’. Philo

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<sup>23</sup> Augustine, *DCD* 10.6.

<sup>24</sup> Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: the True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 43.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, 872.

<sup>26</sup> See David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: a study of four writings* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

epitomises this shift, eschewing the material and perishable for the spiritual and eternal, interpreting the Passover as symbolizing the soul's heaven-bound ascent and regarding genuine sacrifice as selfless, God-honouring self-giving requiring appropriate inner disposition.<sup>27</sup> He aligns the high priest with the divine Word and understands him to represent the entire creation, whilst proposing universal priesthood where ethical purity outshines sacerdotal separation and the rational, divinely-imaging soul becomes the decisive sanctuary.<sup>28</sup> Judging Jerusalem's sacrificial edifice as dissolutely invalidated, Qumran's Community Council regarded itself as "a House of Holiness for Israel, an Assembly of the Holy of Holies for Aaron ... an agreeable offering, atoning for the Land,"<sup>29</sup> a spiritual temple presenting "an offering of the lips .... obtaining loving-kindness for the Land without the flesh of burnt offerings and the fat of sacrifice."<sup>30</sup> Centuries later, Maimonides (1135-1204), who painstakingly categorised complex sacrificial laws, paradoxically understood Israel's offerings as secondary – if not redundant – within God's intentions.<sup>31</sup> All these examples underline the intrinsic ambiguity of Israel's sacrificial edifice and the need for definitive resolution.

## ***Aqedah***

So does the shift towards 'spiritualisation' rescind tangible gift-offerings? Isaac's near-sacrifice – or his binding (*Aqedah*) – impedes this seemingly smooth evolution into bloodless, pious, 'civilised', inner devotion. Evocatively associated with Israel's perpetual offerings through a common location (Gen. 22:22; 2 Chr. 3:1), God's hideous request probes sacrificial limits, whilst extolling and rewarding Abraham's unflinching fidelity (Gen. 22:16-18). Resembling the

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<sup>27</sup> Daly, *Origins*, 106-8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> 1QS 8.5-10; translation by Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English (7th Edition)* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2011), 109.

<sup>30</sup> 1QS 9.3-5, Vermes, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Anderson, 871.

homage-rendering ‘*olah*, this absolute testing opens “a road....into Godforsakenness” for as Isaac embodied God’s pledges, his loss signifies “the disappearance from Abraham’s life of the whole promise.”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, Hebrew tradition reveres this as *the* primordial sacrifice through which human-divine communion is sustained, restored and perfected.

I shall consider the *Aqedah* both as Abraham’s offering-of-another and Isaac’s offering-of-self, a dual perspective expanded through New Testament depictions of Christ as both the passive offered-up victim and the active self-offering Son. Finally, I shall conclude that Christ thus locates his sacrifice within true, *trinitarian* giving-and-receiving, thereby overcoming the gift’s philosophical/anthropological impasse.

### ***Offered up***

Søren Kierkegaard’s (1813-1855) austere *Fear and Trembling* (1843), composed under the enigmatic pseudonym Johannes *de silentio*, accentuates Abraham encumbered with unimaginable incoherence. Divinely ‘silenced’ and thrust into obedient *action*, Abraham constitutes a “prodigious paradox” defying rational/ethical categories whilst straining determinedly, like a soaring ballerino, towards faith’s elusive ‘beyondness’.<sup>33</sup> Propelled by the captivating *thought* of God’s love, “incommensurable with the whole of actuality”<sup>34</sup>, such “knights of resignation” desire “eternal consciousness”<sup>35</sup> in accomplishing the prescribed

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<sup>32</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: a Commentary*. (London: SCM Press, 1961), 244.

<sup>33</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. C. Stephen Evans and Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27-28; cf. 45. Kierkegaard emphasises the ‘beyondness’ that faith provides by providing four alternative hypothetical retellings of the Genesis narrative, offering portraits of a faithless Abraham whose anguished deficiency is ultimately destructive both for him and Isaac (*ibid.*, 8-11).

<sup>34</sup> *Fear and Trembling*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



movement.<sup>36</sup> Having embodied “infinite resignation” for “the blessedness of infinity”, this “knight of faith” returns to finitude and, like the descending dancer, recovers his life as God’s *gift*, in trustful, thankful return. Delusions of self-sufficiency dissolve once the gift is recognised as transitory, contingent and unpossessable: “life is itself transfigured.”<sup>37</sup>

Evaluated against Kant’s rationalistic universality, Hegel’s social morality and Lévinas’s infinite responsibility towards the other, Abraham’s morally abhorrent action deserves condemnation.<sup>38</sup> Only a “teleological suspension of the ethical”<sup>39</sup> legitimates Abraham<sup>40</sup>, for unlike other ‘tragic heroes’ he expects no worldly recompense.<sup>41</sup> Jeopardizing, moreover, his *nation’s* well-being, Abraham seeks justification solely through his paradoxical “absolute relation to the Absolute”<sup>42</sup>, “[recognizing] God as the condition for the Good and not the Good as the actuality of God.”<sup>43</sup> Morally repugnant, religiously laudable, profoundly lonely, he resists ‘translation’ between incommensurate, mutually incomprehensible, spheres: hating Isaac *ethically*, his love, in *absolute* terms, must *intensify*, thus performing *sacrifice* rather than murder.<sup>44</sup> Trustful sacrifice thus entails not simply the (essentially *faithless*) gift-of-self-unto-death which provokes worldly admiration but the gift-onto-death-of-another-more-precious-than-self.<sup>45</sup>

Surrendering possession of divine promises, yet confident in God’s power to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19), Abraham’s faithfulness potently inspires New Testament writers. Paul’s proclamation that God “did not withhold his own

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's 'Fear and Trembling': Reader's Guides* (London: Continuum, 2010), 87.

<sup>38</sup> See J. Aaron Simmons ‘What about Isaac? Rereading *Fear and Trembling* and Rethinking Kierkegaardian Ethics’, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35.2(2007), 319–345

<sup>39</sup> *Fear and Trembling*, 46ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-52.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>43</sup> Simmons, 335.

<sup>44</sup> *Fear and Trembling*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Son but gave him up for all of us” (Rom. 8.32) echoes Septuagintal rendering of Genesis 22.16 (“[you] have not withheld your son”)<sup>46</sup> and evokes Christ’s being “handed over (*paradothē*) for our offences” (Rom. 4:25; cf. 5:8; Gal. 1:4). Moreover, for Matthew Rindge, Mark’s climactic “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15.34; Ps. 22.1a) exposes paternal abandonment provoking filial lamentation<sup>47</sup>, thus negating Psalm 22’s closing hopefulness.<sup>48</sup> This final rebuffal completes earlier rejection motifs: God’s voice at baptism (1:11) echoes his sacrificial command (Gen. 22:2, LXX), whilst Jesus’ ensuing temptations (*peirazō*) evoke Abraham’s own *peirazō* (Gen. 22:1).<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the passion echoes baptismal abandonment allusions: as the heavens are rent (*schizō*; 1:11) so is the temple curtain (15:38); God’s affirming voice (1:11, *phōnē*) anticipates both Jesus’s questioning cries (15:34-7) and the centurion’s confession (15.39); and as the *pneuma* descended *into* (*eis*) Jesus (1:10), so he *ex-pires* (*ekpneō*; 15.37-39).<sup>50</sup> Announcing Christ’s death as *baptisma* (10:38) is therefore deeply resonant.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the Septuagint frequently uses *agapētos* for an endangered beloved child – compare Abraham’s *agapētos* (Gen. 22:2) and Jephthah’s *agapētē* (Judg. 11:34)<sup>52</sup> – or a child lamented (Jer. 6:26; Zech. 12:10; Am. 8:10).<sup>53</sup> For God to address Jesus as *ho huios mou ho agapētos* (Mk. 1:11) vividly suggests Abraham-Isaac parallels and reinforces patristic Isaac-Christ typologies.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, although Isaac was saved (Gen. 22:12), Jesus’s Father does not intervene,

<sup>46</sup> Hans Joachim Schoeps, “The Sacrifice of Isaac in Paul’s Theology”, *JBL* 65:4(1946), 390.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew S. Rindge, ‘Reconfiguring the Akedah and Recasting God: Lament and Divine Abandonment in Mark’, *JBL* 130:1(2011), 757. Leroy Huizenga’s *New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew* (Boston: Brill, 2009), contends that, from birth, the new Isaac’s sacrificial, temple-fulfilling vocation is announced (chapter 6).

<sup>48</sup> Rindge, 759.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 762-3; cf. Huizenga (chapter 7) discerns Akedah resonances within Matthew’s baptism account..

<sup>50</sup> Rindge, 763.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 763-4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 764.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 765.

remaining chillingly silent, save for the mournful heavenly portents (15:33; Am. 8:9-10).<sup>55</sup>

Striking lexical parallels between Mark's transfiguration and the Septuagintal *Aqedah* reinforce Christ's Isaac-status, such as the high mountain (*oros hupsēlon*; Gen. 22:2; Mk. 9:2), the *agapētos* reaffirmation and the decree to "listen (*akouō*) to Christ" (9:7) just as Abraham obeyed God (*hupakouō*; Gen. 22:18).<sup>56</sup> God's *huion agapēton* (12:6) is *taken* (12:8) to be killed (cf. 14:65), the recurring verb (*lambanō*) echoing the *Aqedah* where it indicates progressive sacrificial displacement.<sup>57</sup> This also underlines divine complicity, for as the beloved heir is sent (*apostellō*) to known murderers, so Jesus is spared nothing (14:35-36), implicitly proclaiming "a God who refuses to rescue his son from death."<sup>58</sup> Passively compliant to the Father's active sacrificial intent, Jesus's Gethsemane prayer constitutes an Isaac-like "narrativized lament", resignedly unravelling hopes of deliverance through filial capitulation.<sup>59</sup> As submissive, self-bewailing victim, Mark's original audience of suffering Christians are thus urged to 'inhabit' Jesus's sorrowful plight.

### ***Self-offering***

Rindge presents only a partial picture, however. Whilst offered by God, Jesus also *offers himself*,<sup>60</sup> fulfilling Jewish interpretations that heighten Isaac's *willing, active* role. Jubilees pinpoints the sacrificial location as Mount Zion (18.13) and identifies the Passover as the *Aqedah*'s annual commemoration (18.3,17-19;

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 766.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 766-7; cf. Huizenga 235.

<sup>57</sup> Rindge, 767.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 768.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 768-771.

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Huizenga portrays Matthew's Isaac-like Jesus as less passive than Rindge's Markan victim, facing death as "a willing, active and obedient participant in his sacrifice." (260).

49.7)<sup>61</sup>. Pseudo-Jubilees goes further, depicting Isaac begging Abraham to “tie [him] well” lest his anguished struggles “cause a blemish to be found in [the] offering.”<sup>62</sup> His own mettle tested, Isaac becomes blessed himself <sup>63</sup> and, in “[submitting] to being slain” (4 Macc. 13:12) “as a burnt-offering” (18:11), he exemplifies commitment to temple and altar (Judith 8:26).<sup>64</sup> Whilst Philo eulogises this “son of God” who transports the sacrificial materials, Isaac remains largely passive before Abraham, the active priest.<sup>65</sup> However, Pseudo-Philo’s Isaac, whilst not actually sacrificed, presents himself as willing, “acceptable” burnt-offering, his ‘blood’ grounding Israel’s election, with expiatory merit.<sup>66</sup> Enacting blessed deliverance for nations and cosmos, Isaac understands himself as gifted in becoming sacrifice and demonstrating the human soul as worthy self-offering.<sup>67</sup>

Joyfully receiving Abraham’s bidding to “bear ... this consecration valiantly”, Josephus’s Isaac hastens to a self-constructed altar for sacrifice locationally aligned with David’s temple.<sup>68</sup> The Targumic *Poem of the Four Nights* extols the night of Israel’s liberation from Egypt, depicting Jewish salvation history ‘held’ within four ‘nights’ – namely creation, Abraham’s covenant and sacrifice, the Passover and the end of the world. One version portrays Isaac willingly undergoing *actual* sacrifice as expiatory “lamb of the burnt offering.”<sup>69</sup> The *Aqedah* thus conceived soteriologies predicated upon Isaac’s physical, primordial

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<sup>61</sup> Huizenga, 85.

<sup>62</sup> 2.ii.4 (see Huizenga, 89).

<sup>63</sup> 2.ii.6-10 (Huizenga, 90).

<sup>64</sup> James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to The Bible as it was at the start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 303-4.

<sup>65</sup> Huizenga, 97-104.

<sup>66</sup> *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, 18.5-7, quoted by Huizenga, 106-7.

<sup>67</sup> *Liber*, 32.3 (Huizenga, 107).

<sup>68</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1:232-226.

<sup>69</sup> Daly, *Origin*, 47f.

sacrifice, his meritorious self-giving guaranteeing subsequent atoning efficacy<sup>70</sup> and, as flawless sacrificial lamb, validating Israel's passover offering.<sup>71</sup>

Abraham's and Isaac's concurrent offerings compose a sacrificial 'symphony': "Abraham went to bind, Isaac to be bound; Abraham was ready to slay, Isaac ready to be slain."<sup>72</sup> This active, foreknowing Isaac inaugurates the type of sacrifice which early Christians saw fulfilled in Jesus. Hence, Mark's derelict, abandoned *agapētos* finds balance in John's portrayal of willed self-giving: "no one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (10:18a; cf. 1 Jn. 3:16), a progressively intensifying self-possession: (12:27-8). The climactic *tetelestai* (19:30) reinforces Christ's innate intentionality in both offering his life and "[taking] it up again" (10:18). Hence, whilst subjected to 'external' handing-over (11:49-53; 13:30; 13:38; 18:3-5; 18:17,25-27; 19:6,15-18) and the Father's will (10:17; cf. 12:27-28), Christ enacts deliberate *self-giving* martyrdom (15:12-13; 1 Jn. 3:16), premeditatively displaced so that beneficiaries cross *from sin into* eternal life (1:29; 3:14-16; 10:10-11).

Paul shares in this graced, liberative transit (Gal. 1:4), "by faith in the Son of God who loved me *and gave himself* for me", participating in his sacrifice through co-crucifixion and living through his indwelling presence (2:19-20). Providing a mediating ransom (1 Tim 2:6) and "fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2), Christ shifts humanity from iniquity to purified zeal (Tit. 2:14). Surpassing Hellenised Judaism's over-spiritualised dedication and the canonical Isaac's *near-sacrifice*, his vocation demands *actual* blood-shedding (Lev. 17:11). Rendering interminable animal sacrifice redundant, whilst embodying human-divine

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>71</sup> Huizenga, 83-88.

<sup>72</sup> Midrash Rabba on Genesis 22:8, quoted by Schoeps, 387.

communion through *corporeal* self-oblation (Heb. 10:5), his body, offered once-for-all, secures human sanctification (10:10).<sup>73</sup>

Jesus' prophetic eucharistic words-in-action underscore his physical, communicable, self-giving, his own "blood of the covenant" (Mk. 14:24; Mt. 26:28) fulfilling Sinai's foundational covenant-sacrifice (Ex. 24:3-8) where sprinkled blood fashioned human-divine bonds. This "new covenant" (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25) reorients believers, with sins forgiven and law interiorised (Jer. 31:31-34) through Christ, sacrificially "poured out" (*ekchunnomenon*) in atonement (Mt. 26:28).<sup>74</sup> As eschatological paschal lamb, he perfects prototypical sacrifices,<sup>75</sup> fulfilling the vicarious offering of YHWH's Suffering Servant (Isa. 52:13-53.12)<sup>76</sup> and establishing the definitive sacrificial memorial (1 Cor. 10:18), "serious, legitimate and efficacious.....not disembodied or abstract but physical, tangible, and even threatened by defilement and profanation."<sup>77</sup> Christ thus dedicates his own body as temple fulfilled (Mk. 14:58; Jn. 2:13), embodying both human 'ascent' and divine 'descent' in superexcessive, transmissible donation. The crucified Jesus is like the mercy-seat (LXX *hilastērion*), the means (or place<sup>78</sup>) of atonement (*hilastērion*) whom God puts forward (Rom. 3:25); yet as the sprinkled expiating blood is his own, he is both victim and priest, "[bringing] all the sin of the world deep within the love of God and [wiping] it away."<sup>79</sup>

Hebrews depicts Christ's self-offering as both consummatory and supersessional. Whilst commending Israel's sacrifices, it exposes them as ineffective (7:11,18-19;

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<sup>73</sup> See Matthew Levering, *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> Joachim Jeremias, tr. Norman Perrin, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Second Impression) (London: SCM, 1973), 222.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-7

<sup>77</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple - Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 220.

<sup>78</sup> The NRSV's variant reading.

<sup>79</sup> Ratzinger, *JN2*, 40. Christ's sacrifice is therefore *expiatory* rather than *propitiatory*, for the object of the Hebrew atoning verb, *kpr*, is not God but *sin*. See J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 214.

10:4), interminable (7:23; 10:1), transient (8:13, 9:9-10) and polluted (5:3; 7:27; 9:7),<sup>80</sup> directing readers towards “better sacrifices” (9:23) and a “better covenant.....enacted through better promises” (8:6), mediated by Christ the great high priest, “holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (7:26), who nevertheless participates fully in humanity (2:14-17). Thus Christ’s saving work entails a fundamental human-divine exchange rooted in his superior ‘once-for-all’ (7:27) high-priestly atoning sacrifice. Involving no humanly-crafted (*cheiropoiēta*) sanctuary (9:24) but the true (8:2), greater and perfect (9:11-12) tent of God’s dwelling, Christ enters heaven itself (9:24), fulfilling God’s will (10:5-10) through intentional, corporeal, sanctifying self-offering (10:10), thus presenting his vital blood (8:3) in the holiest place (9:12,14; 12:24). Unlike former rites (10:1-4), Christ’s priestly act is efficacious, accomplished uniquely in *his own* blood (9:12), superabundantly sin-atoning (Lev. 17:11) and consummately unitive (Ex. 24:3-8).<sup>81</sup> Whereas earthly priests, *stand* perpetually for *ceaseless* offering (Heb. 10:11), Christ, his offering *complete*, *sits* at God’s right hand (10:12) as *heavenly* intercessor.<sup>82</sup>

Fusing sacrificial roles, Christ the priest-victim offers himself as *the* once-for-all (10:10) sacrifice (7:27) that purifies forever (9:14,26), having divinely-bestowed priesthood (5:5,10) unconstrained by mortality (7:23). Blameless (4:15, 7:26), he requires no prior sin-offering (5:3; 7:27; 9:7) and as unblemished (9:14), willing, obedient martyr-victim (10:5-7) and enthroned high-priest blazes a heaven-bound trail (10:19-20). This is no ‘extrinsic’ sacrifice, either for Christ or believers, for, associated with him (2:11-13), they inhabit abundant benefits.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Richard D. Nelson, ‘He Offered Himself: Sacrifice in Hebrews’ *Interpretation*, 57:3(2003), 251.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 256.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Paul’s notion of being incorporated into the death of Christ through baptism (Rom. 6).

## *Through the eternal Spirit*

Biblical and extra-biblical sources suggest that the offering God requires hovers tantalisingly ‘beyond’ Genesis’s closure-resistant Elohist narrative whilst, nevertheless, lying ‘beneath’, the rock upon which all sacrificial language is predicated, just as Mount Moriah’s tortured ground affords Jerusalem’s temple its very foundations. As Peter Kline contends, Kierkegaard’s Abraham calls humankind to reach *beyond* itself, participating in *divine* transcendence which *transgresses* ontology and epistemology, like Christ’s servitudinous – yet *free* – self-expenditure which inspires salvation-crafting ‘fear and trembling’ (Phil. 2:12).<sup>84</sup> Sacrifice coheres solely within doxological abandonment to “the *radical exteriority* of God’s action and address.”<sup>85</sup> Faith-filled sacrifice entails *reception* rather than offering, “[becoming] vulnerable to the agency of an-other.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, for Bo Kampmann Walther, Abraham’s temporal faith presages the ultimate ‘other’, namely Christ’s atemporal *anakephalaiosis* (Eph. 1:10) which resolves the *Aqedah*’s perplexing impasse through corporeal self-offering.<sup>87</sup> This completion conflates the Father’s giving-of-the-Son and the Son’s gift-of-self “through the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14), unveiling its trinitarian depths.

The *Aqedah*’s mysteries find resolution not merely as Christ discharges Isaac’s uncompleted task but as he perfects and universalises the *ram*’s offering. This thicket-entangled creature prefigures Jesus “who before He was offered up, had been crowned with thorns”<sup>88</sup>, the humanly *unavailable*, divinely *given* lamb (Jn. 1.29), who affords humanity its elusive satisfactory oblation.<sup>89</sup> Isaac’s quest for a

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<sup>84</sup> Peter Kline, ‘Absolute Action: Divine Hiddenness in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*’, *Modern Theology*, 28:3(2012), 506.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 507; italics added.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.

<sup>87</sup> Bo Kampmann Walther, ‘Web of Shudders: Sublimity in Søren Kierkegaard’s “Fear and Trembling”’, *MLN*, 112:5(1997), 763.

<sup>88</sup> Augustine, *DCD*, 16.32.

<sup>89</sup> Aquinas, *In Ioan*, 1.14.257 (*Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, ed. and trans. James A. Weisheipl and Fabian R. Larcher (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 120).



holocaust (Gen. 22:7) is answered not through intrepid, self-sacrificing victims but from utterly beyond as “God himself” provides (22.8; cf. 22.14) his Son, both given-up and self-giving, thereby consummating messianically God’s promise of sacrificial communion instigated at creation.<sup>90</sup> Christ-Isaac parallels are thus cast against a greater, *trinitarian* canvas, for sin-atonement efficacy emerges not through magnanimous human agency but perfect divine giving that overflows expiatorily, displacing the incarnate Son to Golgotha so that humanity might cross into him and thus participate most intensely in God’s own kenotic-plerotic life.

John’s ‘high-priestly prayer’ reveals the trinitarian depth of Jesus’s intentional offering, describing eternal life as recognition of – and participation in – the relation of Father and Son, sender and sent (17:2-3), the life sacrificially outpoured and communicated. Ratzinger observes Jesus’ triple consecration: sanctified by the Father (10:36), he sanctifies himself in order to sanctify others (17:17-19).<sup>91</sup> Thus (self-)consecrated as both priest (cf. Ex. 28:41) and sacrifice (cf. Ex. 13:2) “for the life of the world” (Jn. 6:51), he enables sanctified believers (17:19) themselves to participate in this priestly consecration.<sup>92</sup> Revealing the divine name, the incarnate Christ makes God’s gift-of-self radically present (17:6), sealing the loving interpenetration of Christ and believers.<sup>93</sup> Yet whilst the high priest *uttered* God’s name just once a year, Christ, the new temple-sacrifice, *bears* that name eternally. Guaranteeing perfect unity (17:11) through participation in Father-Son intimacy (17.21-23), he fulfils at-one-ment’s deepest meaning as the healing of every breach that rends humanity – and thus creation – from its ordained trinitarian ‘location’. Christ is thus (self-)displaced so that misplaced creation might be divinely re-placed.

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<sup>90</sup> See Rowan Williams. *Eucharistic Sacrifice: The Roots of a Metaphor* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1982), 16.

<sup>91</sup> *JN2*, 86-7.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90; quotation, 89.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-93.

## Displaced displacer

The New Testament depicts Christ, God's embodied gift, graphically rejected through humiliating, murderous force and with the Father's salvific intent. Yet Christ is no mere passive victim, but *gives* consciously, unremittingly, with ever-increasing intensity, in eucharistic prefigurement, in betrayal, denial and abandonment, in trial, judgement and condemnation, in physical, mental and spiritual anguish, even in, through and beyond death. Perpetually shuttled into humanity's deficient abysses, Christ represents the *ex-patriated* gift whose glorious, unimaginable abundance was, from conception, displaced, transgressing all boundaries, that humanity might cross more fully into being.

Here, I examine Christ's salvifically mobile self-giving from three complementary perspectives: the gospels' sacrificial narratives; Paul's christological 'interchange' formulae; and Hebrews' expansive depiction of Christ transporting pliant humankind into the permanence of the true, heavenly sanctuary. The consistent pattern shows Christ receiving the 'gift' of displacement into humanity's privative alienation in order to return an abundant salvific counter-gift that displaces recipients into his own glorious life.

### *Gospels: giving through rejection*

Progressively constrained, denigrated and eliminated, Jesus reveals (self-)displacement as salvifically potent, as divine superabundance penetrates creaturely poverty transformatively. Whereas Mark initially presents 'Jerusalem' coming to Jesus (3:8; 3:22; 7:1), from 10:32 it is Jesus who determinedly travels there, facing rejection, suffering and death.<sup>94</sup> Hooker suggests that the people's

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<sup>94</sup> See Mieczysław Mikołajczak, 'On Pilgrimages to the Temple: the Theology of Mark 11-13', *Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne* 25(2011), 107-118; here, 113-114.

“Hosanna!” – “save now!” – voices exultant praise as much as pleas for political emancipation, whilst “blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” welcomes Christ the anticipated Davidic king (11:9-10//):<sup>95</sup> the gift (or, rather, the *imagined* gift) is received jubilantly.

Whereas *many* enter Jerusalem only *one* enters the temple (10:32-33; 11:1,15,27).<sup>96</sup> Christ purifies his proper ‘place’, *driving out* those who peripheralise God’s will to *draw in* all nations (11:15-17//; Isa. 56:7). Expelled himself, a new body-temple is established (Mk. 14:58; Jn. 2.13) *from which* issues physical/sacramental flows-of-self (Jn. 19:34) and *into which* believers are beckoned (1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13). Rejection redefines boundaries subversively, rendering Israel’s sacrificial space desolate (Mt. 23.37-38//) amid cataclysmic, eschatological upheavals (Mark 13//), whilst Gentiles discover abundance (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 13:10; Lk. 21:24; Rom. 11:25-26). What lasts is Jesus, the apocalyptic Son of Man (Mk. 13:24-27; cf. Dan. 7:13-14) and his transcendent words (Mark 13.31//), “the real event” in whom, “despite the passage of time, *the present truly remains*.”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, this “present” – as *gift* – ‘truly remains’ amid displacement, kenotically self-giving without exhaustion, gathering creation’s gift-denying, deathly delusions into himself to bestow God’s plenitudinous life. Controversially anointed in expectation of his impending entombment (Mk. 13:8), Jesus receives Mary’s fragrant, lavish outpouring (Jn. 12:3), ‘returning’ such charity overwhelmingly through Calvary’s superexcessive, ‘inhabitable’ ‘counter-kenosis’, surpassing immeasurably all meagre human offerings (cf. Mk. 12:41-44).

Jesus’s displacement multiplies, loving his own “(in)to the end” (*eis telos*, Jn. 13:1) through sacrifice which discloses creation’s ‘end’ as profligate ‘loss-of-self’ which means immediate gain (cf. Mk. 8:35). Laying aside his garments (Jn. 13:4)

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<sup>95</sup> Hooker, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London, A&C Black, 1991), 259-260.

<sup>96</sup> Mikołajczak. 117.

<sup>97</sup> Ratzinger, 50; italics added.

prefigures laying down his life (10:17) in servile disappropriation whilst physical foot-washing cleanses profoundly (13:5) through immersion in Christ's transformative truth (15:3), so that those sanctified (17:19) might themselves enter into divine exchange (17:22-24).<sup>98</sup> Giving rather than grasping, Christ's 'laying aside' enables believers' 'taking up' new life as boundaries are transcended. His "new commandment" exceeds mere *exemplum* (13:15), representing genuine participation in loving, reciprocal kenosis-plerosis (17:26). Whilst Peter resists Christ's disconcerting gift (13.8), Judas slips into gift-rejecting darkness (13.30; 18.2-3), constructing the arena for Christ's free self-donation (Jn. 18:5,8) and consequent crossing-over (*hypagō*, 13:36) into a humanly inaccessible (7:34-36; 8:21-24; 13:36) sacrificial space (13:36-38; 21:19).

Christ's eucharistic gift-of-self is inherently 'transgressive', 'engulfing' simple bread and wine and underlining his fourfold action as prefiguring sacrificial transformation. As Ward observes, Mark uses *sōma* to denote the physical, biological body of the haemorrhisa (5:29), the living Jesus anointed (14:8) and the dead Jesus awaiting burial and embalming (15:43) – yet shatters this seemingly comprehensible designation by announcing "take; this is my body (*sōma*)" (14:22).<sup>99</sup> This shocking, dissonant identification demolishes the cosy assumption that bodies – or, indeed, any created thing – offer themselves fully for straightforward construal: Christ's eucharistic self-giving is thus an eschatological advent, presenting<sup>100</sup> Christ as "always in transit ... always transferred", never commodifiable, possessable or claimable, but an "ontological scandal."<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the supper's commanded *anamnesis* (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24)

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<sup>98</sup> JN2, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 83. Nevertheless, Mark's *soma* repeatedly signifies sites of giving-and-receiving, both Jesus's kenotic outpouring in healing and eucharistic self-displacement and his accepting proleptic anointing in preparation to receive a tomb.

<sup>100</sup> 'Presenting' suggests multivalent meanings: the gifting and displaying of the one pre-sent to gather creatures into their (both disclosed and hidden) *telos*.

<sup>101</sup> Ward, 91.

announces the Passover of Christ's new exodus (Lk. 9:31)<sup>102</sup>, liberating sinners from gift-denying enslavement towards the kingdom's expansive promised land (cf. Lk. 22:16-18). Despite desiring intimacy (Lk. 22:15-16), Jesus suffers acute Godforsakenness (Mk. 15:34), demonstrating Father-Son communion bearing the bitterest separation which redemptively effective, salvifically communicable sacrifice demands. Christ's body is "given for" others and his blood "poured out" both as unique, substitutional offering and as sacramental food, forever replenished in vivifying liturgical sacrifice.

Gethsemane stresses the 'beyondness' of self-offering. Physically close (Luke 22:41), yet spiritually detached (Mark 14:33-41//), Christ inhabits a desert-like garden (cf. Lk. 4:13), there reversing Adam's exit from Eden and prefiguring resurrective entry into heaven itself. His course is untrodden, both as sinless Son enduring sin's gift-rejecting hostility, but also for recipients of his passing-over, limited no longer to those with blood-daubed lintels (Ex. 12:13) but radically universalised (Rev. 7:14). Willingly struck down (Mt. 26:31; Zech. 13:7) for vicarious self-offering (Jn. 10:11), Christ leads his flock not simply to Galilee (Mk. 14:28; 16:7) but to the Father (Jn. 20:17). *Accepting* the Father's dispossessive 'gift' of sacrifice, he transforms humankind's tragic gift-*rejection*. Embodying "the ultimate concurrence of [the] human will with the divine will"<sup>103</sup> he receives perfect consecration as the true Melchizedek (Heb. 5:7-10), united with the Father in salvific intent, yet increasingly separated in accomplishing that common resolve.

The eternal priest, recapitulating Adam's forfeited proto-priesthood through offering the world back to the Father, then stands trial before the earthly high priest who, fixated on death's expediency (Jn. 11:48-50; 18:14), ironically

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<sup>102</sup> Ratzinger, *JN2*, 147.

<sup>103</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Opusculum 6*, translated in Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 174.

prophesies universalised ingathering of God's children (11:52), drawn to Jesus, the new temple, who displays love's primal sacrificial economy in glorious crucified exaltation (12:27-32). Admitting the scandalous, yet redemptive, truth of his messianic filial identity (Mk. 14:62), Christ suffers ignominy, whilst the ensuing verdict of blasphemous self-assertion (14:64//) necessitates onward displacement for political judgement.<sup>104</sup>

Locating his kingship elsewhere, Jesus embodies truth (Jn. 14:6; 15:36-37) which liberates the receptive (5:24; 8:32) and judges the rejecting (12:48). He becomes judgement's criterion, as king (19:14,19-22) – humanity itself (19:5) – brutally condemned, whilst the guilty walks free (Mk. 15.11//), delivered to crucifixion (15.15//) and sardonic royal investiture (15.17-20a//). Nevertheless, repeated shunning through betrayal, denial, disloyalty and verdict, serves his stark vocation as YHWH's suffering servant, freely yielding his life (Jn. 10:15-18). In Christ's threefold transfer – into Jewish, imperial and mass judgement – Milbank detects the plebeian custom of pursuing a condemned individual, the *homo sacer*, abandoning him to death.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, transcending passive acceptance of enforced displacement, Jesus determinedly gives himself, pouring luminous divine richness into humanity's bleakest austerity.

Expelled beyond city confines, Jesus's renders his personal 'beyondness' inhabitable for others through his own prior expropriation. Luke's Jesus diverts pity towards Jerusalem's tragic plight (23:28) and beseeches the Father to for-give his crucifiers (23:34), an "extreme .... one-sided .... unprompted .... gift to the undeserving."<sup>106</sup> Moreover, he guarantees the penitent thief's imminent relocation to *paradeisos* (23.43), implying God's primeval garden (Gen. 2.8) and

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<sup>104</sup> See Rowan Williams, *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles our Judgement* (London: HarperCollinsReligious, 2000), 6-9.

<sup>105</sup> John Milbank, *Being reconciled: ontology and pardon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 90-92.

<sup>106</sup> Milbank, 44.

the eschatological Eden<sup>107</sup>, thereby surpassing Adam's original delights. Moreover, familial ties cross over (Jn. 19:26-27) whilst the lavish bridegroom (2:10; 3:29) has his own thirst assuaged by sour wine (19:28-9; cf. Ps. 69:21) of human alienation (cf. Isa. 5:2).<sup>108</sup> Once this sin-enveloped 'gift' is absorbed bodily, Christ's final *tetelestai* resounds (Jn. 19:30) and a 'return-gift' issues from his punctured depths (19:34), the wine-'become'-blood prefiguring eucharistic transubstantiation of creation's gifts and the water (19:37; cf. Zech. 12:10) signifying his sanative baptismal fountain (cf. Zech. 13:1).<sup>109</sup>

Shrouded in creation's dark pall (Mk. 15:33//), Jesus experiences Isaac-like abandonment (Mark 15.34//) whilst directing his entire being towards the Father's ultimate 'beyondness' (Lk. 22:46; Jn. 19:30). Ostensibly impenetrable boundaries are breached with eschatological force as the temple's curtain is ruptured (Mk. 15.33//), earth shaken, rocks split, tombs opened and the dead raised (Mt. 27:51-52), suggesting that "the new age, for which Israel had been longing, has begun" through a "strange semi-anticipation" of the final general resurrection.<sup>110</sup> Meanwhile, a Gentile centurion utters the poignantly ironic confession (27:54) which Jewish leaders deemed blasphemous (26:65) and Jesus undergoes his (seemingly) 'final' displacement into a borrowed grave (27:57-60) in compassionate solidarity with mortal humanity. Even in death, Jesus bequeaths gifts and inaugurates a yet bolder, plenitudinous rending of sinful limitation.

### ***Paul: the salvific interchange***

Inherently 'mobile', Christ freely responds to fierce rejection by constantly bestowing himself, yet without compromise or erosion. His passion thus

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<sup>107</sup> C.E. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 874.

<sup>108</sup> Ratzinger, *JN2*, 218.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>110</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 635.

epitomises salvific interchange: ‘receiving’ fallen humanity’s deficiency, he delivers God’s superabundant response into the alien, privated ‘space’ he redemptively occupies. Using striking metaphor, Paul illustrates how Christ bears humanity’s direst refusal in order to bestow God’s ‘best’ divine counter-gift, reversing Adam’s poverty through riches outpoured. In this targeted crossing, “the infinitely pure one” remains untainted even when ‘touching’ the most polluted: “through this contact, the filth of the world is truly absorbed, wiped out, and transformed in the pain of infinite love.”<sup>111</sup>

Christ’s salvific self-giving arc exposes humanity’s opposing potentialities – “life and death, blessings and curses” (Deut. 30.19) – yet unlike Moses’ legal exhortation, he embodies pure, superlative gift (Rom. 5:15-17; cf. Eph. 2:8-9). Adam, lured to become “like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5-6) *snatches* illusive ‘Godlikeness’ rather than *receiving* his glorious, God-imaging identity eucharistically (1:26-27), lapsing into giftless idolatry (Rom. 1:21-25) through *misdirected* desire (Gen. 2:17, 3:5; cf. Ex. 20:17, Deut. 5:21; Rom. 7:7-13).<sup>112</sup> Adam is mystifyingly captive, for despite “enjoying perfect vision and perfect capacity and so perfect freedom, [he] nonetheless freely and without ground willed these things away.”<sup>113</sup> His sin is the *fantasy* of choice, seizing illusory “*infinite* emptiness” whilst rejecting God’s gracious fullness.<sup>114</sup> Thus, in an inherently gifted, good creation, evil – despite its beguiling concreteness – represents ‘virtual reality’, sin’s void. So it is not the gift that represents ‘nothing’ (as Marion suggests), but its very *absence*.

Infiltrating humanity’s poverty, Christ, the priest-victim-gift salvifically repositions recipients (Col. 1:13-14) not through simply trading existential conditions but through “participation .... not substitution .... a sharing of

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<sup>111</sup> Ratzinger, *JN2*, 231.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, 98-100.

<sup>113</sup> Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 8.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*



experience, not an exchange. Christ is identified with us in order that – in him – we might share in what he is.”<sup>115</sup> This grace-enabled interchange happens *in Christ*,<sup>116</sup> who representatively refashions the Adamic-Abrahamic-Davidic line from within, redefining the recipients of ancient promises as those having Abraham-like faith (Rom. 4:16-17).

Philippians’ so-called ‘kenotic hymn’ charts humankind’s grand transformation. Christ’s ‘displacement’ from being “in the form of God” to self-emptying, crucified servant to exalted, acclaimed Lord (2:5-11) enables humanity’s resultant transference from privative barrenness to unearned fullness (3:7-21). Unlike Adam, Christ gives rather than grasps, self-outpouring freely, plenitudinously and transformatively wherever deathly diminishment threatens, countering humanity’s descent into non-being through elevation into divine extravagance. Demanding no propitiatory offering, God in Christ embodies the reverse, transcending humanity’s giftless delusions through relentless donation: “the divine answer to the original human refusal of the gift is not to demand sacrifice – of which he has no need – but to go on giving in and through our refusals of the gift, to the point where these refusals are overcome.”<sup>117</sup>

Christ’s outpouring entails no relinquishing loss but is inexhaustible trinitarian gift, offered “through the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14).<sup>118</sup> Moreover, Philippians 2 linguistically implies progressive divine externalization, from the Son’s eternal giftedness into worldly, transient appearances.<sup>119</sup> As Aquinas understood the divine life as gift in-and-of-itself ‘before’ becoming a gift to creation, Christ’s

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<sup>115</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 26-7.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 100.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>119</sup> See chapter two.

kenosis represents divine *disclosure* rather than anomalous salvific necessity.<sup>120</sup> For Balthasar, God's *Urkenosis* underpins redemption as Christ outpours from the inexhaustible fullness of God's gift-exchanging inner life, that ultimate 'going-beyond-self'. From real, relational *ek-stasis*, Christ frees those enmeshed in *unreal*, illusive, yet ruinous, gift-denial. In Cusan language, the *possest* unites that which *is* with that which *is not*, or, using Maximus's terminology, Christ's gifted trinitarian *ousia*, finds new *tropoi* amid humanity's depletory, gift-eschewal. Uniquely theandric, Christ unites within himself the human-divine difference, *revealing* deified humanity whilst *communicating* that fullness liberally.

Paul portrays this dynamic, displacive interchange repeatedly through the following formula: "Christ became [x] so that (*hina*) you might become [y]".<sup>121</sup> Urging generosity to impoverished believers, he presents Christ as charity's epitome: intrinsically rich, he became poor, that he might make others rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Christ's divine resources are inexhaustible: even death, that humanly intransgressible limit, is 'overwhelmed' inconceivably by 'yet more' in resurrection. The profoundest human response is thanksgiving, the eucharistic sacrifice which participates in Christ's own self-offering.

Christ's gift is conferred indiscriminately upon Adam's visionless, death-bound progeny, revitalising humanity's capacity to receive divine richness (cf. Rom. 5:6-11). God, forever reconciled to us and lacking nothing, "does not need to forgive since he goes on giving"<sup>122</sup> but "in Christ...[reconciles] *the world to himself*" (2 Cor. 5:19). Christ's self-gift *transforms* recipients, arousing the counter-gift of

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<sup>120</sup> Many contemporary biblical scholars read the kenotic hymn similarly: e.g. Hooker, 99-100; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 84-90; Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 96-7; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God crucified and other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 45ff; Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2009), 21.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 170; cf. Rom 15:13; 2 Cor 5:14; Gal. 2:20.

<sup>122</sup> Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 64.

thankful, joyful onward transmission. To become rich through Christ's poverty inspires mimetic kenosis, "the gift of the capacity for forgiveness"<sup>123</sup>, participating in Christ's reconciling ministry (2 Cor. 5:18).

Paul extols such astounding transformation: "for our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that (*hina*) in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ's being "made sin" might indicate "the sinless One [offering] the 'unblemished sacrifice'" <sup>124</sup> like a beast who "represented the offerer *qua sinner* .... its life [standing] in for his."<sup>125</sup> However, if true sacrifice entails directional giving-of-*self*, Christ's death comprises no arbitrary offerer-offering alliance; rather, the sinless redeemer and guilty humanity are bound *inextricably* together to mend sin's devastating abyss. God allows Christ's sinlessness to touch humanity's sinfulness transformatively, assigning undeserving believers alien – *divine* – righteousness, thus re-casting boundaries with transgressive, eschatological generosity.<sup>126</sup>

Christ crucified becomes sin as he, God's perfect gift, is graphically reviled, rejected, banished, annihilated. Receiving sinners' annihilative 'gift', he communicates God's reconciling self-gift.<sup>127</sup> In Christ's expelled body, God gives as humans reject. Yet in resurrection, the sin-laden redeemer is vindicated as righteous whilst those 'in Christ' share this divine righteousness.<sup>128</sup> Driven 'beyond the walls' into crucifying abandonment, Christ reveals the extent of God's transgressive, absorptive giving, thereby demolishing former 'walls' of separation (Gal. 3:27-28; Eph. 2:11-19).

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 62; cf. Mat. 7:12, 18:35; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13.

<sup>124</sup> Gordon Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007), 166, n.17.

<sup>125</sup> Dunn, 219.

<sup>126</sup> Martin, 157-8.

<sup>127</sup> Hooker, *From Adam to Christ*, 17; See also her "On Becoming the Righteousness of God: Another Look at 2 Cor 5:21" in *Novum Testamentum* 50(2008), 358-375.

<sup>128</sup> M.E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians (Volume 1)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 444.

Centuries earlier, Moses had addressed Jesus' ancestors on the threshold of Canaan's long-awaited gift, equating law-observance with blessing (Deut. 28:1ff) and infidelity with curses (28:15ff). Inhabiting the land required 'inhabiting' the law, whilst failure risked annulling God's ancient promises: accursed, exiled, expelled from the covenant.<sup>129</sup> Astonishing then is Paul's admonition to Galatian Christians to be *free* from legal *enslavement* through Christ who became "a curse" (Gal. 3:13), recapitulating his people's historical plight through physical-spiritual ejection.<sup>130</sup> As Israel remained politically exiled, "the death of Jesus, precisely on a Roman cross which symbolised so clearly the continuing subjugation of the people of God, *brought the exile to a climax*. The king of the Jews *took the brunt of the exile on himself*."<sup>131</sup> Quoting Deut. 21:23 – "anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse" – Paul accentuates the costly vicarious expulsion Christ undergoes. Yet rather than being regarded as "a blasphemous contradiction in terms"<sup>132</sup> the expropriated, crucified Messiah gathers up Israel's stubborn gift estrangedness and, in desolate Godforsakenness, where faithless Israel and uncovenanted Gentiles languish alike, bestows an alien, unmerited gift: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles..." (Gal. 3.13-14). Christ meets Jew and Gentile alike, conveying both into undeserved patriarchal blessing through receiving the promised Spirit (3:14). In the accursed Christ, God embraces humankind's common alienation, absorbing Israel's gift-rejection and Gentiles' gift-ignorance into his overwhelmingly gratuitous counter-gift. The Christ of eternal splendour subjects himself to shameful elimination in the hour that John calls glorious, rendering sin and death subject to God – and thereby annihilated.

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<sup>129</sup> Wright, *Climax*, 142.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 146

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, italics added.

<sup>132</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1982), 166; cf. 1 Cor. 1:23.

### ***Hebrews: the cosmic span***

Hebrews sets this self-giving against an altogether expansive backdrop, stressing the enduring effects of Christ's sacrifice and his entry into heaven's sanctuary. Portrayed both 'from above', as pre-existent Son (1:2-13) and 'from below', as martyr (2:9f, 5:7-10, 12:1f), Christ reveals salvation's 'exchange mechanism'. 'Transgressing' his eternal exaltedness to embrace humankind's temporal lowliness, he thus enables humanity to 'transgress' Adamic fallenness, not merely recouping Eden but participating in his own inherent *topos*. Soaring christological acclaim (1:2-4; 7:3, 13:8) finds counterbalance in his lowly suffering on behalf of a new humanity with whom he shares "one Father" (2:11) in common "flesh and blood" (2:14). Pioneering the path into glory, he is perfected through suffering (2:10), vanquishes satanic powers (2:15), liberates the death-enslaved (2:16) and strengthens those tested like him (2:18). Christ thus possesses capacity to distribute his divine salvific power, fully embracing humanity's gift-deficient condition, liberating *through* (2:14) his perpetually efficacious death.<sup>133</sup>

Jesus 'takes to himself' those who fall under the power of evil *through entering their condition wholly*: the incarnation is completed and characterised by *his entry into death*, death undertaken for these others, by which he becomes qualified to be representative of humanity before God and of God before humanity in need of help [2.17f].<sup>134</sup>

Christ thereby embodies *dual* priestly 'upward-downward' mediatorial capacity, representing/*re*-presenting what sin-ensnared humanity lacks, whilst simultaneously representing/*re*-presenting humanity to God, thereby displacing sinners into ontological fulfilment. Christ "taste[s] death for everyone" (2:9) "by the grace of God" (*chariti theou*) or, in variant reading, "apart from God" (*chōris theou*), sacrificially exiled as humankind's sin-offering (cf. 5:7-10; Isa. 53:8-

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<sup>133</sup> Dunnill, 214.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 216; italics added.

10),<sup>135</sup> surrendering intimacy for alienation (5:5-10). Seeking deliverance “*out of death*” (*ek thanatou*) (5:7)<sup>136</sup> through resurrection, he fulfils Isaac’s foundational near-sacrifice<sup>137</sup>, becoming “a merciful and faithful high priest” with persisting at-one-ment (2:17). Jesus’s obedient crossing into death, is matched by God’s superlatively displacing resurrective counter-gift, marking thereby the midpoint of a grand glory-death-glory interchange connecting Christ’s pre-existent brilliance, his suffering abasement and his exaltation as great high priest, entering heaven’s sanctuary as humanity’s representative (9:24) and pioneer (10:19-20).

Heaven marks (for Christ) the origin and (for Christ and humankind) the endpoint of this expansive salvific action, a trajectory mysteriously sundered by sin’s asymptotic discontinuity, yet embraced and overcome in him. Belonging to the superior “order of Melchizedek” (7:17), Christ’s eternal, heavenly priesthood affords humanity lasting displacement into God’s presence (4:16; 10:22), the ‘perfection’ previously unattainable (7:11; 10:14; 11:40; 12:2; cf. 9:14; 10:22). Former divine-human separation – spanned imperfectly through *Yom Kippēr*’s incessant priestly entry into the earthly sanctuary – is transcended, for the veil of Jesus’ flesh forms no barrier but the very means of accessing heaven’s sanctuary (10:19-20).<sup>138</sup> Because Christ has freely and graciously descended into creation’s estrangement and corporeally pierced heaven’s supreme veil, humanity is raised in him into this alien magnificence.

### ***The gift displayed***

I have demonstrated how New Testament writers portray Christ sinlessly entering humanity’s woeful predicament – both graphically in the passion narratives and

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-4.

<sup>136</sup> Rather than the NRSV’s Gethsemane-like “save him *from* death”: *ibid.*, 217.

<sup>137</sup> James Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: a study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the light of the Aqedah* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 182.

<sup>138</sup> Dunnill, 233-4.

‘existentially’ in the epistles – in order to enrich immeasurably through his self-emptying, life-bestowing fullness, shifting Adam’s deficient race from poverty, sinfulness and accursedness into richness, righteousness and blessing, a transfer completed ultimately in heavenly admittance through his bodily, pioneering, communicable ‘hyperaction’.

Thus the gift’s ‘crucial contentions’ that Derrida and Marion vigorously deny are superlatively affirmed, for in Christ the gap between the ‘pure’ trinitarian gift and Christ’s incarnate, redemptive giving is spanned. Moreover, it reveals ‘inversely proportional’ reciprocity as humanity’s poverty-stricken ‘gift’ to Christ is overwhelmed by his superexcessive ‘counter-gift’, which ennoble the deficient and displays God’s extraordinary generosity. Furthermore, redemptive transformation is accomplished through the ‘gift-object’ of Christ’s displaced, pierced, outpouring body, shamefully hung (cf. Gal. 3:13) and offered once-and-for-all (Heb. 10:10) to provide the sacrificial flesh and blood that assures “the new and living way” into heaven’s sanctuary (10:19-20). God’s corporeal gift-of-self anticipates humanity’s living anamnestic eucharistic counter-sacrifice that thankfully and joyfully constitutes the Church, making it the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9) that Adamic kings and priests forfeited, finally offering creation back to its source.

## **Human rejection meets divine giving**

How might this temporal, asymmetric interchange relate the Trinity’s eternal, balanced exchanges to Calvary’s brutal displacements? Here I analyse Balthasar’s profoundly fertile, yet daringly contentious, trinitarianism against the celebrated, though seemingly incompatible, literary-anthropological theories of the French-American scholar, René Girard. They are intriguing, though possibly unexpected, partners. Girard portrays Christ as the definitive scapegoat who bears, exposes

and transcends society's desire-driven violence, a 'surface' narrative in which I discern insufficient ontological depth. Balthasar's 'submerged', avowedly theological, explanation provides this missing component, depicting Christ's post-crucifixion descent into hell as trinitarian drama in which the sinless Son fully endures sinners' alienation, thereby transporting humanity into its deified end. I argue that this extraordinarily comprehensive soteriology fissures through presuming too much about God's mysterious life whilst projecting violence therein. I will conclude that if Girard is augmented by a robust peace-ontology and Balthasar 'apophatically' tempered, a richer account of Christ's visible and hidden saving work results.

### ***Girard's scapegoat***

As Father and Son seamlessly conspire to fulfil Isaac's near-sacrifice, so human beings plot his murder. For Girard, such brutality represents *not* the divinely-willed, 'liberative' violence of certain propitiatory soteriologies but rather humanity's viciousness *exposed* and *negated*. Motivated through considering victimhood, expulsion and 'redemption' within European literature, Girard claims that enmity stems from antagonism prompted by conflicting *desires*, with ensuing violence (temporarily) abated through scapegoating. Among creatures, human beings alone can discern what is desirable and therewith find themselves profoundly (re-)constituted.<sup>139</sup>

However, the desirer-desired correspondence is not binary but mediated by a third party *model* who sets the 'desire agenda.'<sup>140</sup> Triangularly constituted as non-

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<sup>139</sup> See Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 12.

<sup>140</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans, Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 145-6. (Hereafter, *VS*).



autonomous “interdividuals”<sup>141</sup>, captivated by mimetic desire, people learn to copy others, initially coveting identifiable things (acquisitive mimesis) and subsequently some imperceptible state of fullness or well-being (metaphysical mimesis) embodied by the mediator-model.<sup>142</sup> When the model is remote (*external* mediation) conflict is not inevitable but if occupying the same socio-symbolic-spatial environment (*internal* mediation) mirroring escalates, thus degenerating benign desire into violent competition for some tantalizingly unattainable, unfathomable “beautiful totality”.<sup>143</sup> Such mimetic, mutually-reinforcing pairings multiply incessantly, yielding widespread destructive violence.

Such annihilative aggression finds temporary resolution as communities fixate their multiple antagonisms on the *scapegoat*: unable to establish “agreement around the object which everybody wants” they discover ‘harmony’ through “the victim whom everybody hates.”<sup>144</sup> This hostility-absorbing *skandalon*, is savagely despised and concurrently admired as the mysterious reconciler,<sup>145</sup> society’s *pharmakon* – “both poison .... and ....antidote, sickness and cure”<sup>146</sup> – bestowing ‘peace’ insofar as perpetrators remain convinced both of their ‘innocence’ and the victim’s ‘guilt’. Repeated activation through multiple victims brings stability, eventually normalizing the process as *sacrifice*, “spreading and perpetuating the reconciliatory effect of the surrogate victim.”<sup>147</sup> For Girard, therefore, “*the sacred is violence*”<sup>148</sup>, yet with its underlying mechanism obscured.

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<sup>141</sup> René Girard, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, Guy Lefort, trans. Stephen Bann, Michael Meeter, *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 299-305 (Hereafter, *THFW*).

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>143</sup> *VS*, 148.

<sup>144</sup> René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 66. (Hereafter, *EC*).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *VS*, 95.

<sup>147</sup> *THFW*, 32.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*; 32, italics original.

Christianity ultimately rewrites Israel's narratives of sacrificial displacement *from the innocent victim's perspective*, decoding substitutionary violence through Jesus who uniquely embodies *agapē* "to its end."<sup>149</sup> Whereas Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, John's *incomprehensible* divine logos reverses this ancient expulsion through being *bound* to the victim and undergoing rejection, 'replacing' "the God that inflicts violence with the God that only suffers violence."<sup>150</sup> Indeed, John reveals scapegoating's secret alchemy as the victim's death both averts devastation and unifies God's scattered children (11:50-2): Christ acquiesces to – and thus *exposes* – systemic bloodthirstiness, to executioners, accomplices and onlookers alike, interceding non-retaliatorily for his crucifiers (Lk. 23.34).

Nevertheless in typecasting religion as mere 'release-valve' for enslaved communities, tacitly hallowing 'virtuous' scapegoating predicated upon some primal expulsion/murder, Girard overlooks prior *victimless* ontological foundations. Whilst decoding pernicious cycles *from which* humanity is redeemed, he sketches only mutedly the positive alternative *for which* it is liberated, the *inherently* salvific 'content' of transcendent, non-mimetic, reciprocal charity. 'Homeopathically' dispensing the poison-antidote of 'original violence' may relieve symptoms, yet the 'original peace' of permanent restoration remains tormentingly elusive. Girard's Christ manifests too faintly the sheer *divine*, redemptive power to *transform* humanity's plight fundamentally. This sinless, virginally-conceived new Adam, "completely alien to the world of violence"<sup>151</sup>, seemingly lacks *positive* grounding in eternal, metaphysical peace. Nevertheless, that is the very gift which allows him – the poverty-embracing, sin-bound, accursed, self-emptying scapegoat – to lavish richness, righteousness and blessing upon the desperately needy, violent world. For Girard, following the risen Christ "means *giving up* mimetic desire"<sup>152</sup> with precious little pre-lapsarian

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 431; italics added.

salutary desire, which inspires “loving mimesis”<sup>153</sup>, to *take up*, in anticipation of Christ’s *deifying* gift. Although later work stresses *positive* mimesis<sup>154</sup> through becoming open to the divine<sup>155</sup>, Girard’s violence-free ‘divine’ appears gauged against humanity’s existing mimetic-expulsive ‘script’ rather than bestowing ontologically *prior* peace “[surpassing] all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). Nevertheless, Christ-mimesis means “*ultimately participation in the divine life*”<sup>156</sup> of joyous, endless positivity that López extols.

Proposing “no innocent starting-point, no absolute beginning, no unquestionable *a priori*”<sup>157</sup>, Girard nevertheless marginalises the *eternally-beloved* Son (Jn. 1:18) for the *temporally-expelled* scapegoat and, overemphasizing futile peace-through-scapegoating, neglects Christ’s ‘peace-work’ – creating humanity anew *in himself* (Eph. 2:11-22) – and his ‘peace-bequest’ – in the *beyondness* of divine life (Jn. 14:27). Christ-mimesis aids humanity’s ascent *out of* violence’s mire,<sup>158</sup> for *before* commissioning earthly peace envoys God in Christ ‘[reconciles] the world *to himself*’ (2 Cor. 5:19). Over-aligning culture with mimetic desire lacking primal, benevolent *eros*, Girard reduces Augustine’s ‘two city’ narrative to proclaim “a story of one city, and its final rejection by a unique individual.”<sup>159</sup>

Lamenting Hebrews’ temple-priesthood-sacrifice paradigm for enshrining discreditable ritual economies,<sup>160</sup> Girard overlooks the astounding *newness*

<sup>153</sup> Rebecca Adams, ‘Loving Mimesis and Girard’s ‘Scapegoat of the Text’: A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire,’ in *Violence Renounced: Rene’ Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford PA: Pandora Press, 2000), 277-307.

<sup>154</sup> See *EC*, especially chapter 3.

<sup>155</sup> René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (hereafter, *ISSF*), trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 16.

<sup>156</sup> See Petra Steinmair-Pösel, “Original Sin, Grace, and Positive Mimesis”, *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 14(2007), 1-12.

<sup>157</sup> Charles Davis, “Sacrifice and Violence: new perspectives in the theory of religion from René Girard”, *New Blackfriars*, 70:829(1989), 311-328; here, 327.

<sup>158</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 395.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *THFW*, 231.

proposed: Christ fulfils and *transcends* old ways, effecting humanity's unprecedented transfer *beyond* self-perpetuating violence into heaven's unimaginable *difference*. Whilst distinguished from imposed sacrifice,<sup>161</sup> he does not regard Christ's giving-of-self as *theological* 'at-one-ing' through trinitarian participation. However, Girard has recently proposed that the indwelling Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20) "alone enables us to escape from human imitation"<sup>162</sup> towards divine holiness-within-history,<sup>163</sup> anticipating the parousia's absolute newness which *saves* entangled humanity *from* self-destruction *for* the kingdom's authentically peaceable realm. Such harmony comes in submitting to and receiving from Christ whose kingdom is no Pelagian meritocracy, but founded upon God's *gift* which persistently eludes humanity's furthest ethical reach.

Girard's theories founder theologically, overplaying mimetic theories possessing insubstantial ontological gravity, whilst neglecting Israel's sacrifices as founded upon the Father's *Aqedah*-like handing-over and the Son's being-handed-over. Nevertheless, the crucifixion's expulsive 'surface' action can be ameliorated through supplementing Girard's flimsy Christology with the richer 'submerged' drama of divine relations, reading Christ's *self*-offering with trinitarian depth. The 'self' given is no 'extrinsic' victim nor essentially negative disclosure, but an 'excessive' trinitarian 'self' *in which* others *discover* and *receive* their own 'selves', surpassing the highest ethically-attainable positive mimesis.

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<sup>161</sup> Adams and Girard, 28; *EC*, 215.

<sup>162</sup> René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* trans. Mary Baker, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2010).

<sup>163</sup> Kevin Mongrain, 'Theologians of spiritual transformation: a proposal for reading René Girard through the lenses of Hans urs von Balthasar and John Cassian', *Modern Theology*, 28:1(2012), 99.

### ***Balthasar and the descent***

For Balthasar, it is Christ's *descent* into humanity's alienated human condition that guarantees salvific efficacy, suffering not merely as 'arbitrary' scapegoat but one "whose suffering-with-others is a transforming suffering that turns the underworld around, knocking down and flinging open the gates of the abyss."<sup>164</sup> God's superabundant, transformative self-donation culminates mysteriously *beyond* Calvary in Christ's displaceive descent into hell (1 Pet. 3:18-19; 4:6), transcending sinful humanity's death-bound estrangement (cf. Rom. 8:39). Hence, trinitarian redemptive action *continues* super-intensely as the Father loads humanity's sinfulness onto the spotless Son who, suffering paternal anger, exhausts sin's oblitative power. Christ's kenotic displacement *following* death thus accomplishes humankind's indescribable enhancement.

Balthasarian soteriology depends upon inner-trinitarian difference/distance (*diastasis*): "such an incomprehensible and unique 'separation' of God from himself that it *includes* and grounds every other separation – be it ever so dark and bitter."<sup>165</sup> Creation's mending therefore cannot happen outside God: Christ crucified must bear obediently not simply sin's *consequences* but raw, unmediated, estrangement: 'made to be sin' (2 Cor. 5:21) and becoming a curse (Gal. 3:13),<sup>166</sup> his "Yes to God is stretched beyond all finite proportions."<sup>167</sup> As "love between Father and Son"<sup>168</sup> the Spirit is "the 'personified handing over', the

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<sup>164</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: from the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 20.

<sup>165</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison; 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988-95), 4:325.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:110.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:113.

<sup>168</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *et al.*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982-91), 7:267.

‘gift’”<sup>169</sup>, preserving “the infinite distance between them, [sealing] it and, since he is the one Spirit of them both, [bridging] it.”<sup>170</sup>

The sinless Son enters sin’s devastating chasm *so that* gift-deficient humankind might inhabit God’s plenitudinous gift. Nevertheless, Balthasar finds theologians persistently curtailing Christ’s redemptive span: whilst Augustine and Gregory Nazianzus interpret Christ’s *becoming* ‘sin’ (2 Cor. 5.21) over-timidly<sup>171</sup>, Anselm underemphasises *deification*.<sup>172</sup> Balthasar insists that salvation exceeds ‘external’ sacrificial acquittal, but entails incorporation *into* Christ, who, substitutionally exchanging places with sinners, enacts the *admirabile commercium* of patristic soteriology, thus bearing sin, averting wrath and opening humanity’s divinizing path with unimaginable comprehensiveness. *Freely* occupying the place of the condemned,<sup>173</sup> Jesus fulfils the ‘trinitarian’ *Aqedah*,<sup>174</sup> enacting both God’s judgement on covenanted humanity’s faithlessness and its gracious remission.<sup>175</sup> He ‘receives’ sin’s offensive anti-gift, “[burning] it utterly with the fire of his suffering” and, as divine lamb-scapegoat, carries sin “into the desert....out of sight and unreachable,”<sup>176</sup> revealing “in that cross-fire” the Trinity “as an eternal communion of love.”<sup>177</sup>

Christ finalises his silent association with the dead on Holy Saturday, descending not as the already victorious redeemer of iconography, but in continuing

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:395.

<sup>170</sup> *Theo-drama*, 4:324.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:252-3.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:256.

<sup>173</sup> See Rowan Williams, ‘Balthasar and the Trinity’ in Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 40.

<sup>174</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: the Mystery of Easter*, (hereafter, *MP*), translated with an introduction by Aidan Nichols, O.P. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990) 111.

<sup>175</sup> *MP*, 121; cf. *Theo-drama*, 4:343.

<sup>176</sup> Balthasar, *The threefold garland: the world’s salvation in Mary’s prayer*, translator unnamed, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 71.

<sup>177</sup> John Saward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (London: HarperCollins, 1990), 52.

solidarity, facing sin itself, unattached to particular perpetrators, but in its raw abstraction, thereby suffering a ‘second death’.<sup>178</sup> Christ thus beholds “what in the realm of creation is imperfect, unformed, chaotic” making it “pass over into his own domain as the Redeemer”, thereby (trans)forming “our vision of the Divinity.”<sup>179</sup> Abandoned, Christ reveals sin’s harshest godforsakenness as no longer ‘outside’ God but enfolded *within, transcended* and *re-incorporated* within immutable, deathless love.<sup>180</sup> His absolutely unique death is also “the most *communicable*”<sup>181</sup>, unsurpassably fruitful, replacing supreme negativity with glorious positivity through participation in triune life. Unfolding his eternal personhood in salvific vocation directed towards desolate humanity,<sup>182</sup> his gift-of-self, constitutes *the* human-divine exchange<sup>183</sup> and demonstrates ‘being’ as “being-for.”<sup>184</sup> The descending Christ reveals God to *be* urkenotic self-giving *in se*: “the Kenosis is the supreme expression of the inner-Trinitarian love, the Christ of Holy Saturday is the consummate icon of what God is like.”<sup>185</sup> Precisely *because* the Trinity is ecstatic, kenotic love *ab intra*, so also *ab extra* in deifying super-action.

Balthasar presents a stunning interchange as *all* things become subjected to Christ and thereby enfolded redemptively within trinitarian difference. Yet his captivating drama faces severe critics, not least Alyssa Lyra Pitstick who accuses Balthasar of undermining dogmatic orthodoxy in not recognising Christ’s *consummatum est* (Jn. 19:30) as redemption’s *completion*<sup>186</sup> and Holy Saturday as

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<sup>178</sup> *MP*, 172-3.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>180</sup> *MP*, 147, n. 107.

<sup>181</sup> *Theo-drama*, 4:133.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:356.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:154-163.

<sup>184</sup> Mark McIntosh, *Christology from within: spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 126; cf. *Theo-drama*, 4:239.

<sup>185</sup> *MP*, 7.

<sup>186</sup> Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of the Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 36.

God's *post*-redemptive, peace-bestowing Sabbath.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, tradition honours Christ descending as *triumphant, liberating* king, entering hell to apply merits *already won* rather than suffering redemptively alongside the damned.<sup>188</sup> Catholic teaching proclaims Christ's death as inherently "satisfactory in virtue of the preeminent qualities of His person"<sup>189</sup> and so requires no super-intense *divine* 'experience' that exceeds even the *poena damni*<sup>190</sup> nor some post-mortem efficacious 'resolution' of invisible, trinitarian exchange.

Karen Kilby similarly criticises Balthasar's soteriology for depicting trinitarian relations over-vividly, imagining visible, temporal events as transparent windows onto the *invisible* and *atemporal*.<sup>191</sup> Envisaging an *intra-divine* abandonment<sup>192</sup> surpassing any human-divine separation,<sup>193</sup> whilst proposing a glorious gulf-in-unity 'pre-containing' – and thereby potentially healing – *every possible* sinful abyss<sup>194</sup>, generates mere "novelistic theologizing."<sup>195</sup> Moreover, in acclaiming the Trinity's "unanimous salvific decision"<sup>196</sup>, the Son's "willing cooperation"<sup>197</sup> and a united will "[integrating]....the intentions of the hypostases"<sup>198</sup>, Balthasar suggests distinct centres of consciousness. Whilst Pitstick diagnoses blatant tritheism<sup>199</sup>, Kilby is more circumspect, however: since *all* trinitarian language negotiates perilously between (equally heretical) modalist and tritheistic poles, reverent *apophaticism* is demanded.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-6.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-105.

<sup>191</sup> See her *Balthasar: a (very) critical introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 105-114.

<sup>192</sup> *Theo-drama*, 3:530.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:495.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:325.

<sup>195</sup> Kilby, 115.

<sup>196</sup> *Theo-drama*, 3:187.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:123.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:485. .

<sup>199</sup> Pitstick, 292.

<sup>200</sup> Kilby, 105, n.31



Such restraint strikes an appropriate balance between Balthasar's enthusiastic, overconfident intuition and Pitstick's somewhat deferential reading of Catholic dogma as unyieldingly fixed. Christ's hidden action between crucifixion and resurrection is intensely *mysterious* and does not yield to human probing. Easter's exultant acclamation of Christ's victory declares that as risen king he spans both height and depth to fill "all things" (Eph. 4:8-10) "with all the fullness of God" (3:18-19), yet without presuming to comprehend the 'inner mechanism' by which that triumph is won.

### ***Reconciling surface narratives and submerged epics***

Balthasar's spectacular epic portrays Christ as the conclusive 'displaced displacer', whose hell-bound kenosis causes creation's plerosis, resolving humanity's expulsive rejection within inner-trinitarian *diastasis*. Trusting that God will indeed "reconcile to himself *all things*" (Col. 1:20), gathering them up in Christ (Eph. 1:10) to enjoy "the riches of his glorious inheritance" (1:18), he interprets Paul's interchange formulae with unprecedented integrative sophistication, portraying sin's *elimination* and life's glorious *conquest*.

However, this explicitly *trinitarian* context represents both triumph and downfall, because, like creation's mysterious emergence or Christ's miraculous rising, salvation's 'transaction' remains *unseen*, prohibiting scriptural *exegesis* becoming trinitarian *eisegesis*. Balthasar so 'internalises' Christ's *divine* sin-bearing that the visible *human* drama becomes somewhat tangential, proposing an ultimately *disembodied* atonement, locating the primary 'crisis' not within worldly gift-rejection but the underlying trinitarian distance/difference. Imagining Christ bearing paternal wrath substitutionally with true filial *freedom*, he nevertheless

risks *enthroning* violence eternally within God rather than the matchless peace which *overcomes* all anguished torment.<sup>201</sup>

Furthermore, Balthasar undervalues the passion narratives' *perceptible* transformation: the believing thief's miraculous displacement itself constitutes both redemptive 'performance' and salvific 'reception', whilst Christ's compassionate intercession for his executioners shows self-giving undoing humanity's deadliest *rejection*. God *may* demand require some supra-historical exchange but that remains *unprovable*. The gospels portray staggeringly 'transgressive' giving *in* the crucified Son, who *is himself*, in very *flesh*, the exchange, reversing humanity's hideous anti-gifts within divine love. Whereas Girard's *pharmakon*-scapegoat absorbed violence's concentrated venom to dispense the homeopathic 'cure' of victimary expulsion, Balthasar's Christ goes further: *from*, *within* and *into* a fullness-of-being which surpasses mere *absence* through glorious *positivity*. Christ might indeed appear 'poisoned' by violence that renders him 'empty' and 'poor', made to be 'sin' and 'a curse', *yet he remains uncontaminated*, pristinely communicating the richest, fullest, most righteous divine blessing.

For Girard, this ultimate scapegoat discloses God as *absolutely non-violent*, whilst *exposing* and *defusing* human victimhood through an unprecedented resurrective conclusion.<sup>202</sup> Yet, *overly* focused on Christ's observable expulsion, he lacks a robust constructive ontology that imagines not merely freedom *from* violent captivity as freedom *for* gratuitous participation in God's life. Girardian *désir*, unanchored in trinitarian abundance, contrasts sharply with Augustine's glorious *desiderium naturale in Deum* and leaves scapegoating merely diagnostic rather

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<sup>201</sup> Kilby (115ff) observes that idealising (even idolising?) self-expending sacrificial love as truly divine risks generating abusive distortions in condoning innocent suffering.

<sup>202</sup> Girard, *ISSF*, 134.

than richly salvific, representing, in Balthasar's own judgement, "a closed system".... jettisoning all 'moribund metaphysics.'"<sup>203</sup>

Nevertheless, augmented by "an ontology of original peace .... of creational shalom"<sup>204</sup> Girard's unimaginative metaphysical poverty can be supplemented, even as Balthasar's over-imaginative trinitarian speculation necessitates greater theological reserve. Might Girard's 'surface' narrative of palpable victimhood be ontologically 'enriched' whilst Balthasar's 'submerged' trinitarian drama undergo reverent 'apophaticization'? This mutual tempering would revere Christ's myriad redemptive 'crossings' before, during and after his passion as cohering only within God's awesomely *mysterious* life, whilst rejoicing in the *transformation* of humanity's gift-denying violence through graced participation in that very *otherness*.

## Conclusion

Humanity's 'surface' 'gifts' of violent hostility cause Christ to be radically displaced in the solid 'gift-object' of his woundable body, becoming 'empty', 'poor', 'sin' and 'accursed'. God's 'submerged' 'counter-gifts' of fullness, richness, righteousness and blessing lie eternally *within* and '*beyond*' his resurrectable corporeality, readily bestowed, through unrepeatable historical self-giving and ceaseless sacramental communicability. Christ's deifying gift-of-self possesses trinitarian 'depth', inviting participation in love's '*Aqedah*-like' exchange, which fulfils Abraham's incomplete, temporal action within God's

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<sup>203</sup> *Theo-drama*, 4:308.

<sup>204</sup> Jacob Sherman, "Metaphysics and the Redemption of Sacrifice: On René Girard and Charles Williams", *The Heythrop Journal*, 51:1(2010), 54. In Charles Williams's evocatively titled novel *Descent into Hell*, Sherman discovers many classic Girardian themes considered within a greater, inherently *peaceful*, metaphysics of 'co-inherence', relationship and exchange that overcomes seemingly inescapable desire-mimesis-violence through lovingly 'being-for-the-other' rooted in Christ's primordial – ultimately trinitarian – gift-of-self.

gloriously ‘complete’, atemporal life. The *Aqedah* makes sense only “on the third day” (Gen. 22:4) of divine appearing (Ex. 19), human healing (Hos. 6:1-2) and resurrective consummation (1 Cor. 15:4), for sacrifice exceeds physical immolation, anticipating, like every gift, some non-identical, asymmetric *return* from God’s nuptial plenitude (Jn. 2:1). As Kierkegaard rejects *agape* as altruistic, ethical expenditure, so true sacrifice dwells both *within* Abraham’s offering and *beyond* it, in God’s very life.<sup>205</sup> Christ receives-in-order-to-give and does so to the utmost at Calvary; and yet his resurrective counter-gift shows not merely self-forgetfulness but the mystery of being as *reciprocity*, as *communion*, a receiving-in-order-to-give matched by a giving-in-order-to-receive, as utter poverty and plenitudinous wealth are revealed as complementarily identical in God’s life of perfect self-giving and self-reception.<sup>206</sup>

Christ the redeemer is one who *represents*, surpassing Balthasar’s wrath-bearing substitute *and* Girard’s victim-exposing scapegoat. Acting both ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’, Christ’s crucified, transgressive, transportative giving reveals the representative who *re-presents* – offers again, persistently – a share in divine life whose fullness remains mysteriously *hidden*, yet abundantly *given*, to those who venture, Abraham-like, into the ‘beyond’ pioneered by humanity’s representative re-presenter.

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<sup>205</sup> John Milbank, ‘Stories of Sacrifice’ in *Modern Theology* 12:1(1996), 53.

<sup>206</sup> See López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 173.

## CHAPTER SIX

# Easter Communion

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### Introduction

The gospels mark the hiatus between burial and resurrection with Sabbath stillness and – unlike Balthasar – shroud Holy Saturday’s redemptive events in sheer *silence*, abyssal discontinuity and the irreducible, bewildering strangeness of death. Whilst western artists frequently represent the risen Saviour, Byzantine iconography generally avoids overfamiliar visualisation through depicting the *descensus*, thereby summoning the prayerful viewer into *its* mysterious, unmanipulable arena, seeking its sole vanishing point within a receptive, transformable human life. Jesus receives *completely* Israel’s much-anticipated eschatological gift, a proleptic action nevertheless *incomplete* until the general resurrection. His Easter gift is to be shared.

But what is the ‘shape’ of that gift? Analysing scriptural witness to both resurrection and ascension, I contend that Christ again unveils the true gift, further substantiating the essay’s vital gift contentions of embodied reciprocity anticipated and remembered within an explicit giver-gift-recipient structure that mediates between the pure gift and the gift-as-practised. Nevertheless, his victorious enthronement displays the incarnate gift *withdrawn*. Does this signal crisis or opportunity? The resolution afforded by the Spirit’s descent provides no ‘external’ commodified substitute for the ‘real thing’ but God’s own ‘internal’ gift, participation in his boundless, unquantifiable life, the ecstatic communion shared through his very own *donum*.

## From between the cherubim

The New Testament witness to Christ's resurrection confirms certain gift-contentions self-evidently. For instance, the Church is forever bidden to *remember* the risen Christ who constitutes its very hope of glory (2 Tim. 2:8).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, God's people *rejoice* in being gifted through Easter's 'first-fruits' (1 Cor. 15:20), fundamentally constituted through Christ's transmissible victory, ecstatically acclaimed in scripture, liturgy and hymnody and jubilantly received amid ceaseless 'alleluias'.

Other aspects require deeper examination, however. As Jesus passively 'crosses over' through God's power (Mt. 28:5-6; Mk. 16:6; Acts 2:24; 2:32; 3:15; 3:26; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14 etc.), and the gravestone is displaced (Mt. 28:2//), he receives the superlative *counter-gift* anticipated (Mt. 16:21; 17:9; 17:23; 20:19; 26:32//). This divine 'superaction' prompts further multi-faceted counter-gifts as the risen one transforms others through being re-formed in the Spirit's gifting as his ecclesial body, equipped to present endlessly multipliable counter-gifts in charity. Giving thereby *abounds*.

Jesus's post-resurrectional presence and transformative gifts are perplexingly strange,<sup>2</sup> intruding unbidden, as the generous victor seeks his desired recipients, accentuating Milbank's contention that the paschal gift 'succeeds' through relentless presentation even when refused or unexpected. Christ, moreover, rises with the 'gift-object' of astounding immortal corporeality, thereby bridging

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams examines the importance of memory in *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, second edition (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), especially chapter two.

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003) (599-608) shows how the gospel narratives (i) remain remarkably free of proof-texts offering scriptural corroboration; (ii) refrain from celebrating hopes engendered; (iii) provide unengineered portraits of a strikingly peculiar Jesus; (iv) make women (normally deemed unreliable eyewitnesses) the chief proclaimers. Such unsophisticated rawness thus intensifies Easter's shocking *gratuity*.

between the true, trinitarian gift and the Easter gift which he – and his graced recipients – practise. Thus, Christ’s gift vocation is extended.

In short, having established that resurrective glory confirms the crucified Christ giving-in-order-to-receive, I shall reinforce the reverse aspect of endless non-identical reciprocity, namely that the risen Saviour receives-in-order-to-give. Scrutinizing scripture’s Easter narratives, I depict the resurrection according to three dimensions, namely as participation in God’s life; an embodied event and the victim’s divine vindication.

To accomplish this, I engage numerous scholars, most prominently N.T. Wright, Rowan Williams and Graham Ward. Why these three? Wright’s magisterial tome provides arguably the profoundest English-language defence of the resurrection’s scriptural coherence, whilst Williams, through several ‘impressionistic’ scholarly accounts, reads the gospels intriguingly against the wider tradition and Ward’s bold exegesis forges remarkable, unforeseen connections in discerning God’s elevating Easter gift.

### ***The divine space***

How do the gospels indicate the divine mystery revealed in resurrection? With insight that evades most commentators, Williams notes how John portrays an angel at either end of the empty tomb (20:12), evoking iconographically Israel’s mercy-seat, the imageless divine ‘space’ that announces Jesus’ new life as astonishingly excessive, “non-representable, non-possessable”, a pure, *alien* gift beyond control or depiction.<sup>3</sup> Such emptiness paradoxically “announces the plenitude of God’s presence”<sup>4</sup>, for whilst resurrection may be foreshadowed “its

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<sup>3</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Between the Cherubim: The Empty Tomb and the Empty Throne’ in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 90.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 109.

fulfilment is as unrepresentable as the Hebrew God.”<sup>5</sup> Rather than imagining/imaging Jesus identifiably ‘reconstituted’, humanity itself becomes constituted by his inexpressible risen life which emerges from the mysteriously relocated holy of holies. The earthly *kapporeth* has been displaced into Christ’s body (Jn. 2:19-22) and is forever bloodless, for, as Hebrews teaches, the superlative priest-victim enters heaven itself with his own blood, perfecting former atonement rites through this once-for-all cosmic binding.

Receiving the divine life that is forever his through inexpressible “transfiguring expansion of [his] humanity”<sup>6</sup>, Jesus presents a share in that communion. Mark’s perplexing conclusion (16:1-8) depicts humanity’s uncertain response, for whilst the “young man” (*neaniskos*) – clad in splendour proleptically disclosed at the transfiguration (9:3)<sup>7</sup> – invites the alarmed women to proclaim Jesus’s resurrective displacement, they flee in “terror and amazement” (16:5-8; cf. 5:36, 5:42, 9:9), mutely disobedient. Mark’s enigmatic closing words express the dread of facing the divine gap or venturing to Galilee for transformative encounter, thus writing an unnerving, yet ‘hospitable’, icon whose insistent inverse perspective invites trustful ‘entry’ so that the closure-resistant narrative finds completion in believers’ ongoing Easter lives. Mark’s luminous witness “sitting on the right side” (16:5) himself provides extraordinary consummation, a “representation of the unrepresentable”, for “clothed like the new man – *nean-iskos* – in the community of the baptised he sits enthroned in glory”, fulfilling, in Ward’s reading, Jesus’s prophecy of “the Son of Man seated at the right hand in power” (14:62) and manifesting the resurrection body intimated in healing the haemorrhisa and raising Jairus’s daughter.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, *Resurrection* 89.

<sup>7</sup> Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 66.



Christ's bodily rising thus recapitulates all earlier displacements, "[opening] up a spiritual topos within the physical, historical and geographical orders"<sup>9</sup> that unfolds John's multi-layered *menein*. Used variously to depict the Spirit 'remaining' on Christ (1:32) and those who love him (14:17), the 'abiding' of eucharistic recipients (6:56), like the vine's fruitful branches (15:1-11), it indicates most profoundly human-divine 'indwelling', "[abiding] in the Son and in the Father" (1 Jn. 2:24) through the Spirit given (3:24; 4:13). The (seemingly) prosaic question "where are you staying?" (Jn. 1:38) elicits resurrection's ultimate response in the tomb where Christ does *not* abide, the empty gap which signals Christ's displacement both from and into *divine*, humanly inhabitable, space. Not permitted to cling to Christ (20:17), humanity is beckoned into this mysterious gift-space of divine communion that Christ opens, "alive and ahead of us, clearing a path to the Father's heart"<sup>10</sup> from which he came (1:18). Easter thus "marks the victory of eternity in time", the triumph of the permanent gift, thereby "renewing the Father's ever-greater gift of love" and allowing humanity to participate in the very content of transparent trinitarian giving-and-receiving, responding to the Father's gift with the counter-gift of thankfulness.<sup>11</sup>

So unlike *Yom Kippūr*'s scapegoat, driven into inhospitable wastelands (Lev. 16:10) and removing sin merely fleetingly, the ever-living one – who has endured sin and death *exhaustively* (cf. Rev. 1:18) – ascends to heaven's extraordinarily *hospitable* place (Jn. 14:3; 20:17). As definitive temple, from whom gifts flow in transgressive, invasive abundance, Christ emerges from – and beckons humankind into – that 'new' space of lasting transformation, abiding in the risen one (15:4) and thereby in the communion of Father and Son (14:20). The empty tomb is no 'optional extra', for Christ, displaced from this superexcessive divine 'space',

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<sup>9</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 108.

<sup>10</sup> Rowan Williams, 'Letting Go' in *Choose Life: Christmas and Easter Sermons in Canterbury Cathedral* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 112-113.

<sup>11</sup> Antonio López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (hereafter, *GUB*) (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 277-8.

offers his counter-gift in displacing humanity into these mysterious, gratuitous depths. Believers ‘find’ themselves concretely *in* that free, fluid body, fed *by* that body.

Revelation proclaims “a new heaven and a new earth” with previous divisions *overcome* as God tabernacles among humanity in the heaven-sent, yet earth-situated, New Jerusalem (21:1-7).<sup>12</sup> Hoping for salvation allows no escape from earthly realities into some ecclesiastical sanctuary for “resurrection faith will not permit the abandonment of the hope of the transforming power of God’s justice in history.”<sup>13</sup>

### ***The risen body***

Resurrectional *bodiliness* is thus integral. The evangelists, particularly Luke (24:36-42) and John (20:20,27), emphasise Jesus possessing a solid ‘gift-object’ in his visible, touchable body (Mt. 28:9; Lk. 24:36-40; Jn. 20:20,27) that walks (Lk. 24:15), talks, eats (Lk. 24:41-43), shares breakfast (Jn. 21:13-15) and takes, blesses, breaks and gives bread (Lk. 24:30). Nevertheless, it appears (Mt. 28:9; Lk. 24:36) and vanishes (Lk. 24:31) miraculously, passes through locked doors (Jn. 20:19,26) and resists immediate identification (Lk. 24:16; Jn. 20:15,20,27; 21:4). Nevertheless, there is redolent continuity between ‘old’ and ‘new’: certain ‘markers’ elicit recognition: the fourfold ‘eucharistic’ action (Lk. 24:30-31); uttering Mary’s name (Jn. 20:16); exposing his lacerated hands and side (Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:20); inviting Thomas to penetrate his wounds (20:27); and providing an evocative haul (21:7; cf. Lk. 5:1-11). Jesus’s risen bodiliness is reassuringly familiar yet alarmingly *strange*, both physical and ‘transphysical’<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Rowland, ‘Interpreting the Resurrection’ in Paul Avis (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, (London: SPCK, 1993), 72-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 79; original italicised.

<sup>14</sup> Wright’s term (654).

Mark uses *sōma* to signify both Christ's biological and eucharistic bodies whilst Paul repeatedly identifies the Church as Christ's *sōma* (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17, 12:12-27 etc.), a triple 'transcorporeality'.<sup>15</sup> Luke heralds this unnerving realignment. In retelling the scriptures necessarily fulfilled through suffering and entry into glory, the risen Christ remains unrecognised by the Emmaus-bound travellers, pending eucharistic disclosure in (literal) com-pan-ionship, the disciples' hearts enflamed (24:32) and energised for witness (24:32-35). Christ's entire incarnate existence is thus "transformed into his resurrection, taken up into it, eternalised"<sup>16</sup> and re-formed as gift-material for constructing his ecclesial body. Displaced and displacing bodies "defer or conceal their final identity ... [maintaining] their mystery."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, as Wright observes, whilst the first biblical meal – consuming Eden's forbidden fruit – leads to unwelcome disclosure (Gen. 3:7), the Emmaus feast (Luke's *eighth* meal) unveils "new and deeply welcome knowledge ... the ultimate redemption ... [signifying] that the long exile of the human race, not just of Israel, is over at last. This is the start of the new creation ... the first day of the new week."<sup>18</sup>

Receiving his Father's unprecedented gift of bodily resurrection provokes Jesus's own 'counter-gifts' and those of believers. Mary, "[dissatisfied] with dissatisfaction", perceptively returns to the tomb and through encountering Christ's bodily, yet ungraspable, reality "[finds] her self, her home, her name"<sup>19</sup> as one of the Father's reborn, adopted children (cf. Jn. 1:13; 3:3-13)<sup>20</sup> and becomes the resurrection's pioneering witness (20:17-18). Within Easter's multiple reconfigurative displacements, such "communication confers

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<sup>15</sup> See Ward, *Cities of God*, chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, translator unnamed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 86.

<sup>17</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, 652. Announcing the new creation complements synoptic tendency to emphasise the *kingdom*: for both, Jesus's resurrection proclaims "that the reign of God is at hand... the age to come has decidedly drawn near" (Rowlands, 76).

<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, 667.

communion and creates community.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus, crossing through physical boundaries, utters the ‘transgressive’, extraordinarily forgiving, “peace be with you” that stimulates the disciples’ own imitative mission (20:19-21). Gazing upon Christ’s body – wounded through their complicity – arouses not condemnation but the past, “transfigured into the ground of hope.... the foundation for a new and extended identity”<sup>22</sup>, embodying an astonishing renewed vocation. Receiving Christ’s Spirit-breath, heralds the new creation (cf. Gen. 2:7) of human-divine unity uttered through the Word (1:1-3)<sup>23</sup>, bestowing *corporeally* the ministry of forgiveness in onwardly transmitting the gift received. Moreover, Thomas, penetrating the Messiah’s physical pierced depths<sup>24</sup> utters his extraordinary christological confession and, as tradition attests, is eventually ‘gifted’ with martyrdom whilst countless others receive life-giving belief without seeing (20:28-31).<sup>25</sup>

Receiving overwhelming bounty, shared around a charcoal fire (*anthrakia*; 21:9), leads to Peter’s threefold loving restitution (21:15-19) that undoes his threefold denial around another *anthrakia* (18:15-27). Within resurrectional superabundance, former ‘scarcity’ is reversed and Peter shares the good shepherd’s vocation, crowning this unearned gift with his own Christ-like counter-gift through martyrdom (21:19), finally recognising God’s ultimacy<sup>26</sup> and offering the embodied self-gift that creation’s proto-priests eschewed.

Whilst the gospels remain enigmatically silent about humanity’s eschatological resurrective bodiliness Paul expands contemporaneous Jewish (specifically, Pharisaic) beliefs, resonantly sharpening these hopes whilst resisting Hellenised

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<sup>21</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 111.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 26, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, 667.

<sup>24</sup> Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 126.

<sup>25</sup> Saul’s encounter with Jesus, though signalled by (non-physical) “light from heaven” (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:12), nevertheless instigates an astounding transformation (‘conversion’) with countless extraordinary, far-reaching results.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 50.

views on the soul's immortality (cf. Wis. 3). Although certain Hebrew texts (e.g. Isa. 25:6-10; Hos. 6:2-3; Ezek. 37:1-14) tantalizingly imply resurrection, their overriding concern remains YHWH's covenantal faithfulness, overcoming all that beleaguers Israel, in certain hope that "creation itself ... will be reaffirmed, remade."<sup>27</sup> Implicitly reinterpreting Genesis 1-3, 1 Corinthians 15 bewails the tragic, death-enslaved creation and heralds the anticipated new creation, proclaiming that "all will be made alive in Christ" (15:22). Creatures' participation depends upon Christ's definitive resurrection (15:17), transporting them through death to bear no longer Adam's dust-bound image but Christ's heavenly image (15:49; cf. Gen. 1:27; Rom. 8:29), the Messiah who defines true, liberated humanity.<sup>28</sup>

This 'first-fruit' pioneer represents awaited eschatological resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23), recreating not merely Israel's "wise" and "righteous" (Dan. 12:2-3) but *universally*. Christ receives prototypically the ultimate 'future', 'democratising' Jewish expectations, thereby heralding an epochal "quantum shift .... final, climactic in the unfolding purpose of God"<sup>29</sup>, as anticipated glory permeates current affliction (Rom. 8). Moreover, believers' ardent expectation demands renewed ethical zeal, aligning human 'performance' with God's re-creative gratuity (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 5:7ff.; Col. 3; cf. Mt. 25:31ff.): merely foretasting God's teleological gift of communion elicits anticipative asymmetric counter-gifts.

Contrasting the former "physical body" with the awaited "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44), Paul juxtaposes Adamic humanity – "vitalized and characterized by *psychē* ('soul') and "[ending] in death" – with Christ's – "[beginning] from the resurrection of the dead ... eschatological humankind, the life of the new

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<sup>27</sup> Wright, chapter 3; quotation, 128.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>29</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 240.

creation.”<sup>30</sup> Paul consistently upholds a *bodily* resurrection, governed not by earthy corruptibility but God’s inexhaustibly life-giving Spirit.<sup>31</sup> Setting “perishability”, “dishonour” and “weakness” alongside “imperishability”, “glory” and “power” (15:42-43), he envisages not resuscitation but existence utterly transformed, transcending apparent continuity within radical discontinuity. Indeed, whereas Adam merely *received* himself, Christ inhabits the gift’s ontological *reciprocity* (15:45), “[pioneering] the way into the long-awaited future”<sup>32</sup>, surpassing Eden’s squandered past, not merely attaining Maximus’s well-being but *eternal* well-being.

Humanity’s mortal, corruptible flesh will behold Jesus’s life (2 Cor. 4:11), as current afflictions become thrillingly “suffused ... with the signs of resurrection”<sup>33</sup>, bestowing corporeal foretaste of final participation in God’s resurrective gift (4:14). Wright argues that the incomparable “eternal weight of glory” anticipated (4:17) demands not *relinquishment* of current physicality but God’s bodily *conversion*, guaranteed now by the Spirit (5:4-5) who fulfils salvation. Furthermore, whilst the world’s appointed end is in heaven, humanity’s future involves no disembodied post-mortem flight for the new covenant sealed in Christ’s death and resurrection heralds unimaginable communion, with human corporeality *transformed* but not obliterated as future splendour penetrates present suffering.<sup>34</sup> Jesus’s proleptic reception of glorified bodiliness already bears discernible, pledge-bearing ‘counter-gifts’.

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<sup>30</sup> Dunn, 242.

<sup>31</sup> Wright, 348-356, offers detailed exegesis.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 368-369. Moreover, “new birth into a living hope ... an inheritance ... imperishable, undefiled and unfading” – similarly “kept in heaven”, awaiting eschatological disclosure (1 Pet. 1:3-6) – represents *embodied* participation in Christ’s physical victory (465-7).

## ***Lord and Messiah***

Finally, how does Christ risen receive and extend the gift of *vindication*? Peter's Pentecost sermon rejoices in Christ's astounding turnaround, yet rather than attempting to defend the *incomprehensibility* of a *crucified* Messiah, he argues in reverse. God's response to Jesus's murder, delivered by the lawless, yet accomplished with divine intent, is what *establishes* his Messiahship: "God raised him up, having freed him from death" (Acts 2:23-24), making him "both Lord and Messiah" (2:36). So against the 'anti-gift' of human barbarism, Jesus receives God's resurrective 'counter-gift' in resurrection, thereby "[returning] as the judge of his judges."<sup>35</sup> In the crucified Christ I encounter not merely an image of my own self-absorbed victimhood but the suffering *other* who may expose me as *crucifier* as much as victim.<sup>36</sup>

Yet Christ's newfound authority, confronting humanity's guilt, represents no mere *reversal*, imposing some terrifying *divine* 'counter-condemnation', but offers miraculous release: "grace is released when the judges *turn* to their victim and recognize him as their hope and saviour."<sup>37</sup> So Christ, vindicated through resurrection, becomes the *vindicator*, liberating the profoundly undeserving. Moreover, with astonishing magnanimity, he vindicates not simply *his own* oppressors but those also who, by extension, tyrannise the infant Church. Murderous Saul finds himself identified as the risen Jesus's persecutor (Acts 9:4-5) and yet, vindicated by his victim, is baptised, filled with the Holy Spirit and becomes Christ's chosen, suffering witness (9:13-19).<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, through Peter, Ananias and countless others, vengeful retaliation evaporates and transformative hope arises, even recognising the tormenter as some kind of victim

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<sup>35</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 3. See also John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 74-6.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, *Resurrection*, 68-74.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 3; italics original.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

whose own innocence has been viciously assailed.<sup>39</sup> This potentially re-inscribes all human judging in Christ whose divinely-given judgement (Jn. 5:22) serves his superior purpose to save rather than condemn (3:17; cf. 8:15; 12:47; Rom. 8:1),<sup>40</sup> thereby “transcending the world of oppressor-oppressed relations to create a new humanity, capable of other kinds of relation – between human beings, and between humanity and the Father.”<sup>41</sup>

## Through the veil of his flesh

As the resurrection reveals God’s abundance inaugurating the new creation, so the ascension intensifies these hopes of eternal communion. Christ’s ascension is a trinitarian act involving both self-giving and self-reception: whilst *anabainō* – rendering the cultic Hebrew term *alah* – indicates Jesus’s own active accomplishment (Jn. 3:13; 6:62; 20:17), *analambanō* implies passive elevation (Acts 1:2,11,22; 1 Tim. 3:16).<sup>42</sup> Moreover, humankind longs for such transformative exaltation. As Douglas Farrow indicates, ascent-descent motifs permeate Scripture from Eden onwards and even following displacement from paradise, desire for ascent remains central, as witnessed in Moses’s divine encounter at Sinai, David’s enthronement of YHWH in Mount Zion’s temple, post-exilic temple reconstruction and eventually Daniel’s apocalyptic human being beckoned upwards to receive representatively God’s ancient promises, a

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Williams thus outlines the positive, transformative peace-ontology that Girard’s scapegoats woefully lack. See also Raymund Schwager, *Jesus and the Drama of Salvation: Towards a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, trans. James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Crossroad, 1999) and S. Mark Heim, *Saved from sacrifice: a theology of the cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus ascended: the meaning of Christ’s continuing incarnation* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 37-9.



messianic figure who, like Melchizedek, perfected both kingly and priestly expectations.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst his baptism and transfiguration represent the locational extremities of Christ's pre-passion descent-ascent, his anticipated heavenly ascension excels (Lk. 9:51), surpassing Moses (Mt. 28:18) and David (Acts 2:34), fulfilling Daniel's Son of Man (Mk. 8:38, 13:26; 14:62) and, as exalted (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34) definitive temple (Jn. 2:18-22), he constitutes the Eden-like oasis, cascading the Spirit's refreshment into the new creation (7:37-39).<sup>44</sup> His ascension to the Father (20:17) establishes humanity's heavenly place (14:2), for, having descended (Eph. 4:9), believers may thus aspire towards God's "heavenly call" (Phil. 3:14), to be "raised ... up with him and seated ... with him in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6).<sup>45</sup> Once more, the gift Jesus receives is shared, guaranteeing humanity's lasting communion.

I will demonstrate the ascension's witness to this recurrent reciprocity according to four interrelated areas, namely: the ascension's sheer *physicality*; the *entry* into heaven; Christ's reception of *praise and honour*; and finally his gift of earthly *absence* which allows the Spirit's release and correlates astoundingly the glorified, ecclesial and eucharistic bodies, thereby redefining corporeality.

### ***Physicality***

The ascension's physicality remains notoriously controversial. Writers as diverse as Origen, Erasmus and Schleiermacher relegate bodiliness in favour of a 'spiritual' ascension and even orthodox figures such as Augustine and Maximus, whilst affirming corporeality, stress Christ's fleshly, temporal humanity *removed*

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<sup>43</sup> Douglas Farrow, *Ascension Theology* (London: Continuum, 2011), 2-6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

thus allowing contemplation according to *spiritual* eternity, a shift extended by Kant and Hegel, armed with Enlightenment hubris, effectively to usurp Christ's physical ascension in favour of humanity's intellectual elevation.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, patristic authors are less willing to circumvent the flesh, citing scriptural texts (e.g., Jn. 3:13; 6:62; Eph. 4:10) that identify Jesus of Nazareth seamlessly with the ascended Christ, whilst marvelling that the Word enfleshed in Mary's womb will come again as the exalted, still embodied, Son of Man who has carried human nature into the otherwise fleshless heaven.<sup>47</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, appealing to divine inseparability and the physicality of Christ's wounded-yet-glorious body, affirms corporeality from conception to parousia.<sup>48</sup> John Chrysostom insists that disclaiming the risen/ascended body is tantamount to repudiating creation *ex nihilo* for both question God's power to transcend the spiritual-physical divide.<sup>49</sup> Aquinas affirms that Christ ascends according to both humanity and divinity<sup>50</sup>, thus constituting "the cause of our salvation": liberating captives for heaven (Eph. 4:8) and pioneering humanity's ascent (Jn. 14:2-3), he intercedes powerfully as eternal high-priest (cf. Heb. 7:25) and is enthroned as munificent Lord and God (Eph. 4:10).<sup>51</sup>

Thus Christ ascends physically for humanity's unimaginable enrichment, completing the incarnation's wonderful interchange. The pre-existent, descending Word who assumed sin-enslaved flesh<sup>52</sup>, progressively purifying it and fitting it for heaven, is the glorified, ascending Christ (Eph. 4:10) who leads humanity home: as "the Son of God assumes the frailty of the flesh" so "flesh wears the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2. See also Dawson, 31ff.

<sup>47</sup> Dawson, 78.

<sup>48</sup> See Farrow, 40.

<sup>49</sup> Dawson, 33.

<sup>50</sup> *ST*, IIIa.57.2

<sup>51</sup> *ST*, IIIa.57.6.*responsio*.

<sup>52</sup> Dawson, 94, following Athanasius.

Word of God” (cf. Jn 3:13).<sup>53</sup> Basil the Great extols God’s re-creation in the second Adam, who, exalted, “[bestows] a decoration upon the whole creation ... the firstfruits of nature” through the Spirit’s outpouring.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Chrysostom marvels as the Father joyfully receives Christ’s perfect self-offering and humanity’s once dust-bound nature is enthroned at his right hand.<sup>55</sup> Christ ascended is the ecclesial head (Eph. 1:22-3; Col. 1:9-10) and, as last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), humanity’s head also; so, as Augustine entreats, “if you wish to ascend, be in the Body of Christ”<sup>56</sup>, a member of the *totus Christus*, with head and body intimately united. Whatever our final, resurrected end resembles, it involves being “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (Rom. 8:29), “to the body of his glory” (Phil 3:21), sharing in his filial communion with the Father.

### ***Entry***

Christ’s supreme displacement reveals “vertical, transcending spatiality such as divides the uncreated God from creation”<sup>57</sup>, for having offered himself – rather some ineffectual, ‘external’ sacrifice – the great high priest, receives the ‘counter-gift’ of heavenly entry appearing before God on our behalf (Heb. 9:24-7). He thus pioneers “the new and living way” into the sanctuary by his blood, through the curtain of his very flesh, thus enabling humanity to inhabit that otherwise inaccessible expanse (10:19-20; cf. 4:16). Beyond heaven’s veil, Christ perpetually intercedes until the deifying interchange is perfected, still clothed in the body he received from Mary.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Novatian cited *ibid.*, 80.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>55</sup> Farrow, 40.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, Sermon 294.10. The most recent English translation of Augustine’s sermons is by Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (New York: New City Press, 1990-95), 10 vols.

<sup>57</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 112.

<sup>58</sup> Dawson, 133, following Gregory Nazianzen.

Sanctified for humanity's sanctification (Jn 17:19), he who is eternally "the highest" ascends that "we may be exalted in him" and "enter the gates of heaven which he has also opened for us" (cf. Ps. 24).<sup>59</sup> Thus, through Christ's ascension, humanity receives its final plenitude in God's deifying Spirit<sup>60</sup> and, with sin and death overcome, "retakes... its rightful seat in the life of the trinity" and "regains ... the clear exhibition of its divine mode of life."<sup>61</sup> Straining spatial metaphors to their limit, Christ's 'relocation' constitutes an embodied 'journey' into God, both utterly unique for this first-born risen Lord who pierces heaven itself<sup>62</sup> and pioneeringly representative as humanity is thereby restored to divine intimacy in the new creation where God's promises are realised.<sup>63</sup>

Such transposition is genuinely eschatological, for as the incarnation signified God's advent in humanity's impoverished 'space' so the ascension marks humanity's arrival in God's replete, relational 'space'<sup>64</sup>, through Christ's "permeable, transcorporeal, transpositional"<sup>65</sup> body in which humanity is privileged to participate. Indeed in Christ our inheritance surpasses Adam's for we have "penetrated the heights of heaven and have gained still greater things through Christ's unspeakable grace than we had lost through the devil's malice."<sup>66</sup> As "firstfruits of those who have died" (1 Cor. 15:20), the crucified, risen, ascended high-priest re-offers humanity to God like Israel's harvest offering, thereby sanctifying Adam's race and restoring its own priestly vocation.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Athanasius, quoted *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>60</sup> Farrow, 36.

<sup>61</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 146.

<sup>62</sup> Dawson, 94, citing Athanasius.

<sup>63</sup> Farrow, 46.

<sup>64</sup> See Thomas Torrance, *Space, time and resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976).

<sup>65</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 113.

<sup>66</sup> Leo the Great, *Sermons* 73.4, cited by Dawson, 71.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Dawson, 109.

## ***Glory***

Nonetheless this priest-victim is also crowned as glorious king. Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8; cf. 3:14), the ascended Christ is seated “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name” (Eph. 1:21; cf. Col. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:22), receiving that name “above every name” which triggers universal homage and the declaration of his Lordship (Phil 2:9-11). Enthroned as “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:35-36; cf. Ps. 110), Christ’s ascension surpasses Israel’s New Year festival which enacted YHWH’s victory over evil and anticipated his marriage to his people.<sup>68</sup>

Faith in his victory provokes fearless witness, as exemplified in Stephen’s bold, accusatory retelling of Israel’s impaired gift rapport: responding to God’s gratuitous blessings with disobedient idolatry, the people’s waywardness culminates in Christ’s betrayal and murder (Acts 7:2-53). Granted immediate insight into Christ’s ascended glory, Stephen’s vision penetrates heaven itself and he presents a martyr’s counter-gift, whilst imitating his Lord’s intercession for his killers (7:54-60; cf. Lk. 23:34).

Receiving from God incomparable glory and the divine name itself, and from humanity worship and witness-unto-death, Christ reciprocates lavishly: proclaiming Jesus’s divine name means salvation (Rom. 10:9); baptism in his name bestows forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; cf. Mt. 1:21), whilst the Church pronounces healing in the name (Acts 3:6; 4:18; 16:18). Moreover, as Christ received the Father’s authority to bestow eternal life (Jn. 17:2), heal and forgive sins (Mk. 2:10), teach (1:22) and expel unclean spirits (1:27), this authority shared with his disciples (3:15; 6:7) and intensified post-ascension as the Son of Man “seated on the throne of his glory” grants to his disciples a share in this enthroned judgement (Mt. 19:28).

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<sup>68</sup> H.B. Swete, quoted *ibid.*, 61.

Justin Martyr imagined an ascending victory procession led by Christ, “the King of glory” (Ps. 24:7-10), who, united with humanity through descent, elevates this frail nature into heaven to be unimaginably enriched and ennobled.<sup>69</sup> As the truly strong man (Cf. Mt. 12:29), Christ overpowers the disruptive evil powers which bind and enthrall humanity (cf. Rom. 8:20-1), making captivity – commonly identified as Satan by patristic writers – himself captive and, rather than *receiving* the tribute-bearing spoils of conquest (Ps. 68:18), he *bestows* gifts on his people (Eph. 4:8), the greatest of which is the triumph over death manifested in the resurrection body (1 Cor. 15), thus perfecting humanity’s longing for divine communion.<sup>70</sup>

### ***Absence***

Whilst provoking the interim crisis of apparent *absence*, Christ’s withdrawal is ultimately understood as gift, providing ‘space’ for the empowering (Lk. 24:49), revelatory Spirit (Jn. 16:6-10; cf. 14:26). In gift terms this expectant hiatus is important in preserving the difference between Christ, the departing incarnate giver, the Church as recipient and the Spirit, God’s ‘new’, pervasive, transformative gift. Christ’s displacement furthermore judges and relativises the sin-stricken world (1 Jn. 2:15-17) and awakens longing for God’s *new* creation (Phil. 3:18-21; Rev. 21-22). Nevertheless, as Dawson argues, the Church should neither withdraw in a fearful pseudo-Gnosticism nor “be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2) nor confuse earthly kingdoms with God’s transcendent, yet imminent, kingdom.<sup>71</sup> Instead it should occupy faithfully the interim, Spirit-filled tension, for, suspended desirously between remembrance and fulfilment, the

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-3.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. the interpretations of Irenaeus and Tertullian given *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-151.

Church represents “a history of transposed and deferred identities ... [incarnating] a humanity aspiring to Christ’s own humanity.”<sup>72</sup>

From the ascension’s supreme perspective, distinctions between presence and absence are reconfigured, for Christ “departed not from the Father and came to us ... sucked the breast and ... contained the world ... lay in the manger and ... fed the angels”, one who “[assumed] man’s flesh ... by [adding] what he was not, not losing what he was.”<sup>73</sup> The descending Christ’s self-giving – yet *lossless* – kenosis is matched by humanity’s ascending – unimaginably *enriching* – plerosis in him. The ascension completes Christ’s salvific crossing, denoting both human flesh entering heaven and the Spirit’s release into flesh; thus human bodies, refashioned by Christ as Spirit-vessels, receive his pledge of divine union, an assurance “etched in his palms and seared in his side.”<sup>74</sup> The ecclesial body thus generated enlarges, for Christ’s withdrawn physicality represents “the Logos creating a space within himself, a womb, within which (*en Christoi*) the Church will expand and creation be recreated”, longing for “participation in the divine good ... [making] the participant ever greater and more spacious than before.”<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, Christ’s perpetual eucharistic intimacy represents presence-in-absence, spanning an otherwise inconceivable divide and anticipating sacramentally the eschatological hope that Christ ascended may “fill all things” (Eph. 4:10):

Alleuia, King eternal,  
thee the Lord of hosts we own;  
alleluia, born of Mary,  
earth thy footstool, heaven thy throne;

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<sup>72</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 113.

<sup>73</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, 73.3, quoted by Dawson, 82.

<sup>74</sup> Dawson, 90, expanding Tertullian.

<sup>75</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 113. The second quotation is from Gregory of Nyssa.

thou within the veil has entered,  
robed in flesh our great High Priest;  
thou on earth both Priest and Victim  
in the eucharistic feast.<sup>76</sup>

Remarkable threefold transcorporeality becomes instigated at the ascension, aligning Christ's salvific body – endlessly 'crossed' into human privation for humanity's own crossing into his fullness – and signified through displative, sacrificial, eucharistic sacramentality, alongside the ecclesial body joined to him, given-over to him.<sup>77</sup> The disconcerting risen body – ungraspable and uncontainable, yet touchable, penetrable and edible – becomes the Church's food and fuel for its ongoing vocation as his body, reassured that despite withdrawal he will remain forever in its midst (Mt. 28:20; cf. 1:23; 18:20). Christ's ascended body expands to nurture the growing Church, "continually called to move beyond itself .... [become] eucharistic .... endlessly fractured and fed to others .... the body of Christ broken, given, resurrected and ascended."<sup>78</sup>

## The Spirit as Communion

That cosmic shift does not, however, denote some 'linear' abdication from Christ to the Church but involves those baptised into Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) "in the one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13) being conformed to Christ. Adopted as God's children through receiving Christ's filial Spirit (Rom. 8:12-17; Gal. 4:4-7), the Church recognises and celebrates its own pneumatic transformation and awaits creation's passage from suffering into glory (Rom. 8:18-25).

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<sup>76</sup> William Chatterton Dix's hymn "Alleluia, sing to Jesus!" Farrow, chapter 5, provides a profound eucharistic theology flowing from his ascension, though his emphasis on Christ's sacramental presence is not balanced by a rich *pneumatology*.

<sup>77</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 92.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-5.



How might we express the change the Spirit activates and perfects? I will contend that it is best imagined as intensifying communion which participates in the eternal communion of Father, Son and Spirit. To do this I engage numerous scriptural commentaries, including Anthony Thistleton's comprehensive biblical, systematic and historical survey of the Spirit's influence. However, I will evaluate more closely the related pneumatologies of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and the French Dominican Yves Congar (1904-1995). Both understand the Spirit as eminently gift – *donum* – and are among the most sophisticated pneumatological interpreters. Indeed, Augustine offers arguably the most enduring western pneumatological paradigm, profoundly influencing countless medieval theologians, including Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), Bonaventure (1221-1274) and Aquinas (1225-1274). Among countless exponents of the Augustinian tradition, I have chosen to analyse Congar's significant contribution because he responds to sustained Catholic disregard of the Spirit through an extensive pneumatological anthropology and ecclesiology, study of which will prove fruitful for the thesis's final section on our enfoldment into the trinitarian gift.

Thus aided, I first examine scriptural witness to the Spirit enabling human-divine communion, from the Old Testament's disparate soundings to communion perfectly embodied in Christ and believers' resultant conformation in the Spirit. Humanity's resultant divine longings emerge from God's jealous yearning for the Spirit within us (James 4:5) and thus imply the ever-prior trinitarian communion. Hence, secondly, I explore Augustine's pivotal representation of the Spirit as love and gift, arguing that communion is the proper pneumatological characteristic, a communion graciously extended through Pentecost's outpouring. Finally, I consider Congar's persuasive theology which emphasises the new life of the individual and of the universal Church as profoundly one, thanks to the indwelling, sanctifying Spirit who shapes humanity for communion.

## ***The Biblical Witness***

Somewhat bewilderingly, the biblical *rûach* denotes physical ‘wind’, ‘breath’, as well as ‘the human spirit’ and God’s own Spirit.<sup>79</sup> Intrinsically and awesomely *transcendent*, in contrast to human limitation, the divine Spirit vivifies exiled Israel’s corporate deadness (Ezek. 37:12-14), bestowing healing, unity and rejuvenation (11:19-20), transporting the forcibly displaced back to their heritage and to restored communion with God which had been severely ruptured (36:24-28). Alongside Wisdom and Word, the Spirit is God’s agent who grants revelation, sanctity and renewal. Innately holy (Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10-11; cf. Josh. 5:13-15), he generates tangible effects, inspiring chosen individuals such as judges and prophets, but always for common flourishing. Moreover, the Spirit creates order from chaos (Gen. 1:2; Isa. 63:11-14), granting not merely existence but purposeful life (Job. 33:4; Ps. 104:29-30; Ezek. 37:14) individually (Deut. 34:9; 2 Kings 2:9-15) and corporately (Num. 11:25). Expectation of *universal* participation in this “Beyond who is within”<sup>80</sup> found diverse expression in intertestamental writings<sup>81</sup> and classically in Joel’s prophecy of outpouring “on all flesh” (2:28), fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21), allowing widespread recognition of God’s powerful deeds across linguistic gulfs, thereby undoing Babel’s confused disunity (Gen. 11:9).

Yet such comprehensive sharing transpires through Christ’s lasting possession of the Spirit and restoration of communion, in individual, communal (e.g. Eph. 2:11-22) and cosmic (1:10) perspective. Jesus himself enjoys blissful communion in the Spirit recognising the Father’s gift and his unique benedictional revelation (Lk. 10:21-24). Embodying the divine persons’ (otherwise veiled) eternal loving

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<sup>79</sup> See Anthony C. Thistleton, *The Holy Spirit: in biblical teaching, through the centuries and today* (London, SPCK, 2013), 3-5.

<sup>80</sup> Thistleton’s phrase (21).

<sup>81</sup> See Thistleton, chapter 2.

fellowship, he provides means for humanity to attain a share therein, shaped through learning to love both God and neighbour in practical ways (10:25-37).

From the outset, Jesus is portrayed as revealing and restoring communion. His conception “from the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1:20; cf. Lk. 1:35) is associated with liberation from (‘out of’) sin (Mt. 1:21; cf. Lk. 1:77), as God’s tender mercy overcomes human alienation, establishing peace (Lk. 1:78-79). Yet it his baptism that discloses the ‘icon’ of trinitarian communion most clearly, that divine ‘space’ inhabited by believers baptismally adopted, sharing in the eternal Son’s own Spirit (Rom. 8:14-16; Gal. 4:6). The Father’s tender filial affirmation is accompanied by the Spirit’s dove-like descent upon Jesus (Mk. 1:10//), inaugurating a *new* creation (cf. Gen. 1:2; 8:8-12), definitively exceeding the new covenant-beginning given to righteous Noah (6:5-9). Moreover, Jesus, who receives the Spirit lastingly, alone gives it, thus confirming his filial identity (Jn. 1:32-34) and enabling believers’ rebirth “from above” (3:3) through “water and Spirit” (3:5). ‘Receiving’ the gift of sonship that is his eternally is juxtaposed to his rejection, under the Spirit’s force, of the satanic non-gift which sunders communion (Mt. 4:1-13), his offering, under the Spirit’s anointing, of good news to the poor, captive and afflicted people (Lk. 4:18-21; cf. Isa 61:1-2) and his expulsion of demons, “by the Spirit of God” (Mt. 12:28), thus bringing the tormented ‘back to themselves’ (cf. Mk. 5:15) and heralding the kingdom’s arrival (Mt. 12:28).

Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit is the heavenly Father’s greatest gift to prayerful, receptive children (Lk. 11:13) and his own prayerfulness highlights the Spirit’s role in sustaining divine communion. Luke depicts him praying at crucial revelatory moments, at baptism (3:21) and transfiguration (9:28-29), each event revealing or implying the Spirit’s presence.<sup>82</sup> Jesus’s intimate addressing of the Father as ‘Abba’ becomes adopted believers’ too, in the Spirit’s exclamatory

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<sup>82</sup> See chapter 4.

inspiration (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).<sup>83</sup> Yet, as Williams, following Barth, observes, Jesus utters his ‘Abba’ only in *Gethsemane* (Mk. 14:36), thereby enabling believers’ derivative filial acclamation only “because Jesus so cried in his suffering for us.”<sup>84</sup> Jesus’ wider enactment of his sonship entails conflict and dereliction, revealing his beloved Abba-Father of baptism and transfiguration, who co-endures the impotence of engaged compassion whilst awaiting the ‘counter-gift’ of triumphant resurrection which overcomes the ‘anti-Spirit’ of murderous duplicitous connivance.<sup>85</sup> Allowing the Spirit to articulate our filial ‘Abba’ means participating submissively in Christ’s paschal design (Rom. 8:17), wherein true communion is unveiled, as the Spirit “forms ... ‘Son-like’ life in the human world” through sustained “sharing in the mutuality of Father and Son.”<sup>86</sup>

That ‘long-view’ of the Spirit’s action does not discount or demean the spectacular signs witnessed in Acts, prominent in Paul and constitutive of countless Christians’ experience today. Contemporary scholarship seems, quite rightly, more willing to consider these on-going manifestations and Thistleton engages significantly with Pentecostalism and the Renewal Movement. Nevertheless, the first act of the Spirit-filled Peter, beyond the miracle of tongues, is to *preach*, testifying to God’s purposes in the unimagined crucified, risen, ascended Messiah whilst calling his crucifiers to repentance, forgiveness and similar Spirit-reception (Acts 2:22-42). Moreover, continuing awesome wonders persist, amid an extraordinary common life of praise, goodwill and witness (2:43-47).

Paul stresses that the astonishing gifts given to individuals must never breed individualism: given “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7), these manifestations of the one Spirit dissolve former divisions (12:11-11-13) and build up the Church

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<sup>83</sup> Thistleton, 41.

<sup>84</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Word and Spirit’ in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 121.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-22.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

in unity as Christ's body (12:14-27), with allotted ministries and signs serving the "still more excellent way" of love (13:1-13). Indeed, the gifted community (Eph. 4:7-13) is called to unity, knowledge, maturity and "to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (4:13), growing up in Christ the head (4:15), never grieving the Spirit through divisiveness but embodying tender-hearted forgiveness that imitates God's prior forgiveness outpoured through Christ's loving, fragrant self-offering (4:30-5:2). Thus whilst Pentecost fulfils dramatically the Spirit's long-awaited eschatological bestowal (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21), the Spirit's lasting *fruits* are the relational virtues that nurture communion, as opposed to fleshly chaotic works which amplify dissension (Gal. 5:16-23). To be in the Spirit means living sacrificially, co-crucified with Christ (5:24-5; cf. 2:19-21; 6:14-17).

The Spirit's connection to the cross is intensified in John. Jesus's promise to the thirsty of "living water" (4:10), that inward "spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (4:14), reverberates as "living water" becomes explicitly identified as the Spirit given following Jesus's glorification (7:39). Moreover, the remarkable effusion of blood and water from Christ's pierced side (19:34; cf. 1 Jn. 5:6-8) releases both humanity's true, eucharistic nourishment (Jn. 6:53ff.) and the water of rebirth closely allied with the Spirit (3:5). From Christ's crucified flood flows the Spirit's life-giving liberality.<sup>87</sup> Such pneumatic surplus becomes graphically personalised as the risen, peace-bestowing Christ breathes upon his disciples in the midst of their terrified self-imposed captivity, commissioning them to declare forgiveness (20:22-23). Intentionally intimating "the beginning of the new creation" (cf. Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 37:9; Wis. 15:11)<sup>88</sup>, John portrays Jesus with his riven hands and side exposed (20:21) and proposes the Spirit emanating from his self-offering as agent for restoring and perfecting the human-divine communion lost at Eden. Moreover, although living water emanates from Christ alone, 7:38 implies that believers united with him become derivative fountains of his divine

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<sup>87</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: an introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1955), 463.

<sup>88</sup> Barrett, 474.

life:<sup>89</sup> humanity ‘reciprocates’ the God’s gift insofar as it becomes the conduit for its on-going, profuse transmission.

The distinctive Johannine *paraklētos*, whose somewhat enigmatic significance involves at least the etymologic sense of being “called alongside” – to help, mediate, intercede, defend or represent. As “another Paraclete” (Jn. 14:16), he maintains disciples’ unbroken, abiding connections, “[continuing] the presence of Jesus.”<sup>90</sup> Striking similarities appear between Christ and the Paraclete, for both come from the Father (15:26; 16:27-28), sent by him as gift (3:16-17; 14:16), teaching the disciples (6:59; 7:14,28; 8:20; 14:26) whilst remaining unrecognised by the world (14:17; 16:3).<sup>91</sup> This Spirit of truth glorifies Jesus, communicating his full truth, currently unbearable (16:12-14), testifying on his behalf (15:26), whilst lacking any independent revelation (16:13). The Spirit moreover convicts the world of its unbelieving notions of sin, righteousness and judgement (16:8-11) in the light of Christ’s exaltation through crucifixion which inverts erroneous preconceptions.<sup>92</sup> Yet, as Williams avers, the Johannine Paraclete does not *simply* continue Jesus’s mediatorial mission through merely acting *upon* believers (as in Luke) but is “active in and with the disciples, moving them towards the Father and Son”, being truth itself (1 Jn. 5:7), enabling confession of Jesus’s enfleshed advent (4:2; 5:6-9) and manifesting his own distinct personhood.<sup>93</sup>

Underdeveloped consideration of the ‘third term’ as *intrinsic* to God’s life – rather than some ‘added’ sanctifying agent – has beset Christian history, as intimated occasionally in the Apologists, Tertullian and Origen, and evidenced in theologies contrasting the Spirit’s intimate immanence with the Father’s monarchic remoteness.<sup>94</sup> Williams observes such reductionist tendencies, both in Karl

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>90</sup> Thistleton, 141, quoting Dunn.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, again quoting Dunn.

<sup>92</sup> Barrett, 406-7.

<sup>93</sup> Williams, ‘Word and Spirit’, 119.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-115.

Barth's insistence that the Spirit "is simply the Teacher of the Word"<sup>95</sup>, enabling humanity to hear the otherwise inaudible divine revelation, and, oppositely, in Geoffrey Lampe's contention that the Spirit is God's *sole* means of self-communication, thus denying the Word's hypostatic distinctiveness and imagining "Logos ... swallowed up in Pneuma."<sup>96</sup>

Embryonic trinitarianism can be discerned within Paul, however. Wesley Hill, in particular, argues convincingly that the Spirit communicates the presence and action of the risen Lord, rendering his identity through irreducibly *theological* and *christological* terms: the Spirit-empowered proclamation of Jesus's lordship (1 Cor. 12:3) exceeds merely verbal assent, representing confession of Christ's pre-existent divine equality, expressed through kenotic servanthood, through which he is named as *kyrios* (Phil. 2:5-11).<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Hill contends that believers' filiation (Gal. 4:4-7) depends upon "God, Jesus, and the Spirit [being] *all* implicated in a *prior* determination"<sup>98</sup> that reveals an entirely *reciprocal*, fully *trinitarian* "web of inter-determinative relations."<sup>99</sup>

Conversely, Hill holds that God's self-identification with Jesus occurs through the Spirit's agency, thus depicting both God and Jesus in the light of the Spirit's revelation and affirming the mutuality of constitutive relations. Specifically, he argues that Romans 1:4 imagines Christ declared as Son-of-God-in-power through

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<sup>95</sup> *Church Dogmatics* I.1, quoted *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 116. See also Sarah Coakley, 'Why Three? Some further reflections on the origins of the doctrine of the Trinity' in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 29-56 and John Milbank, 'The Second Difference: For a trinitarianism without reserve', *Modern theology* 2:3(1986), 213-234.

<sup>97</sup> Wesley Allen Hill, *Paul and the Triune Identity: Rereading Paul's God-, Christ-, and Spirit-Language in Conversation with Trinitarian Theologies of Persons and Relations*, Durham theses, Durham University (2012): <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3921/>, 146-149; accessed 23 June 2014.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 150; italics added.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 151. Considering the problematic text which declares "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17), he rejects readings which simply identify the exalted *kyrios* with the Spirit but argues, with Kavin Rowe, for *trinitarian* perspective: "the full unity of God as expressed through his name *kyrios* is that of Father, Son, and Spirit." (Hill, 158, quoting Rowe).

the Spirit's instrumental agency in resurrection (cf. 1 Pet. 3:18)<sup>100</sup>, a reading mirrored in Romans 8:11 which Hill interprets, *contra* Fee, as meaning that the Spirit who will vivify believers' mortal bodies also raised *Jesus* himself.<sup>101</sup> The Spirit thus facilitates *all* resurrection, so that our being raised participates in Jesus' prior rising through the same eternal Spirit who, outpoured in adoptive power, animates the acclamation "Abba! Father!" which, furthermore, demands conformation to Christ in suffering as well as glory (Rom. 8:16-18). Humanity's communion in the Spirit means participation in the eternal trinitarian communion, not through arcane absorption but through the delight and distress of faith-filled, embodied life, patterned according to the kenotic, exalted Christ.

Christ's pneumatic resurrection is, moreover, a cosmic act, inaugurating a new era that fulfils Rabbinic expectation and orientates believers to their *telos* through the Spirit, bestowed as deposit, down-payment or pledge (*arrabōn*; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5), culminating in sonship fully achieved and creation's glory realised beyond present labour pains (Rom. 8:18-25).<sup>102</sup> As "the anticipation of the end in the present"<sup>103</sup>, the Spirit places desirous *longing* for God unfathomably within whilst nurturing genuine first-fruits (8:23). Animating deep prayer "with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:27), the Spirit "veritably magnetises the soul towards God", propelling the pray-er towards divine union, a "tug ... felt *analogously* also in every erotic propulsion towards union, even at the human level."<sup>104</sup> Moreover, envisioning being "pre-destined to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son" in calling, justification and glorification (8:28-30), Paul affirms the Spirit's logical and existential *priority*, truly enfolding creation into the divine life and rendering contemplation no self-absorbed personal acquisitiveness but representative

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-67.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-171. See, further, Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *After the Spirit: a Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (London: SCM, 2006), II.1.i.

<sup>102</sup> Thistleton, 72-3.

<sup>103</sup> Cullmann's phrase, quoted by Thistleton, 75.

<sup>104</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: an Essay 'On the Trinity'*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13-14.



reception, bearing fruit in a world renewed.<sup>105</sup> The pray-er thus senses an inexpressibly *triune* action (Rom. 8:9-11):

The ‘Father’ is both ‘source’ and ultimate object of divine desire; the ‘Spirit’ is that (irreducibly distinct) enabler and incorporator of that desire in creation – that which *makes* the creation divine; the ‘Son’ *is* that divine and perfected creation.<sup>106</sup>

Revelation, despite its complex use of *pneuma*<sup>107</sup>, witnesses to the Holy Spirit’s triumphant, conclusive work. The vision of “the river of the water of life” in the heavenly city evokes the gospel’s pneumatic water symbolism, here related to the fruitful tree of life and its healing leaves (21:1-2). Most significantly, however, is the Spirit and the bride’s shared invitation to the waters (21:17), as the Spirit “reproduces his own longing for the Return of Christ (cf. 22:20) in the cry of the Church.”<sup>108</sup> Divine and human longing find common expression in the Spirit who, as agent of unity, love and communion, resists easy accommodation to the world’s ambiguities, for as “God yearns jealously for the Spirit he has made to dwell in us” (James 4:5), so humanity’s transformation-for-communion participates in God’s eternal desire for God.

### ***Augustine’s pneumatology: Gift, Love and Communion***

Such desire for divine communion permeates Augustine’s pneumatology. Acclaiming the biblical witness to the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying discharge,<sup>109</sup> he exploits dynamic language of outpouring, abiding, love and gift as evocative

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-114.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 114. See chapter 7 for a broader consideration of desire.

<sup>107</sup> See Thistleton, 156-158.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 159. Cf. the Spirit’s work in aligning desire for Christ’s first advent in Mary (Lk. 1:35-38), Elizabeth (1:39-45), Zechariah (1:67-79) and Simeon (2:25-32).

<sup>109</sup> Augustine emphasises his wish to establish his pneumatology “according to the holy scriptures” (*Trin.*, 15.5.27; cf. 15.5.39).

“conceptual scaffolding” for his pneumatology.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, without scripture’s revelation, one could not comprehend the Spirit’s unique character, for both Father and Son, being God, are ‘holy’ and, following John 4:24, ‘spirit’.<sup>111</sup> Augustine confirms that the gift is rooted in the trinitarian persons’ eternal, loving giving-and-receiving-of-self, regarding both “gift” (*donum*) and “love” (*caritas*) as proper names of the Spirit.<sup>112</sup> As the ‘inner’ love-gift *shared* by Father and Son eternally, yet imparted to believers (Rom. 5:5), the Spirit reveals divine unity not “in a universal, ontic *consubstantialitas* but as *communio*”, thus profoundly *personal*.<sup>113</sup> It is in this unity that Father and Son give themselves reciprocally, naming the Spirit as common to both, thereby bestowing upon believers genuine participation in their divine communion.<sup>114</sup> Indeed to be God means being “desirous of and active in *giving* the divine life” for “there is no ‘divinity’ not constituted by the act of *caritas*, and thus no divinity that can adequately be conceived apart from the trinity of persons.”<sup>115</sup> So whilst the divine persons share an indivisible essence, that essence is not ‘additional’ to the Three.<sup>116</sup> Augustine

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<sup>110</sup> See Robert Louis Wilken, ‘*Spiritus sanctus secundum scripturas sanctas*: exegetical considerations of Augustine on the Holy Spirit’, *Augustinian Studies*, 31.1(2000), 1-18; here, 16.

<sup>111</sup> Augustine, *Trin.* 5.3.12; 15.5.37.

<sup>112</sup> As Matthew Levering, in dialogue with Balthasar, observes, Augustine’s exegetical steps to establish the Spirit as ‘love’ and ‘gift’ are intricate and privilege certain texts (such as Rom. 5; 1 Jn. 4 and Jn. 4 and 7; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4) over alternative pneumatological metaphors, such as John’s identification with truth. See Levering, ‘The Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian Communion: ‘Love’ and ‘Gift?’’, *IJST*, 16.2(2004), 126- 142. Whilst such deft weaving of seemingly disparate texts might contravene modern historical-critical methods, Levering (141) concludes that Augustine is entirely justified in his appellations as they serve God’s overriding revelatory purpose to draw humanity to know and love him increasingly.

<sup>113</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, ‘The Holy Spirit as *Communio*: Concerning the Relationship of Pneumatology and Spirituality in Augustine’, *Communio*, 25(1998), 326. Yet the Spirit’s unifying role is no sense ‘subsequent’ to the Son’s generation but established from eternity. See Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 253.

<sup>114</sup> Ayres, 251.

<sup>115</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*’ in *Collectanea Augustiniana* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 317-332; here, 325.

<sup>116</sup> Williams (317f.) protests against theologians who, somewhat unthinkingly, characterise Augustine (and, by implication, the resultant western trinitarian tradition) as equating the divine ontological principle with abstract essence rather than the Father’s concrete personhood.

himself denies any ‘fourth person: “divinity simply *is* the divinity of Father, Son and Spirit”<sup>117</sup> who “can only *exist* simultaneously, and that eternally.”<sup>118</sup>

Whereas the Son is born (*natus*) and creation made (*factus*), the Spirit is *given* (*datus*; Jn. 4:10; Acts 8:20), an inward divine donation pre-existing all economic outpouring: he is “*donum* before *datum*”<sup>119</sup>, “a gift even before there was anyone to give him to.”<sup>120</sup> As Jesus’s own Spirit (Rom. 8:9) whom he sends from the Father (Jn. 15:26), the Spirit represents the Father and Son’s mutual gift, “a kind of inexpressible communion or fellowship.”<sup>121</sup> Moreover, whilst the Spirit’s being *given* in no way suggests an intermediate position between eternal, filial begottenness and creaturely coming-to-be that would compromise his divinity, his ‘immanent’ being-as-gift nevertheless facilitates an ‘economic’ opening onto the world, bestowed by both Father (Jn. 15:26) and Son (20:22).<sup>122</sup> Christ’s promise to the Samaritan woman of “living water” (Jn. 4:10) and the equation of that ceaseless superabundance with the Spirit outpoured following his glorification (7:37-9), further strengthens Augustine’s identification of “the gift of God” (4:10) with the Spirit.<sup>123</sup>

In Ratzinger’s assessment, Augustine thereby regards Christ crucified, creation’s life-giving origin, as “the well of the Spirit” who exposes human yearning as “an

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<sup>117</sup> Lewis Ayres, quoted by Kathryn L. Reinhard, ‘Somebody to Love? The *Proprium* of the Holy Spirit in Augustine’s Trinity’, *Augustinian Studies*, 41:2(2010): 351-373, here, 354.

<sup>118</sup> Augustine, Sermon 71.33, quoted by Reinhard, 354.

<sup>119</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Trinitate, De’, in Allan D. Fitzgerald (general editor), *Augustine through the ages: an encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 849.

<sup>120</sup> *Trin.*, 5.16. Perceiving the Spirit as ‘gift’ was not Augustine’s innovation, however. Hilary, for example, discerned language of giving (e.g. Gal. 4:6) and receiving/possession/indwelling (Rom. 8:9, 8:11; 1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 4:30) to describe the Spirit as “the gift to the faithful”, replete with notions of reciprocity. See Wilken, 7.

<sup>121</sup> *Trin.*, 5.3.12. Reinhard (363) notes that Augustine, contrary to certain readings, upholds a certain *monarchia* inasmuch as the Father is the ultimate source of all that is – including the eternally begotten Son: “the Father gives to the Son his own life”, an *excessive* self-gift “which includes the outpouring of the Spirit; eternally and simultaneously, therefore, the Spirit is given by the Father and Son together.” (Williams, ‘Trinitate, De’, 850).

<sup>122</sup> *Trin.*, 4.5.19

<sup>123</sup> *Trin.*, 15.5.33.

infinite, radical thirst” unquenchable elsewhere<sup>124</sup> (cf. Pss. 42; 63). Indeed, the risen Christ resists being touched (Jn. 20:17) so that the mind may aspire to the “ultimate vision” of the Word’s equality with the Father<sup>125</sup> and mature the Spirit’s gifts of faith and love, thereby dilating believers’ hearts in receptivity.<sup>126</sup> Hence, the gift of the Spirit is appropriately regarded as *arrabon* (“a first instalment” (2 Cor. 1:22) or “guarantee” (5:5)), bestowing partially that which is desired in fullness: “we already have the earnest; but we thirst for the fountain from which it flows.”<sup>127</sup>

Moreover, for Augustine the Spirit is *love* itself, *ab intra* and *ab extra*. Scripture teaches both that “if we love one another, God abides in us” (1 Jn. 4:12) and that “we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit” (4:13), thereby revealing the Spirit *as* love.<sup>128</sup> As “God is love” (4:16b), the Spirit-love exists not merely ‘externally’ but forever ‘in’ God, in “communion, consubstantial and coeternal”<sup>129</sup> best expressed as charity “which is called both God and from God ... the charity by which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, inexpressibly [showing] forth the communion of them both.”<sup>130</sup> Indeed, setting God’s self-revelation *as* love (1 Jn. 4:16) alongside the insight that “love is *from* God” (4:7) allows Augustine to imagine love (in Ratzinger’s reading) as “God from God ... the power to emerge and become near ... the power of new birth, of a new whither for men and women.”<sup>131</sup>

The Holy Spirit remains eternally ‘*in*’ God and yet is temporally outpoured (Rom. 5:5) upon those who desirously anticipate his abundance, this economic self-

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<sup>124</sup> Ratzinger, 330.

<sup>125</sup> *Trin.*, 1.3.18.

<sup>126</sup> See Eugene TeSelle, ‘Holy Spirit’ in Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the ages*, 434-7; here, 435.

<sup>127</sup> Sermon 378.1, quoted by TeSelle, 435.

<sup>128</sup> *Trin.*, 15.5.31; cf. Jn. 4:24 read alongside 1 Jn. 4:16. See Levering 129-133 for a more detailed account of Augustine’s exegesis.

<sup>129</sup> *Trin.*, 6.1.7

<sup>130</sup> *Trin.*, 15.5.37.

<sup>131</sup> Ratzinger, 329.

outpouring truly disclosing the immanent, mutual self-giving of Father and Son sustaining ceaseless, perfect unity.<sup>132</sup> Thus, whereas the unique *proprium* (personhood) of the Father is generation and the Son's filiation, the Spirit is *communion* itself.<sup>133</sup> Love is thus no mere sentiment nor the true gift some ultimately groundless, ephemeral gesture but the divine, substantial person of the Spirit, "Father-loving-Son-cleaving-in-love-to-Father."<sup>134</sup> As divine relations cannot be accidents, the "exchange of love within God's self must be eternally part of what it means to *be* God ... a substantial and abiding reality intrinsic to God's being."<sup>135</sup> As the unity, holiness or mutual love of Father and Son, the Spirit is distinct from both for

he is that by which the two are joined to the other, by which begotten is loved by the one who begets him and in turn loves the begetter.... The Holy Spirit is something common to Father and Son, whatever it is, or is their very commonness or communion, consubstantial and coeternal. Call this friendship, if it helps, but a better word is charity. And this too is substance because God is substance, and *God is charity* (1 Jn. 4:8,16).<sup>136</sup>

Lewis Ayres observes that in regarding the Son as "God from God" Augustine visualises two realities with distinct modes of existence but both fully divine; hence, if the Spirit is indeed the love of Father and Son and 'God is love' (1 Jn. 4:16), then it is necessarily *substantial*.<sup>137</sup> Love is, the gift is, because the Spirit is, eternally.

This "supreme charity conjoining Father and Son to each other and subjoining us to the them"<sup>138</sup> thus 'operates' both eternally and temporally, 'projecting' divine, loving communion onto humanity as the divine love-gift abides in believers,

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<sup>132</sup> *Trin.*, 15.5.37.

<sup>133</sup> This is Reinhard's central thesis.

<sup>134</sup> Reinhard, 367.

<sup>135</sup> Reinhard, 369.

<sup>136</sup> *Trin.*, 6.1.7.

<sup>137</sup> Ayers, 253.

<sup>138</sup> *Trin.*, 7.2.6

enabling them to love both God and each other (1 Jn. 4:19).<sup>139</sup> The pneumatological gift is thus profoundly fruitful, rooting divine superabundance outpoured in creation, salvation and sanctification within the divine life.<sup>140</sup> The Spirit, divine love outpoured (Rom. 5:5), is the ever-prior gift who, alone, can awaken godly love in creatures:<sup>141</sup> it is he – the gift himself – who enables our *return-gift*, thus inscribing all authentic gift-giving forever ‘in’ God, through gracious participation, rather than in meritorious human (self-)action. He thereby constitutes the Church through those gratuitously *gifted*, integrated into Christ’s body, enjoying communion’s profoundest unity.<sup>142</sup>

Augustine reads the quotation of Psalm 67(68):18 in Ephesians 4:8 intriguingly: whilst Paul interprets this as implying the ascending Christ *giving* gifts to his people, the Vulgate envisages the victor *receiving*, intimating thereby a profound christo-ecclesiological mystery of giving-and-receiving, with Christ as “head and body, giving from the side of God and receiving from the side of humanity”, his (self-receiving, ultimately self-*giving*) Church constituting “continuation of [his] humanity.”<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, as the gifts’ final purpose is to construct the body of Christ in unity and maturity (Eph. 4:11-13), they represent, in diverse distribution, the *single* outpoured Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:2) who *is* perfect, mutual, trinitarian love-gift.<sup>144</sup> “the gift of the Holy Spirit is nothing but the Holy Spirit.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Trin.*, 15.5.31

<sup>140</sup> See, further, López, *GUB*, 233-8.

<sup>141</sup> *Trin.*, 15.5.31

<sup>142</sup> Schisms therefore represent pneumatological *heresies* as the oneness of abiding in God and in charity is sundered (Ratzinger 323-3).

<sup>143</sup> *Trin.* 15.5.34; quotations Ratzinger 335.

<sup>144</sup> *Trin.* 15.5.34

<sup>145</sup> *Trin.* 15.5.36.

## ***Being in the Spirit: Yves Congar's pneumatological anthropology and ecclesiology***

Inhabiting this Augustinian inheritance, Congar realises that if being itself is *caritas* there are profound ontological consequences for creation and, particularly, for divinely-imaging human creatures.<sup>146</sup> More fundamentally, it means that the divine Persons are forever “in a being-toward (*être-à*) one another, in mutual exchange and reciprocity”<sup>147</sup>, a unity-in-difference echoing Aquinas’s notion of opposition of relation. The Holy Spirit applies Christ’s objective, historical redemption to us subjectively and interiorly, realising and personalising life ‘in Christ’, awakening *doxology* that foresees the eschatological communion where all will be praise.<sup>148</sup> The Spirit represents powerful divine *ekstasis*, completing and perfecting all things as God’s loving, ‘inward’ gift ‘externalised’.<sup>149</sup> So, with Augustinian insight, Congar regards the Spirit as the gift of Father and Son, proceeding from both as their common Spirit, “their Love and their substantial Communion.”<sup>150</sup> Moreover, as love desires communion beyond itself, so the Spirit, like water, cascades downwards, implanting divine riches in wretchedness as God gives his very self.<sup>151</sup>

Congar’s Christology is thoroughly pneumatic, emphasising how the Spirit constitutes Jesus as the Messiah through his life, death and resurrection and “causes the humanity hypostatically united to the eternal Son to pass from the *forma servi* to the *forma Dei*.”<sup>152</sup> He observes how God’s presence, discerned sporadically by patriarchs and prophets seeks to dwell abidingly within human

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<sup>146</sup> See Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, *Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 64.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, tr. David Smith (London: Chapman, 1986), 5.

<sup>149</sup> Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 volumes, trans. David Smith (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 3:149.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:146.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:149-150.

<sup>152</sup> Congar, ‘Pneumatologie dogmatique’, cited by Groppe, 73.

hearts.<sup>153</sup> The temple, that potent symbol of divine presence, is represented in scripture with intensifying personalised interiority, from Jerusalem's localised sanctuary to the embodied person of Jesus to the individual Spirit-endowed, filiated believer, indwelt by God.<sup>154</sup> As James Hanvey observes, this historical progression has Christ as its indisputable core, whilst the Spirit effects ever-increasing inwardness.<sup>155</sup> Nevertheless, just as sacrifice's gradual 'spiritualization' did not usurp 'exterior' offering so the physical temple is not *superseded* in Christ, or the Spirit-filled believer, but perfected in loving communion, fulfilling participation in the trinitarian life.<sup>156</sup> Hence, Christ does not overthrow the old temple but "makes explicit the reality and promise of which it is a symbol: a new temple – one that is eternal and heavenly – not made by human hands."<sup>157</sup> Christ is therefore both altar and high priest, the meeting-place of God and humanity (Hebrews)<sup>158</sup>, the true tabernacle and dwelling-place of divine glory (John)<sup>159</sup> and, sacrifice completed, his Easter body becomes the sanctuary of human-divine encounter, as crucified self-giving and resurrective self-reception reveal corporeally God's plenitudinous kenotic-plerotic life.<sup>160</sup>

Christ's pneumatologically transparent humanity thus affords Adam's race a new, gift-receptive abode, a new *habitus* of grace rooted in the economy of hypostatic union whereby believing subjects become themselves temples of the Spirit.<sup>161</sup> This fulfils the covenant by realizing humanity's unrestricted communion with God through the golden thread of God's presence which becomes "ever more

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<sup>153</sup> Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple or the Manner of God's Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse*, trans. Reginald Trevett (London: Burns and Oates, 1962), quotation, 236.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 237.

<sup>155</sup> James Hanvey, 'In the Presence of Love: the Pneumatological Realization of the Economy: Yves Congar's *Le Mystère du Temple*', *IJST* 7.4(2005), 388-9.

<sup>156</sup> Hanvey, 389.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>158</sup> Congar, *Mystery*, 128.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 142.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* 53; cf. Hanvey, 392.



generous, ever deeper.”<sup>162</sup> God’s purpose to establish communion is eternal, for the Word’s eternal procession forever ‘imagines’ creation and redemption, as divine being – love itself – means positive ‘pro-existent’ desire: being *is* being-for-the-other, being-towards-the-other, being-on-behalf-of-the-other.<sup>163</sup>

Congar’s anthropology and ecclesiology are thoroughly pneumatological, resisting neoscholastic theological tendencies to examine the Spirit separately from humanity and the Church. He followed Augustine in regarding the *imago Dei* as imprinted interiorly on the soul whilst affirming its ‘outward’ manifestation in human communion, nevertheless recognising that although insight into divine communion enlightens human society, the reverse process risks illegitimate theological ‘anthropomorphisation’.<sup>164</sup> Whilst affirming Aquinas’s observation that the trinitarian image is located in the Word’s procession in the intellect and Love’s procession in the will, he emphasises that this is no individualistic possession, but a movement *beyond* self towards knowledge and love of *others*, an *ek-stasis* which constitutes oneself precisely “in communion ... in relations of exchange with others.”<sup>165</sup> Human creatures are thus free to the extent they consent to become divinely (re)formed for communion and mutuality with God himself, divinely ruled by the Spirit’s filiating gift (Gal. 4:6) and thus drawn towards goodness itself.<sup>166</sup> As Gregory of Nyssa regarded humanity’s divinely-imaging creation to involve not a single creature but a universal nature, so the individual instantiates that Godlikeness through a unique vocation<sup>167</sup>, participating in humanity’s microcosmic calling to articulate creation’s aspiration for communion in the Spirit.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Congar, *Mystery*, ix.

<sup>163</sup> Congar, ‘*Dum Visibiliter Deum Cognoscimus*’, quoted by Groppe, 53.

<sup>164</sup> See Groppe, 87.

<sup>165</sup> Congar, ‘La Tri-unité de Dieu’, quoted by Groppe, 88.

<sup>166</sup> Congar, ‘Holy Spirit and Spirit of Freedom’, in *Laity, church and world: three addresses*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1960), 14.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>168</sup> Congar, *Word and Spirit*, chapter 8.

Conversely, sin means hindering God's cosmic, unifying gift-bestowing action, rupturing communion and promoting sectarianism.<sup>169</sup> Christ's cross reveals simultaneously humanity's most forceful rejection and God's tenderest, fullest embrace, surpassing mere reconciliation in order to perfect communion.<sup>170</sup> The Spirit convicts the world of sin (Jn. 16:8) and brings liberation therefrom (Jn. 20:21-23; Acts 2:38), offering penetrating awareness of sin's wretched untruth against God's glorious, life-imparting truth.<sup>171</sup> Repentant sinners receive the Spirit dwelling (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 3:7) and abiding (Jn. 14:16-17) within, raised by grace to unprecedented ontological heights by participating more intensely in God's gifted inner life.<sup>172</sup>

Human beings are thus led to know and love God perfectly, drawn, as Aquinas taught, "above the condition of ... nature to a participation in the Divine good", God himself.<sup>173</sup> Congar thus joins de Lubac, Rahner and others in denying that Aquinas implies a chasm between nature and supernature, whilst affirming humanity's natural desire for God and grace as that necessary divine gift which makes creatures responsively alert to a privileged, teleological vocation in God alone.<sup>174</sup> Recognizing that God alone can sanctify, Congar warns that western preoccupation with created grace can obscure the role of the Spirit – uncreated grace itself – in transformative *union*.<sup>175</sup> Unlike de Lubac, Congar regards the Spirit as *grace itself*, offering deified, supranatural, eschatological participation in God's life, consonant with humanity's divine image.<sup>176</sup> Through scripture, sacraments and ascesis, creatures learn to *cooperate* with grace, submitting worldly longings to the Spirit, thereby made fit for ever intenser communion,

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<sup>169</sup> Congar, *The Wide World, My Parish: Salvation and its Problems*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), 42.

<sup>170</sup> Groppe, 93.

<sup>171</sup> Congar, *I Believe*, 2:122-124.

<sup>172</sup> Groppe, 94.

<sup>173</sup> *ST*, IaIIae.110.1.*responsio*.

<sup>174</sup> Groppe, 93-4.

<sup>175</sup> Congar, *I Believe* 2:67-69; cf. 2:84.

<sup>176</sup> Groppe, 113.

namely deification: truly free in the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), we die with Christ (Gal. 2:20) and rise with him (Col. 3:1), predestined for adoption (Rom. 8:11-17,29; Eph. 1:3-14), becoming “sons in the Son”<sup>177</sup>, possessed by God’s sovereign power.<sup>178</sup>

Ardently longing for the kingdom, believers endure suffering<sup>179</sup> as the Spirit, as pledge, fills the already-not-yet tension with “true *spiritual* joy (Rom. 11:17; Gal. 5:22).”<sup>180</sup> Yet this desire is no mere ‘extrinsic’ longing applied by the Spirit but stems from God’s ‘intrinsic’ desire for God.<sup>181</sup> Quoting the theologian-psychologist Jean-Claude Sagne, Congar maintains that prayer leads us to recognise the limit of human longing and thus submit wholeheartedly to God’s innate desire for himself and creation.<sup>182</sup> Hence, the pray-er’s indwelt heart is “a place where God encounters himself” in his eternal ineffable relations so that the Father’s eternal love for the Son “may be in them (Jn. 17:26).”<sup>183</sup>

Congar’s anthropology does not terminate, however, in some privatised spiritual soliloquy, but generates profound ecclesiology for the Spirit’s ongoing inspiration is given principally to the faith community (Rom. 5:5; 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22).<sup>184</sup> As the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed maintains, it is belief in the Spirit that undergirds the Church’s unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity<sup>185</sup> rather than some (seemingly) self-governing hierarchy or overly juridical magisterium: the Spirit’s manifold gifts form the Church.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, Christ and the Holy Spirit co-institute the Church, for as the Word incarnate establishes sacramental, apostolic order, so the Spirit develops organic ecclesial

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<sup>177</sup> *I Believe*, 2:129.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:84.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:107

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:122.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. My comment on James 4:5 above.

<sup>182</sup> Congar, *I Believe*, 2:116

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:117

<sup>184</sup> Groppe, 100.

<sup>185</sup> *I believe*, 2:6-7

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:156.

identity, a church “always in the process of being built ... by God.”<sup>187</sup> As Christ’s historic salvific actions are received potently through sacraments, human creatures and inanimate material are enveloped in God’s deifying action through “the grace of the one who is uncreated Grace ... the absolute Gift, the Breath of the Father and the Word.”<sup>188</sup> The descending Spirit renders the eucharistic narrative an enlivening memorial and reception of Holy Communion fruitful rather than mechanistic.

The Spirit establishes and safeguards ecclesial unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. For Congar, “the communion (*koinōnia*) of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:13) means participation *in* the Spirit himself who guarantees personal *union* with God and ensures the communion of the Church through common baptism and diverse gifts (1 Cor. 12): a sublime, yet concrete, “unity without uniformity.”<sup>189</sup> Uniquely holy, God alone can sanctify creatures, through a journey initiated in baptism (2 Cor. 3:18). The Church then signifies his presence and the reality of the kingdom where God will be “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).<sup>190</sup> God’s utter uniqueness and generous universality guarantees catholicity, enabling vertical and horizontal connective eschatological communion (Col. 1:19-20) through the Spirit-pledge.<sup>191</sup> Apostolicity stems from God’s steadfast fidelity, exemplified in Christ and continually enabled by the Spirit, the Church’s “transcendent principle of faithfulness”<sup>192</sup> who alone certifies and animates evolving ecclesial structures.<sup>193</sup>

Nevertheless, beyond time, the Spirit forms the eschatological temple, a perpetual ‘Easter’ where ecclesial essence and mission cohere in perfect doxology. Here, in

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<sup>187</sup> Congar, *Pneumatology Today*, quoted by Groppe, 103.

<sup>188</sup> *I believe*, 3:271.

<sup>189</sup> Congar, *L’Esprit de L’homme*, cited by Groppe, 208.

<sup>190</sup> Congar, *I Believe*, 2:58.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:18.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:43

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:44-47.

the new creation, there is no temple but God alone who indwells his creatures entirely, fulfilling creation, redemption and sanctification.<sup>194</sup> Hence, truly aligned desire is satisfied in joyful communion, “a mutual exchange ... a reciprocal presence”<sup>195</sup> completing adoption through rooting us in Father and Son (Jn. 17:10) whose ‘inner’ desire overtakes ours.<sup>196</sup> This non-pantheistic overcoming of the human-divine separation happens through the Spirit who is both gift and giver.<sup>197</sup> Congar’s pneumatology furnishes a profound ontology because the Spirit is forever *communio*, relational and dynamic, being both ‘internal’ unitive, trinitarian love and the ‘external’ means of its outpouring. Following Hilary and Augustine, Congar observes how the Holy Spirit, overwhelms creatures with generosity, giving nothing less than his very self and bringing humanity to its appointed fullness of being, to enjoy God – *frui Deo* – through the “dilection... pleasure .... felicity [and] happiness” of God’s inner life.<sup>198</sup>

Congar even speaks of the Spirit’s ecstatic *kenosis* which sanctifies believers and constitutes the Church as humanity’s “real homeland” (cf. Ps. 87), longing to “gather the whole human race into one people of God, one Body of Christ and one Temple of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>199</sup> This eschatological vision is expressed in the doxology of eucharistic prayers which render “all glory and honour” to the Father, “through”, “with” and “in” Christ “in the unity of the Holy Spirit” who, consummating believers’ filiation, voices creation’s inexpressible praise, thus filling all things and gathering them into their original and final unity in Christ (Col. 1:15-20).<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Congar, *Mystery*, 233, inspired by Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 22.30.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 230-1.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>198</sup> Congar, *I Believe* 3:147.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:223.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:224.

## Conclusion

What does this pneumatological perspective add to the thesis's theological account of the gift? The saving work of Christ, God's gift (Jn. 3:16; Gal. 2:20 etc.), accomplished through his expansive descent-ascent, is objectively 'complete' at the ascension, so why not settle for an essentially binitarian gift alongside those theologians who regard the Spirit as essentially superfluous?<sup>201</sup>

First, it is vital to reiterate the decidedly pneumatological shape of Christ's entire incarnate life, from conception to ascension, with the Spirit's presence and action particularly highlighted in the 'troughs' of baptism and descent and the 'peaks' of transfiguration, resurrection and ascension. Christ's entire displaced self-giving interchange is 'enfolded' in the Spirit: pneumatology is integral to christology.

Moreover, this marvellous interchange is not merely a 'remote' intratrinitarian event but undertaken with salvific intent. Humanity is no passive onlooker but intently engaged: we are to be enfolded into Christ's efficacious drama by the Spirit, even as that same Spirit enfolded Christ, so that we may be truly conformed to him (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21) as the 'first-fruits' of creation's return to its divine source. Only "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us" (Rom. 8:11), will the resurrecting Father vivify our mortality and bring us to the *telos* of the new creation, that perfect communion, intimated in the tomb's cherubim-flanked gap and the pierced heavenly veil crossed by Christ's wounded flesh.

Yet more than simply acting as salvation's outpoured, galvanizing force to gather all things finally into God – an essentially 'external' divine agent – Augustine and Congar show him to *be* the eternal 'internal' divine communion, that ceaseless

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<sup>201</sup> See Rogers, I.1, for evidence of such pneumatologically weak stances.

desire of God for God, which makes possible creatures' own longing for divine union. The Spirit confirms God's life as a mutual 'being-for', a transparent, blissful reciprocity imprinted in Adamic humanity's clouded 'memory' of Godlikeness and creation's inarticulated anticipation of recapitulative fullness (Eph. 1:10) achieved in and through its very matter. Pneumatology is vital therefore as it reveals the gift's ontological essence and humanity's trinitarian end.

The gift then is not simply *something* to be received, as if Christ's risen life or the Spirit's presence were confinable commodities. We do not receive a merely 'external' gift of Spirit-enabled filiation but discover ourselves inwardly *transformed*. We *become* 'sons in the Son', for Christ, "the fully realized human being" is, through the hypostatic union, "uniquely equipped to make [us] fully realized human beings."<sup>202</sup> The Spirit, as the gift's noetic basis, allows us to acknowledge our ontological giftedness and confess Christ as Son of God, discovering in him the ontological foundation of all gift-reception. Consequently, in him we understand being as gift rather than some inert 'given', a gift which 'lives' only in onward transmission and multiplication. Consciously receiving the gift of being, we *become* gift, learning and inhabiting Christ's patterns of self-reception and self-giving, participating thereby in the trinitarian rhythm of kenosis-plerosis. Hence, we can offer ourselves as "a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1), a 'counter-gift' presented in thankfulness for God's very gift of existence and Christ's gift of redemption. Our self-gift thus discloses embryonic reciprocity in the 'gift-object' of our continued embodied existence in thankful anticipation. The transformed human creature, finally realizing the divine likeness through the Spirit's sanctification, participates by grace in the pure trinitarian gift of communion.

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<sup>202</sup> López, *GUB*, 149.





## PART III

# Enfolded into the Gift

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In this thesis, I have outlined how God reveals and bestows the true, trinitarian gift, in Christ and the Spirit. But how is this gift received concretely? This process was implicit throughout Part II, for God's giving is never 'abstract' but forever has a recipient already in view. However, this final part examines the conscious reception of the gift, with a particular interest in its liturgical transmission and its completion in deification. Creation's return to God through humanity's particularly intense trinitarian end means that the gift is not simply the means of salvation but the very content of life in the new creation.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The Liturgy of the Gift

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### Introduction

Enfoldment into the gift entails a profound liturgical dimension: baptised once-and-for-all into Christ, believers receive him repeatedly under humble sacramental forms. They enter Christ and ingest him. But who is Christ? At this juncture, it will be helpful to review briefly the thesis's key christological claims in order to enrich the forthcoming discussions.

I have shown how Maximus and Cusa expand our understanding of what it means for creation to descend as gift from “the Father of lights” (James 1:17), “in”, “through” and “for” Christ (Col. 1:15-16), the eternal divine image “in [whom] all things hold together” (Col. 1:17) and whose hypostatic union represents the summit and purpose of reality. In him creation unfolds, only to be enfolded as it returns to God. Truly to ‘receive Christ’ is to be initiated into an ongoing, dynamic process whose terminus is God himself.

Moreover, in examining the ‘texture’ of Christ’s incarnate life, I have observed his constant, salvific displacement, through enfleshed descent into Mary’s receptive womb, Jordan’s disorder, Calvary’s excruciating offering and, finally, hellish estrangement, a downwardness matched by transfiguring ascent, triumphant rising and ultimate heavenly enthronement. To receive Christ means receiving this ‘displaced displacer’ in his ‘grit and glory’ – not as some passive, inert commodity but as active, supremely living Lord who commands worship and witness, whose Spirit-powered ‘momentum’ preserves his recipients in their own continuous movement until creation comes to rest in the Trinity’s motionless

motion, the gift's epitome. Furthermore, God's baptised, adopted children, aspiring to share Christ's 'mountaintop' splendour, may find themselves participating also in his ominous, *Aqedah*-like vocation, albeit in less costly modes. Like Christ, the Church is called to be a living sacrifice, priestly and self-offering (cf. Rom. 12:1; Phil. 2:17; 1 Pet. 2:5-9; Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6 etc.).

The eucharistic gifts received and consumed embody this sacrificality, for Christ's person coheres perfectly with his actions. So investigating his 'real presence' means not imagining how his crucified, risen and glorified body and blood could possibly be 'in' bread and wine as a localised, lifeless, controllable thing. As Christ's replete existence means an unstinting 'being-for' so the consecrated elements offered and received forever 'contain' this desire to 'cross over' for the sake of the other, to 'lose' oneself self-communicatively in order to 'gain' oneself, thereby participating mysteriously in God's trinitarian 'form'. To commodify eucharistic anamnesis, presence and sacrifice as 'external' to ecclesial ontology – making the Mass a propitiatory oblation which offers another, yet without self-offering, whilst regarding its consecrated gifts as almost 'magical' viaticum – is to parody Christ and woefully diminish humanity's need for radical, possibly uncomfortable, transformation.

Nevertheless, the liturgy directs worshippers to their *telos* in Christ. Catherine Pickstock eloquently portrays the strikingly non-linear shape of the medieval Roman Mass, replete with stammering beginnings and unresolved 'endings' that demonstrate the sheer impossibility of addressing God: "for liturgy is at once a gift *from* God and a sacrifice *to* God, a reciprocal exchange which shatters all ordinary positions of agency and reception."<sup>1</sup> As 'work of the people' liturgy represents perpetual human activity, but never accomplishment, for creatures' faltering language and gesture necessarily surrender to God's overwhelming self-

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 176-7.

giving, exemplified in the climactic miracle of transubstantiation.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, liturgy is no human achievement but “gives us a share in heaven’s mode of existence, in the world of God ... [allowing] light to fall from that divine world into ours.”<sup>3</sup> Liturgy itself thus mediates between donation and reception, “between [the] Christological pole which is ‘given’, objectifying and organic, and a pneumatological pole which is subjective, interpersonal and always leading us to complete the work of shaping ourselves in the image of Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

But how might this reshaping, this human enfoldment into divine life, occur? Having already shown how Christ and the Spirit reveal the objective trinitarian gift, in this final chapter I analyse subjective appropriation of that salvific gift. How does God’s unfolded gift enable humanity’s enfoldment therein? I will demonstrate how God’s action and humanity’s re-action intertwine transformatively as grace generates, envelopes and perfects rightly aligned desire and belief, conveying the believer immersed within the baptismal waters into Christ’s filial status and the Spirit’s sanctifying action, a transition not completed but initiated. Occupying the intermediate state marked by visible signs mediating invisible realities, the Church celebrates Christ’s own eucharistic self-signification, through memorial and enactment, offering and feast, finding itself swept into an expansive vision where material transformation serves humanity’s greater participation in the trinitarian life of perfect self-giving and self-reception. Lest the redemptive process appear abstract, I will illustrate the transformation enacted through showing how Christ’s mother – profoundly poor, unimaginably blessed – demonstrates human receptivity overwhelmed by divine abundance.

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<sup>2</sup> Pickstock, chapter 6.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 21. See further Eduardo J. Echeverria, ‘Eucharistic Personalism’ in James G. Leachman (ed.), *The Liturgical Subject: Subject, Subjectivity, and the Human Person in Contemporary Liturgical Discussion and Critique* (London: SCM, 2008), 74-113.

<sup>4</sup> John Milbank, ‘The Second Difference: For a trinitarianism without reserve’, *Modern theology* 2:3(1986), 228

In this task I will consider numerous theologians, ancient and modern. Foremost among these is Augustine: building on his pneumatology of communion explored in the last chapter, I consider his enduringly influential concern for the absolute priority of God's grace, his innovative theory of signs and his astounding eucharistic theology which stresses worshippers' sacramental incorporation into Christ's ecclesial body through the sacrifice enacted. I also examine Aquinas's distinctive development of this Augustinian tradition: his understanding of grace as a motive force which leads recipients to their appointed end; his conception of sacraments as ordained for human sanctification; and the abiding relevance of eucharistic transubstantiation which mediates non-idolatrously between Christ's presence and absence. Modern perspectives feature prominently, most notably Rowan Williams' evaluation of human sign-making and the enduring relevance of eucharistic sacrifice, alongside Hans Urs von Balthasar's account of how God's pneumatological and eucharistic self-gift provides the 'bridge' for humankind – and, by extension, creation itself – to return to its deifying source. The sacramental enterprise thus affirms the reciprocal, embodied gift by signalling a new, enriched mode of being, illustrated in Mary's graced availability and her enfoldment into the gift of communion, the eternal trinitarian 'liturgy' itself.

## **Being relocated: the nexus of grace, desire and belief**

How does this path towards deification begin? What is the relationship between the overwhelming priority of God's gift – grace – and humanity's 'counter-gifts' of purified desire and awakened belief? I argue that this harmonious nexus unveils a 'new' ontology, rooted in God's trinitarian existence, bringing creation to its appointed *telos* through humanity's reception of its divine end.

Kathryn Tanner shows how humanity's 'weak' divine participation, through constantly (often unconsciously) receiving being from Being-itself, contrasts with

the ‘strong’ reception of the divine image, which constitutes well-being.<sup>5</sup> Humanity, innately plastic, can therefore ‘expand’ through exercising “response-ability”<sup>6</sup> and becoming con-formed to Christ (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21), who satisfies eternally. This divine-human encounter is inevitably asymmetric as God’s grace engulfs but does not suffocate, bringing humanity to its full stature as rightly reoriented desire generates faith in God’s transparent, incarnate sign. Through unwavering assent, Mary exemplifies this harmonious ‘symphony’ of grace, desire and belief, the gateway to deification.

### ***The priority of the gift***

Consideration of Augustine’s theology of grace tends to focus on his pessimistic view of humanity’s Adamic plight and his emphasis on God’s crucial, entirely gratuitous, inward liberation of the will so as to delight in the Good, in contrast to Pelagius’s accent on ‘external’ grace facilitating law-abiding ethical performance. Seemingly overshadowed by emphasis on divine predestination, Augustinian grace appears sternly juridical. Such interpretation is, however, decidedly skewed, understating Augustine’s theology of the Spirit as communion and human salvation as deification.

In common with the Greek Fathers, Augustine understands grace as enabling participation in divine life, restoring God’s image and likeness in Christ, the Image in whom humanity is made and re-made.<sup>7</sup> However, whereas the Greeks regarded humanity as essentially free to accept or reject God, Augustine emphasised Adam’s communicable fallen nature as instigating a fundamental

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<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12; cf. Maximus the Confessor’s desire for participation in *eternal well-being*.

<sup>6</sup> Aaron Riches’ term in his “Deconstructing the Linearity of Grace: The Risk and Reflexive Paradox of Mary’s Immaculate *Fiat*”, *IJST* 10:2(2008), 185.

<sup>7</sup> See Patricia Wilson-Kastner, ‘Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo’, *Augustinian Studies* 7(1976), 135-152.

chasm that only God could bridge, thereby allowing forensic justification to eclipse deification and grace to become a depersonalised aid rather than relational gift.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, grace means not merely being freed *from* Adam, but being won *for* Christ and his unimaginable depths, a new freedom and righteousness “simply because it is a participation in God’s own life .... a new existence .... shrouded in the inscrutable Mystery of God’s being.”<sup>9</sup> Grace thus communicates God’s own *self*-donating availability, enabling humanity’s inconceivable liberty, through “[grasping] the very Mystery of God” and “[entering]... into the ‘new creation’.”<sup>10</sup> By grace, human beings thus enjoy intense communion with God and each other, for in dying and rising once-for-all Christ healed objectively sin’s disruptive, giftless chasm and through the Spirit enabled believers’ endless participation in divine communion.

Aquinas emphasised the attendant teleological perspective through Aristotle’s call to understand things according to their self-consistent *end*, which for humanity means union with God. Grace thus sets humanity’s distorted origin against its glorious completion through *supernatural* gratuity, elevating human nature ontologically to fulfil teleologically the good connatural with it.<sup>11</sup> Simon Oliver shows how Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s perception of motion as actualising some potentiality, an action ultimately dependent upon the first unmoved mover, who, in natural motion, perfects things’ inherent receptivity, allowing them to achieve their appointed end.<sup>12</sup> Unlike inanimate objects and unintelligent animals, humanity, through will and intellect, tends towards the universal Good, thereby

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 137ff.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Daley, S.J., ‘The Law, the Whole Christ, and the Spirit of Love: Grace as a Trinitarian Gift in Augustine’s Theology’, *Augustinian Studies*, 41:1(2010), 143.

<sup>10</sup> Daley, 144

<sup>11</sup> *ST*, IaIIae.109.2.*responsio*. The relationship between the natural and supernatural – brought to the fore in the twentieth century through *Nouvelle Théologie* – remains fiercely debated. See Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: a Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009), chapters 3 and 4 and, more fully, John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Simon Oliver, ‘The Sweet Delight of Virtue and grace in Aquinas’s Ethics’, *IJST* 7.1(2005), 52-71; here, 53-56.



discerning the Good mediated through particular, relative goods.<sup>13</sup> Yet this entails not some interminable deliberative sequence but formation of an enduring disposition, or *habit*, which transforms a creature's substance and, in the case of a good habit (*virtue*), intensifies humanity's Godward motion.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the beatific vision was forever inaccessible by natural human power and so even pristine humanity required grace, a transformation achieved not by some superimposed (violent) motion but through God infusing supernatural qualities to allow the rational creature to 'own' her own motion. Grace is thus a "special love, whereby [God] draws the rational creature above the condition of its nature to a participation of the Divine good."<sup>15</sup> It communicates God's goodness to humankind, thereby facilitating ecstatic, supernatural elevation fittingly conveyed through Christ, who joins human nature perfectly to the divine, not merely exemplifying virtues but imparting the grace of forgiveness achieved objectively in his passion and conveyed to subjects sacramentally.<sup>16</sup>

Inherently dynamic, grace transports recipients to their end, actualising participation in the Good, which is trinitarian 'motionless motion', the perfection of all motion and the meaning of gift.<sup>17</sup> Grace is therefore startlingly transformative, possessing vital, objective supernatural priority. Nevertheless, "[surpassing] every capability of created nature" through "partaking of the Divine Nature"<sup>18</sup> also requires subjective human consent and self-willed movement.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>15</sup> *ST*, IaIIae.110.1.*responsio*.

<sup>16</sup> Oliver, 66-9.

<sup>17</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> *ST*, IaIIae.112.1.*responsio*

## *Desire reordered*

This teleological passage involves an asymmetric human-divine ‘liturgy’ that fits creatures to receive their inconceivable, unearnable end through participation in the eternal trinitarian ‘liturgy’ of giving-and-receiving. Divinely re-ordered desire overcomes Adam’s visionless ‘existence’ amid creation’s relative, potentially idolatrous, goods where gift-rejection threatens. Purified, God’s people long for wisdom’s life-giving delights (Prov. 3:13-18; Sir. 51:13-30) and for ultimate communion (e.g. Pss. 42; 63; 84), a yearning well expressed by Bernard of Clairvaux, who understood “desire for God [as] a state of being ... [perceiving] oneself to be in motion beyond the known” towards spiritual marriage consummated through “total, face-to-face encounter with God in the resurrection of the body.”<sup>19</sup>

Humanity’s yearning is thus perfected in communion. Nevertheless, perilously disordered desire persists. Augustine pondered humanity’s perplexing enigma, torn between knowledge and love of God and idolatrous self-love. The human body exemplifies this ambivalence, for whilst subordinated to the soul and profoundly honoured through Christ’s incarnation, resurrection and ecclesial incorporation, it remains potentially dysfunctional. Grace allows self-examination that rekindles longing for God’s “eternal truth .... true love and beloved eternity”<sup>20</sup> and whilst Christ alone is the Father’s matchless image and likeness, human beings can *approach* that same status.<sup>21</sup> Although the imprinted *imago Dei* may become tragically neglected or deformed, sin cannot obliterate it, for humanity is ordained for relationship with God.<sup>22</sup> Creatures are thus torn between two contradictory loves: whilst *caritas* seeks lasting joy in ‘vertical’ divine union,

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 316-7.

<sup>20</sup> *Conf.*, 7.10.16; cf. *Trin.*, 9.3.18.

<sup>21</sup> *Trin.*, 7.6.12.

<sup>22</sup> *Trin.* 14.8.11. See also Stephen J. Duffy, ‘Anthropology’ in *Augustine through the ages: an encyclopedia*, general editor Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 24-31; here, 28.

proving its genuineness through ‘horizontal’ human love, *cupiditas* pursues egotistical fulfilment in transitory, illusory pleasures.<sup>23</sup> Treacherously divided between these conflictual loves, humanity is called towards the supreme Good whose trinitarian plenitude alone offers happiness.<sup>24</sup>

Liberated from illusions of self-subsistence, the mind participates in God’s self-imparting life willingly “turned ‘outwards’”, recognizing in that revelation the right ordering (*justitia*) that constitutes our own God-given life. So *caritas* bears an imprinted triadic fullness, allowing us to “recognise *in* ourselves and *beyond* ourselves ... the eternal Good ... turned towards us ... sharing itself with us”, a self-bestowal that reveals God’s life as intrinsically diffusive.<sup>25</sup> *Sapientia* is inasmuch as it eternally generates another in love and is itself loved,<sup>26</sup> that complete, inner divine life of loving interrelatedness, endlessly fruitful ‘beyond’.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, if the human mind recognises the knowing, loving divine imprint within itself, it is drawn ‘beyond’ through true Godward desire, rejecting lesser objects for graced fulfilment. Prayerful, Spirit-led entry into this ineffable realm endures agonising ‘birth-pangs’, yearning for creation’s liberation (Rom. 8) and enthralled by the Trinity<sup>28</sup> as the Spirit – himself love – “inflames .... the love of God ... and neighbour.”<sup>29</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite intensifies this, imagining human desire rooted in God’s own eternal *ek-stasis* and revealed in his salvific, economic ‘standing-‘beyond’-self” to embrace his alienated creatures.<sup>30</sup> True human desire thus participates in God’s ‘inner’ desire, his intrinsic gift ‘unfolded’ in Christ and the Spirit.

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<sup>23</sup> Duffy, 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*’ in *Collectanea Augustiniana: mélanges T.J. van Bavel* (Leuven: Leuven University Press), 323-4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: an Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 296-300.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *Trin.* 15.17.31, cited by Coakley (312).

<sup>30</sup> See Coakley, 314-5.

## ***Belief kindled***

John's gospel presents this vision of divine-human indwelling through belief in Christ, who grants "power to become children of God" (1:12). Christ thereby enacts (in Cusan terms) creation's 'enfolding', commencing with believers' self-reception as first-fruits (cf. James 1:18b) through filiation, which represents "the ultimacy of perfection", namely *theosis*.<sup>31</sup> Believers participate in Christ's filial identity through the Spirit, "sealed with his likeness" and approaching "the archetypal form of the image ... to a dignity above [their] nature."<sup>32</sup> So receiving Christ means receiving ourselves and being received by him into the inexhaustibly rich trinitarian life, as John's farewell discourses indicate. Hence as Christ refashioned human nature through becoming "a partaker of flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14)", human beings have "become partakers of him, and have him in [them]selves through the Spirit", thus becoming adopted as sons and "'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4)."<sup>33</sup> Salvation's wonderful interchange thus entails both objective divine gift and subjective human appropriation.<sup>34</sup>

Belief bestows transformed, filial identity, through him who is Son eternally. For John, this involves dynamic transit, expressed through repeated use of *pisteuon eis*, *eis* suggesting no dispassionate intellectual exercise but transfer *towards* or *into* Christ in trustful, adhesive self-giving.<sup>35</sup> Whilst Johannine belief may be accompanied by particular gifts, such as healing, it represents no seizing of object, status or identity. Rather, receiving means *to have been received already* (cf. 15:16), granted our deepest identity with Christ 'close to the Father's heart'

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<sup>31</sup> *De Filiatione Dei*, 51-52, trans. H. Lawrence Bond; accessed from <http://www.appstate.edu/~bondhl/defil.htm>, 18 September 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Cyril, *In Io.* 1:12, quoted by Daniel Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), 183.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril, *In Io.* 14:20 (Keating's translation (p. 8)).

<sup>34</sup> Keating, 10.

<sup>35</sup> See Noël O'Sullivan, *Christ and creation: Christology as the key to interpreting the theology of creation in the works of Henri de Lubac* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 408.

(1:18), desirously and trustfully “[going] into him ... [being] incorporated into his members.”<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, for Paul, transformation from sin to righteousness, from first Adam to last, from death to life, represents the epochal transition mirroring Christ’s own paschal journey. This involves both decisive, once-and-for-all justification, enacted through believers’ baptism “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), and continuous progression towards salvation through sanctification, expressed in repeated eucharistic partaking (1 Cor. 10:16-17).<sup>37</sup> Such transformation depends wholly on grace (*charis*) given and received, overflowing gratuity embodying both loving kindness within a covenantal relationship (the Hebrew *chesed*) and indiscriminate, unilateral favour (*chen*),<sup>38</sup> God’s superlative donation that elicits believers’ ‘vertical’ counter-gift of thankfulness and on-going ‘horizontal’ correlative transmission through the Church’s *charismata*. Through justification, God honours the commitment made to humankind at creation and to Abraham’s descendants through election, thereby surpassing ‘mere’ unmerited forensic acquittal by intensifying his *original* beneficence. Although covenanted Israel remains wayward, God’s *chesed* fidelity persists, a generosity extended universally through Christ’s dynamic self-giving, penetrating and superabundantly enriching humanity’s alienating poverty through intensifying and ‘democratising’ Israel’s original communion.

This transition is never individualistic, however, but *cosmic*. Ephesians’ panoramic preface (1:3-14) portrays this superexpansive ‘liturgy’, associating individual transformation with God’s “plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.” (1:10; cf. Col. 1:17-

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<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 29, quoted by O’Sullivan (409); cf. Aquinas, *ST*, IIaIIae.2.2 and Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: a reading of the Apostles’ Creed* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 20.

<sup>37</sup> See J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 319.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 320-21.

18). Christ enacts this cosmic unity-in-fullness through the divine plenitude embodied and outpoured in him (Col. 2:9-10). David Ford recognises the gap between Christ's complete, objective salvific gift and its ongoing subjective individual/corporate/cosmic reception, a tension spanned by Ephesians' use of *pleroma*.<sup>39</sup> Salvation's cosmic reach is grounded in concretely transformed and transformative face-to-face relationships, in communion with Christ and one another, believing in "the creation of a new place of love which is infinitely capacious."<sup>40</sup> Creaturely belief is thus inscribed within God's 'belief' in an expanded, restored, deified creation.

### ***"Be it unto me": the Marian Church's receptivity***

Grace, desire and belief can thus be 'traced back' to God's inner life. But are they thereby unbearably abstracted – pure, yet elusive, divine gifts? heralding salvation actualised through offering her body for God's advent, the Virgin Mary demonstrates that human desire and belief are not mere concepts but embodied responses to invasive divine grace. Rooted in Israel's covenanted heritage, she proleptically models *ecclesia*, called from expectation to encounter, deeply receptive to God's desire to establish communion. She represents definitively the *anawim* ('poor ones'), drastically dependent upon God, accepting riches which escape the arrogant and self-sufficient (Lk. 1:46-55).<sup>41</sup> Other characters in Luke's infancy narratives – Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna – similarly manifest this self-forgetful receptivity, an expectancy exemplified in John the Baptist whose diminishment serves Christ's increase (Jn. 3:30). Yet Mary alone becomes *Theotokos*, conceiving Christ first in her mind and heart<sup>42</sup>, in "pure transparency

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<sup>39</sup> David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 115.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>41</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Birth of the Messiah: a Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), 350-55.

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, Sermon 196.1; 215; 245.4.

.... pure flight from self”, as God seeks a “pure emptied space for the Incarnation of the Word.”<sup>43</sup> She epitomises humanity’s fitting response to Paul’s question, “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7), in willing *fiat*, exultant *Magnificat*, dolorous solidarity and Pentecostal anticipation. Her life embodies, quite literally, the human-divine ‘liturgy’ to which Adam was called, offering to God her choicest gift, a life outpoured in responsive, eucharistic self-offering made possible through Christ’s superlative sacrifice.

Proleptically granted paschal grace, she utters the ‘con-sent’ that both welcomes and makes possible God’s christological action. John Milbank observes that although atonement depends absolutely on Christ’s once-and-for-all sacrifice, his own sinless humanity is mysteriously reliant on his mother’s immaculate reception.<sup>44</sup> Yet, as Aaron Riches perceives, her ‘kenotic’ availability depends entirely on Christ’s eternal filial *fiat*, whilst temporally anticipating his own crucified kenosis.<sup>45</sup> Thus the Virgin’s innate poverty encounters God’s plenitude, the Trinity’s eternal ‘being-for-the-other’ that alone can perfect humanity. The annunciation’s immaculate transparency thus awaits an ‘enriched’ reception, fulfilled in Mary’s assumption, both wholly *continuous* with creatures’ unbroken acceptance of divinely-donated being and strikingly *disjunctive* as sin’s divisive chasm is healed, thereby intensifying humanity’s gift-dependent contingency and multiplying thankfulness for unmerited blessings (cf. 2 Cor. 4:15).

Mary remains utterly poor even whilst participating in Christ’s Easter victory and heralding a more expansive rising (1 Cor. 15:23). As new Eve, entirely dependent on the new Adam, she realises humankind’s vocation to reflect God’s image, not like the Son who *eternally* mirrors the Father’s glory, but through graced transformation into Christ’s image “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor.

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<sup>43</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, trans. Antje Lawry and Sr. Sergia Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981), 52.

<sup>44</sup> Milbank, ‘The Second Difference’, 227-8.

<sup>45</sup> Riches, 180.

3:18). Approaching the trinitarian beauty, she becomes lustrously beautiful through sheer gift,<sup>46</sup> for when transfigured beings “receive the sunbeam they beam themselves”<sup>47</sup>, participating undeservedly in Christ’s eternal filial counter-gift. Mary thus exemplifies creatures’ calling to *respond* to divine self-giving with their own ‘improvised’ return, recognising that human existence means dialogue with God who instigates desire for communion through his own ‘inner’ yearning.<sup>48</sup> So Mary, full of grace, embodies right desire and belief, ardently adhering to the self-diffusive, plenitudinous divine Mystery and welcoming rebirth through God’s dynamic, nuptial indwelling.<sup>49</sup>

The wider communion of saints echoes Mary’s graced receptivity, discerning, beyond perplexity and suffering, a gratuitous ‘in-transit’ vocation awaiting realization. Thus Peter, with faith purified, becomes the Church’s rock (Mt. 16:13-26) and, despite treachery (Jn. 18:15-18, 25-27), Christ’s shepherd-martyr (21:15-19); Thomas, seeing and entering Christ’s risen body, moves through incomprehension to witness (and, in tradition, sacrifice); Stephen, recounting Israel’s faithless rejection, beholds Christ enthroned and imitates his forgiveness (Acts 7); and Saul, the zealous persecutor, becomes Paul the apostle, straining beyond present suffering to future glory (Phil. 3:12-14). Reflecting upon Balthasar, David Moss observes three distinct saintly modalities: the *theo*-logical, imaging the Trinity’s mutually kenotic ‘being-for-the-other’; the *christo*-logical in obedient, filial, sacrificial love; and the *mario*-logical, enacting a transparent, fruitful *fiat* at every ‘cross’.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the saints embody mutedly the self-giving, relational ‘liturgy’ of God’s very life and unveil Christ’s true image.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Tanner, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, quoted by Tanner, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Antonio López, ‘Mary, Certainty of our Hope’, *Communio* 35.2(2008), 176.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 177-9.

<sup>50</sup> David Moss, ‘The Saints’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes, SJ and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 87-91.

<sup>51</sup> Moss, 90-1.



## Traversing the in-between

But how does concrete liturgical celebration relate to the eternal trinitarian ‘liturgy’ glimpsed in saints’ sanctified existence? More fundamentally, how are these myriad, palpable signs of the Spirit’s transformative power rooted in Christ, who alone represents the unrepresentable and enables all authentic sign-making? In particular, how might we understand those sanctifying signs – sacraments – which effect humanity’s participation in the trinitarian gift?

### *Sign-making as re-present-ation*

For Augustine, *signum* functions by indicating something else, irreducibly ‘beyond’, yet somehow – sometimes mysteriously – conveyed thereby.<sup>52</sup> *Res*, however, means solely those things “not employed to signify something”<sup>53</sup> and so God alone, who surpasses and transcends all naming<sup>54</sup>, is “supremely *res* .... the context of everything.”<sup>55</sup> Whilst some signs are ‘natural’ (such as smoke emanating from fire),<sup>56</sup> others are ‘given’, communicating some deliberate purpose.<sup>57</sup> ‘Symptom’ and ‘symbol’ illustrate the contrast for whilst the first (from *pipitein*, ‘to fall’) suggests involuntary, ‘casual’ signification, the latter (from *ballein*, ‘to throw’) implies ‘formal’ intentionality.<sup>58</sup> Crucially, Augustine recasts the existing dyadic *signum-significata* correspondence as triadic *relationality*: a sign involves “[standing] for something to somebody.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, (hereafter, *DDC*), ed. and trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.2.2.

<sup>53</sup> *DDC*, 1.2.2

<sup>54</sup> *DDC*, 1.6.13

<sup>55</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine’, *Literature and Theology* 3(1989), 139.

<sup>56</sup> *DDC*, 2.1.2

<sup>57</sup> *DDC*, 2.2.3

<sup>58</sup> See R.A. Markus, ‘St. Augustine on Signs’, *Phronesis* 1.1(1957), 73; italics original.

<sup>59</sup> Markus, 72.

Augustine is aware that this ‘thing-sign-receiver’ system may delude observers in envisaging signs to be *enjoyed* (*frui*) themselves rather than being *used* (*uti*) to pass beyond – *ever* beyond – for no creaturely sign can truly satisfy.<sup>60</sup> Desirous beings cannot allow transient representations idolatrously to represent finality, for only God instigates, focuses and fulfils desire. Christ alone – God’s strange, crucified, but unfailingly reliable, self-signification – maintains non-collapsible divine difference and offers earthly signs – particularly humanity – fundamental reconfiguration, “equipped for life in God’s image, the unending expansion of love.”<sup>61</sup> Genuine words (as opposed to utterances) are self-expressive, ultimately related to the Father’s eternal Word<sup>62</sup>, “the one ineffable source of light.”<sup>63</sup>

Sacraments thus derive their efficacy from Christ’s words (cf. Jn. 15:3): “the word is added to the elemental substance, and it becomes a sacrament..., a visible word.”<sup>64</sup> Although “our enlightenment is to participate in the Word”<sup>65</sup>, sin inhibits such participation and we thus require cleansing by him who, “becoming a partaker of our mortality .... made us partakers of his divinity.”<sup>66</sup> Such interchange happens through him who is both sinless priest and efficacious sacrifice<sup>67</sup>, mediating in himself between the inward and outward offering, for sacrifice is “the visible sacrament (*sacramentum*) or sacred sign (*sacrum signum*), of an invisible sacrifice.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, as ultimate sign, the crucified Son imparts *salvific* knowledge of God through inscribing humanity within trinitarian relationality. So whilst Christ’s historical sacrifice is objectively complete, its subjective reception remains expansively open, for humanity’s transformation.

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<sup>60</sup> *DDC*, 1.3; 1.33.

<sup>61</sup> Williams, ‘Language, Reality and Desire’, 144-5.

<sup>62</sup> *Trin.*, 4.2.4

<sup>63</sup> Markus, 82.

<sup>64</sup> *Tractatus super Johannis*, 80.3.

<sup>65</sup> *Trin.*, 4.2.4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Trin.*, 4.3.19; cf. *DCD*, 10.6.

<sup>68</sup> *DCD*, 10.5

Amplifying Augustine, Aquinas too regards sacraments as signs, not merely *revealing* salvation but also *mediating* it, as suggested by *sacer* (meaning ‘holy’) and *–mentum* (suggesting causality). Aquinas thus narrows Augustine’s broad definition to mean signs of Christ which *sanctify* human beings<sup>69</sup>, the reality signified being Christ himself, whose passion caused our sanctification.<sup>70</sup> A sacrament, moreover, orders time, being simultaneously the efficient, formal and final cause of human holiness, reminding us of Christ’s historical saving passion, applying its effects in the here-and-now and prefiguring future glory.<sup>71</sup> Sacraments thus constitute “eschatology in the flesh .... [living] the ‘already’ of Christ in the ‘not yet’”<sup>72</sup>, for God’s actions provide means to reach attain the *telos* envisaged.<sup>73</sup> So sacraments are, concurrently, human actions and divine signs, representing, making present and communicating the good of eternal life, through the Spirit’s grace.<sup>74</sup> God’s sanctifying ‘downward’ movement moreover awaits humanity’s ‘upward’ cultic response, participating tangibly in Christ’s own priestly worship and enabling all things’ Godward return.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, ‘visible words’ require prescribed actions; so baptism entails not merely water and words but sanctifying washing.<sup>76</sup> Yet whilst God uses sacramental corporeality efficaciously, believers must resist becoming fixated on signs and oblivious to the hidden reality which is Christ’s sanctifying self-gift, imparted to effect their appointed end. Whilst grace is caused by God alone, the principal cause, he has decreed certain secondary, instrumental, sacramental causes which ‘contain’ grace in divinely-appointed measure<sup>77</sup>, deriving their

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<sup>69</sup> *ST*, IIIa.60.2.*responsio*.

<sup>70</sup> *ST*, IIIa.60.3.*responsio*.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>72</sup> Liam G. Walsh, O.P., “Sacraments” in Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (eds.), *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 328.

<sup>73</sup> Walsh, 330.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 331; *ST* IaIIae.106.1.

<sup>75</sup> *ST*, IIIa.60.5; IIIa.62.5; IIIa.63.1; IIIa.63.6; IIIa.65.1.

<sup>76</sup> *ST*, IIIa.66.1.*responsio*.

<sup>77</sup> *ST*, IIIa.62.1.*responsio*; IIIa.62.3.*responsio*.

power<sup>78</sup> and communicability from Christ's passion (Jn. 19:34)<sup>79</sup>, acting like conjoined instruments, just as Christ's humanity is an instrument of his divinity.<sup>80</sup>

For the artist-poet David Jones (1895-1974), humanity's works are intrinsically sacramental, unlike the often beautiful, though functional, making of non-human creatures, producing revelatory signs that suggest that "anthropos has some part in a *without-endness*."<sup>81</sup> Liturgical sacraments constitute corporeal 'art-work', expressing generative anaphoric, anamnestic boldness divinely ordained through being intrinsically fastened to Christ, the endlessly fruitful "*Signum* on the Hill."<sup>82</sup> Jones quotes the French priest-liturgist Maurice de la Taille (1872-1933) in evocatively describing Christ's purposeful eucharistic passage: "He placed Himself in the order of signs."<sup>83</sup> Through Christ, believers' temporal sign-making participates, like time itself, in eternity, the enduring trinitarian gift,<sup>84</sup> allowing sacramental memorial and anticipation to define the present through Christ's sanctifying self-donation endlessly represented/re-presented.

Far from offering manipulable, magical certainty, humanly-enacted sacramental signification roots liturgical subjects in an unconstructable 'beyond'. As Israel's laws, rituals and festivals enshrined, maintained and re-forged human-divine communion, so Jesus magnifies this pervasive sacramentality, establishing people and rites "for a community that does not yet exist, the Kingdom of God."<sup>85</sup> So to be baptised means to acknowledge one's life as ultimately God's (Mk. 10:38-39), whilst the Eucharist, in seating us alongside Christ's faithless disciples, probes our

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<sup>78</sup> *ST*, IIIa.62.4

<sup>79</sup> *ST*, IIIa.62.5.*responsio*.

<sup>80</sup> *ST*, IIIa.62.5.*responsio*; IIIa.64.1.*responsio*.

<sup>81</sup> David Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' in *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 143-179; here, 157.

<sup>82</sup> Jones, 168.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 179. For further comment on Jones' sacramentalism, see Rowan Williams, 'The Nature of a Sacrament', in *On Christian Theology*, 197-208.

<sup>84</sup> See Antonio López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (hereafter, *GUB*) (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 3-4.

<sup>85</sup> Williams, 'Nature of a Sacrament', 203.

own commitment.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Christ's own fidelity, in life and death, signifies the *new* humanity established by God through covenant<sup>87</sup> and sacraments thus effect sanctified believers' graced membership of this new creation in him.<sup>88</sup>

Sacraments are thus intrinsically 'in-motion'. Williams rightly warns of the danger of "[theologically] immobilizing ... a sacred object" in isolation from divine action for "the sign that is Christ and the signs of Christ equally are *God in act*"<sup>89</sup>, healing and transfiguring creation for communion.<sup>90</sup> Sacraments are efficacious, ritualised performances, enriching impoverished believers through God's comprehensive regeneration.<sup>91</sup> Thus, individuals' baptismal transitionality matures expansively towards "self-forgetting longing" for "the same good to be in all"<sup>92</sup>, thereby disclosing Christ's universalised, 'inhabitable' humanity. Similarly, consecrated eucharistic elements, identified by the Fathers as resurrectional first-fruits (1 Cor. 15:20), reveal a new order inaugurated through Christ's "[passing] over' ... into the vulnerable and inactive forms of the inanimate world"<sup>93</sup> and "[announcing] his death by 'signing' himself as a thing, to be handled and consumed."<sup>94</sup> Yet as Christ establishes newness through physical *withdrawal* prompted by disciples' faithless manoeuvrings, so those deniers and deserters re-encounter Christ as the risen eucharistic host (Lk. 24:28-43; Jn. 21:9-14), inviting re-entry into the covenant, the very "guarantee of hospitality."<sup>95</sup>

Christ's ascension recasts subsequent eucharistic encounters, however. Louis-Marie Chauvet re-imagines Christianity's sacramentalism symbolically, recalling

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*; italics added.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>91</sup> Rowan Williams, 'Sacraments of the New Society' in *On Christian Theology*, 209-221; here, 209.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-7; quotation, 217.

that *syn-ballein* literally ‘throws together’ seemingly disparate realities.<sup>96</sup> He regards the empty tomb as iconic, heralding the loss of unmediated divine presence and affirming the “presence of the absence of God”<sup>97</sup>, thereby tempering exaggerated reification. Believers thus discover sacramental *mediation* “as the (eschatological) place of God’s advent”<sup>98</sup> through social, historical and linguistic bodies and, most pertinently, in their own embodiedness<sup>99</sup>, an “*arch-sacramentality* ... where the believing subject comes into being”<sup>100</sup> as Christ intervenes as *ad-esse*, a “being-for-the-other.”<sup>101</sup> The Church thus becomes a desirous, eschatological “transitional space”<sup>102</sup> in which sacraments bear “the joy of the ‘already’ and the distress of the ‘not yet’.... *witnesses of a God who is never finished with coming.*”<sup>103</sup> Eschewing idolatrous reductionism by acknowledging God as Absolute Mystery, sacraments respect creation’s gifted non-possessability and inculcate mercy, service and reconciliation.<sup>104</sup>

Through matter and ritual, sacraments thus ‘represent’ – signify as ‘strong’ participatory symbol – by ‘re-presenting’ – offering again, perpetually – God’s continuing, sanctifying action and ‘re-present-ing’ – reorienting worshippers’ temporal here-and-now according to God’s historic, objective, salvific Christ-gift and the Spirit’s pledged future of eschatological fulfilment when sacraments

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<sup>96</sup> Chauvet, Louis-Marie, *Symbol and Sacrament: a sacramental reinterpretation of Christian existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan, S.J. and Madeleine Beaumont. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 112; original quotations italicised.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 404; italics original.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 555; italics original.

<sup>104</sup> Chauvet’s sacramentology, however, rejects the so-called ‘onto-theological’ approach of traditional metaphysical models, including Aquinas’s, for they allegedly supplant the language of love with instrumentality and causality, reducing God’s measureless self-gift to quantifiable dimensions. In ‘The Instrumental Causality of the Sacraments: Thomas Aquinas and Louis-Marie Chauvet’ (*Nova et Vetera*, 4.2(2006), 255-93), Bernhard Blankenhorn O.P., severely criticises Chauvet’s reading through examining Aquinas’s evolving sacramental theology, nevertheless concluding that Chauvet’s key insights are ultimately compatible with Aquinas’s, for divine sacramental signification is fruitful in human sanctification.

cease. In the desirous interim, however, sacraments allow believers to be themselves re-present-ed (made present to their true selves), sharing adoptively in Christ's inherent filial identity and thereby participating in his eternal trinitarian gift.

### ***Immersed into mobility***

Sacraments thus enact subjective appropriation of Christ's objective salvific work whilst yearnfully anticipating the kingdom. Baptism involves immersion in the 'in-between', a once-for-all sacramental reception of a 'mobile' gift – vividly depicted in water's inherent fluidity – that initiates ongoing, deepening participation in Christ and the Spirit. As Ward contends, Mark's closure-resistant, elliptical 'ending' (16:8) proposes terror, amazement and silence as the curious responses to Christ's rising, thereby inviting readers not simply to seek him but to discover *themselves*, remade, within an "economy of response."<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the opening chapter's juddering sequence of beginnings leads to Jordan, "a place of liminality" situated between wilderness and promise, and to baptism, that "rite of passage through the zone of that liminality"<sup>106</sup>, by repentant acknowledgement of past failures before the coming Lord who leads sinners into forgiveness. Such transformation, however, requires Jesus's prior, ever-sinless entry into sin's watery, primeval disorder to receive representatively the filial affirmation and descending Spirit eternally his *so that* temporal beings baptised into him might receive adoption and the same, long-expected Spirit, awaiting promised eschatological divine communion.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 29-59.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

<sup>107</sup> See also chapter four.

The Markan Jesus's resultant wilderness "[battle] with cosmological divisions and uncertainties"<sup>108</sup> lacks Matthew and Luke's extended exegesis and thus invites readers into another 'in-between place' where unresolved selves are bidden to receive more fully the transformative gift of (eventual) self-completion.<sup>109</sup> Just as Mark's elusive Jesus resists categorization, so humanity baptised into him is "characterized by an expansive openness"<sup>110</sup>, awaiting full participation in God's invasive, deifying presence. Moreover, as Christ's (*Aqedah*-like) baptism signifies death (Mk. 10:45), so humanity's participation therein connects Christ's "substitutionary self" to believers' non-identical sacrificial repetition,<sup>111</sup> whilst anticipating final bodily resurrection which transcends all creaturely giving. Baptism thus proposes human outlooks transfigured towards communion, inviting believers, like the Galilean fishermen-become-disciples, to be "woven into God's meta-text, a story of Trinitarian inscription where God is author, Christ is performer and the Holy Spirit is the performance", an enacted "liturgical praxis of sacramental and soteriological significance."<sup>112</sup>

Paul likewise considers believers' transitionality, with baptism denoting outwardly the inner transformation initiated. Having *already* died with Christ and been incorporated "into him", the baptised await future, resurrectional glory.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, the new age proceeds as individuals submit to be conformed to Christ within a corporate, cosmic process: receiving his filial Spirit and participating in his own cry of sonship, they anticipate their being moulded into his glorious divine image.<sup>114</sup> Set between death and resurrection and awaiting Christ's *parousia*, baptised believers occupy the overlap of the ages: *already* justified by faith, redeemed, free and constituting the new creation, they nevertheless *still*

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<sup>108</sup> Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 37.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Tanner, 37.

<sup>111</sup> Ford, 164.

<sup>112</sup> Ward, 'Christology and Mimesis', 42-3.

<sup>113</sup> Specific scriptural references are too vast to list; see, e.g., Dunn, 402-3.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Dunn, 403-4.



inhabit the old, awaiting final acquittal, true liberty and full inheritance. The Spirit sustains this eschatological longing as pledge and first-fruits, as believers progressively recover the divine image and glory through sharing in Christ's sufferings to participate more intensely in his risen life, awaiting final bodily resurrection and creation's true end.<sup>115</sup>

Moreover, baptismal chrismation into Christ, creation's true king, priest and prophet, reconnects us to our true beginning, restoring humankind's originary vocation.<sup>116</sup> Whereas kings *receive* power and authority *over* creation, the priest's vocation is to *offer* sacrifice mediatorially *for* creation: Christ's sacrifice thereby enables the Church's priestly, sanctifying offering both of itself (Rom. 12:1) and creation to God, thus reinstating the rightful gift-rapport squandered by Adam.<sup>117</sup> Prophetic humankind, furthermore, recognises all as gift, "transparent to God", thereby re-construing human temporality within God's own eternity.<sup>118</sup> Activated in baptism, this renewed threefold vocation awaits its full, eschatological realisation.

Baptism's gestured materiality, acting transformatively upon a particular human body, signals reordered desire and awakened faith meeting divine superabundant grace, for in the baptismal commitment to "'turn to Christ'... the cross on the face responds to the face on the cross."<sup>119</sup> Baptismal corporeality moreover, foretells *creation's* renewal: matter, intrinsically good, yet commodified exploitatively within a death-enslaved cosmos, regains its God-given agency as symbol of divine glory and humanity's intended communion.<sup>120</sup> As water becomes hallowed to signify and effect liberation from sin and foretell entry into deified existence,

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<sup>115</sup> Dunn, 442-57, considers Paul's baptismal understanding of baptism with thorough textual citation.

<sup>116</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: a Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 81-103.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>119</sup> Ford, 163.

<sup>120</sup> Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 49.

so matter finds discovers its purpose as agent of *theōsis*.<sup>121</sup> Having believingly abandoned their impoverished pasts for God's unimaginable communion, baptised believers inhabit an aching intermediacy, subjectively unfinished, yet objectively full, proleptically *given*.

## Being Offered: Eucharistic Gift, Counter-Gift and Communion

Awareness of sacramental transitionality prevents the contentious eucharistic mysteries of remembrance, presence and sacrifice from obscuring God's great Mystery which is Christ himself (Col. 2:2). If the hypostatic union's awesome splendour elicits adoration rather than explanation, so too "the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27). As Colossians layers superlatives to extol humanity's incorporation into Christ, so Ephesians' enraptured wonderment concerning boundless divine fullness hovers evocatively nearby. Eucharistic signs and actions are thus intrinsically connected to humankind's ultimate sanctification, never isolated things detached from the greater Mystery.

Within the early Church's analogical, participatory worldview, eucharistic sacrifice and sacramental presence remained uncontentious, for the Eucharist represented not doctrine to be dissected but a *habitus* in which to grow, thankfully recognising the divine plenitude there celebrated and received.<sup>122</sup> God's profuse gratuity embraces the entire liturgy: so whilst we remember Christ, God remembers us entirely; whilst we fittingly offer gifts, God's offer of Christ's sacramental, sacrificial self overwhelms; whilst we present the eucharistic

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>122</sup> Ford, chapter 6. For a fuller explanation of the loss of analogical sacramentality, see Boersma, *passim*.

oblation, it is both embedded solidly in and suspended fluidly between Christ's unique, historical self-offering and his perpetual priestly intercession in heaven. Through ritual gestures and liturgical language of human-divine giving-and-receiving, the asymmetric eucharistic 'transaction' is rooted in Christ's deifying paschal interchange and, yet more deeply, in the Trinity's eternal, perfectly balanced, gift-exchange. The purpose of human sacramental endeavour is thus to perfect that eucharistic life of loving mutuality which Adam rejected, through Christ whose entire existence manifests the reciprocal trinitarian gift and thus constitutes "the perfect Eucharist."<sup>123</sup>

Humanity's liturgical action is thus enveloped in profound thankfulness for God's prior, all-encompassing gift, given historically in Christ and the Spirit and perpetually renewed in tangible forms through the sacramental economy. Christian worship thus acclaims God's transcendent magnificence and generous superabundance, an awareness heightened at the offertory, as creation's gifts are presented for transformation. So as the priest declares

Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power,  
the glory, the splendour, and the majesty;  
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,

the eucharistic assembly acclaims the absolute primacy of divine provision which makes possible all human giving:

All things come from you,  
and of your own do we give you.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1966), 34.

<sup>124</sup> *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), Prayer at the Preparation of the Table, The Order for the Celebration of Holy Communion.

As I shall show, with reference to Augustine's teaching on eucharistic sacrifice, the gifts offered are not simply creation's 'external' goods but, more fully, the gift of lives laid before God as Christ's ecclesial body becomes more fully itself through offering itself, thereby entering more deeply into God's life of perfect giving-and-receiving. With this in mind, I re-evaluate the central debates on eucharistic anamnesis, presence and sacrifice, showing how the sacramental 'unfolding' of Christ's redemptive work is incomplete without liturgical subjects' 'enfolding' into him and, consequently, into the trinitarian life of complete giving-and-receiving. Such sacramental renewal happens within diverse, concrete liturgical contexts where desirous, believing sinners gather in the triune name to receive absolution, participate in the angelic *Gloria*, be comforted and confronted by God's incisive, revelatory, converting word (Heb. 4:12-13), confess the Church's undying faith, intercede through Christ for his gifted, yet tumultuous, world, share the divine peace surpassing comprehension (Phil. 4:8) and receive the divine benediction. Through the word proclaimed and sacrament enacted, the Church is progressively and perpetually transformed, honed for fuller participation in the great thanksgiving of the saints and angels, whose ceaseless "holy, holy, holy" heralds creation's enfoldment into the trinitarian 'liturgy'.

### ***Thank-fully re-member-ed***

As Cusa taught, creation participates in God's being via a *descending* gift (cf. James 1:17), an unfolding downwardness exemplified as Christ – the perfect divine image in whom, through whom and for whom all things exist (Col. 1:16-17) – stoops into Mary's womb, plunging further into Jordan's chaotic waters, humble sacrificial servanthood and ultimately into hell itself *so that* creation might be enfolded in God.<sup>125</sup> John intensifies this dynamic through sacramental imagery: Jesus, the living bread, descends (6:51) so that his eucharistic recipients

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. *DDPL*, IV.

might be eschatologically raised (6:54).<sup>126</sup> Dying and rising with Christ in baptism and receiving his filiating Spirit, the Father's adopted children learn thankfulness, joyfully recognizing their share in the astounding positivity of being<sup>127</sup>, free of the idolatrous self-congratulation of amnesic ingratitude<sup>128</sup>, celebrating, like Mary, the individual gift-vocations that constitute the pneumatic Church.

Believers' desirous 'in-between-ness' sustains perpetual mobility: signs themselves of divine plenitude already outpoured (Rom. 5:5), yet longingly anticipated (Rom. 8:18-30), they await consummation. Christ's transitional, eucharistic people thus embody gratitude, sharing in Christ's concentrated yearning to celebrate the Passover-Exodus memorial (Lk. 22:15; cf. 9:31) which, through and beyond Calvary, heralds the kingdom's messianic banquet (22:16). Thankfulness matures as the eucharistic assembly gladly recognises Christ, the eschatological paschal lamb, given-and-outpoured in his body and blood, as past atoning sacrifice, present sacramental nourishment and future kingdom fulfilment, guaranteeing eternal life (Jn. 6:51), announcing the parousia (1 Cor. 11:26), anticipating the new resurrectional embodiment (1 Cor. 15:42-57) and, in supremely hospitality, inviting participation in trinitarian communion.

Ecclesial eucharistic memorial surpasses unadorned 'rubrical' nostalgia, allowing Christ's objective, accomplished work to overflow into subjective, 'improvised' fruitfulness.<sup>129</sup> Not merely cultic but prophetic, such anamnesis represents both Israel's constitutive covenant perpetuated and creation's eighth day renewal anticipated.<sup>130</sup> For Gustave Martelet, "the Eucharist *is* the Resurrection ... the

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<sup>126</sup> See further Jane S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

<sup>127</sup> See López, *GUB*, esp. chapter 1.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 142-3.

<sup>129</sup> Ford, 154; cf. Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 170.

<sup>130</sup> Morrill, 169-172, drawing on David Gregg.

risen person himself become our food”<sup>131</sup>, bequeathing transfigured incorruptibility<sup>132</sup>, whilst drawing all creation into Easter’s cosmic renewal.<sup>133</sup> Christ’s institutive words indicate his “supratemporal existence”, anticipating both crucifying withdrawal and astoundingly innovative sacramental intimacy.<sup>134</sup> Hence, his eucharistic word-action enriches commemoration of *past* deliverance from Egypt through event by anticipation of *eschatological* kingdom-entry, achieved in his very person.<sup>135</sup> So the Eucharist represents insertion into Jesus’s “very self, his life, his mission, and his destiny”, into communion in his crucified and risen body.<sup>136</sup> Eucharistic anamnesis thus constitutes “memory of the future”<sup>137</sup>, allowing Christ’s past and future to dwell within us, repositioning our lives securely in God’s.<sup>138</sup> Such christological anamnesis depends upon pneumatological epiclesis, for only the invoked Spirit enables creation’s eschatological ingathering.<sup>139</sup>

Nevertheless, this human-divine eucharistic memory represents a complex – yet redoubled – joy, for worshippers implicated in Christ’s *ongoing* denial, betrayal and desertion receive, alongside the original perpetrators, restoration precisely in *encountering* the risen victim, endlessly represented/re-presented/re-present-ed through his sacramental self-gift.<sup>140</sup> The pierced victim allows the Church to be constantly re-member-ed (cf. Lk. 23:43) as he is dis-member-ed though historical sacrifice, eucharistic fraction and limitless self-distribution, thereby ‘membering’

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<sup>131</sup> Gustave Martelet, *The Risen Christ and the Eucharistic World*, trans. René Hague (London: Collins, 1976), 12.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 188

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>134</sup> Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The Witness of the New Testament*, trans. Matthew O’Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 67.

<sup>135</sup> Léon-Dufour, 111-2.

<sup>136</sup> Morrill, 183.

<sup>137</sup> Chauvet, 239.

<sup>138</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans. Paul Kachur (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 130; cf. Morrill, 142.

<sup>139</sup> See Isaac Kizhakkeparampil, *The Invocation of the Holy Spirit as constitutive of the sacraments according to Cardinal Yves Congar* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1995), 11.

<sup>140</sup> See Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, second edition (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), 98-106.

his ecclesial body anew (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 12:12-30; cf. Rom. 12:4-5).<sup>141</sup> Thus Christ's sacramental gift intensifies the Church's ec-static remembrance of its future, through the invoked Spirit who animated Jesus and guarantees the Eucharist's anamnestic efficacy.<sup>142</sup>

So Christ's kenotic self-signification is intrinsically mobile, embodying through and in 'solid' sacramental gifts the astounding 'fluidity' of his – and our – 'passing-over' into enriched existence in him, the divine "eschatological operation."<sup>143</sup> Easter's meal narratives (Lk. 24:28-43; Jn. 21:9-14) portray Christ wounded and triumphant, truly *present*, sacramentally *given*, yet resolutely *unrestrainable*. No fetishizable ecclesially-confined thing, the living, eucharistic Christ *defines* the Church (1 Cor. 10:15-26) in malleable missionary evolvment (Acts 2:42-46; 27:35-36) and eschatological expectation (1 Cor. 11:25-26), evoking imitation of his own kingdom-desire through sacramental mediation.

Aquinas vividly portays this reconfigurative sacramental *ekstasis*, "[expanding] and [extending] the 'I'" before "a fundamentally different existence" (cf. Gal. 2:19-20; 6:14).<sup>144</sup> Uniting past instantiating reality, present signification and future beatitude, sacraments allow Christ crucified and risen to act transformatively, fulfilling in the Eucharist "an incomparable fullness and immediacy" through total, mutual self-giving bearing unparalleled oneness and fruitfulness.<sup>145</sup> Having appropriated in baptism Christ's own death and resurrection, the eucharistic food changes recipients into Christ<sup>146</sup>, for "love

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. Graham Ward, 'The Church as the Erotic Community' in L. Boeve and L. Leijssen (eds.), *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 167-204; here, 167f.

<sup>142</sup> See Kizhakkeparampil, *passim*.

<sup>143</sup> Ward's phrase (see chapter 4).

<sup>144</sup> Peter A. Kwasniewski, 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Eucharistic Ecstasy' in Leachman, 154-171; here, 155.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-8; cf. *ST*, IIIa.73.3

<sup>146</sup> *ST*, IIIa.73.3.ad2; IIIa.73.4

places a man outside himself and places him in the one loved.”<sup>147</sup> This sacrament of friendship *par excellence*<sup>148</sup> applies Christ’s passion, destroying death, restoring life<sup>149</sup> and accomplishing plenitudinous nuptial union, “pure, total, permanent possession ... going to the abyss of one’s being.”<sup>150</sup>

### ***Real presents***

Such unimaginable ecstasy depends upon Christ’s rich sacramental presence, not some inert ‘given’ but the active dynamism of being ‘given *for*’, ‘poured out *for*’ (Lk. 22:19-20). As such, Christ’s guests receive in edible form the directional gift of his crucified, risen body, handed-over once-for-all in sacrifice, progressively transforming consumer into giver, anticipating the resurrection body signified.

Marion would agree, affirming Christ as the true sacramental *res*, the gratuitous, salvific self-gift (*don*) aban-don-ed in love, intensifying earlier theophanic manifestations, yet bestowed *iconically*,<sup>151</sup> less as delimitable “available permanence” as “a new sort of advent”<sup>152</sup>, an “infinite excessiveness”<sup>153</sup>, God’s transfigurative *eikōn* (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 1:15).<sup>154</sup> For Marion, the Eucharist transports the gaze *beyond* physical accidents to Christ, the objective substance, who places the community at his disposal<sup>155</sup> through the eucharistic saturated phenomenon that both memorialises his historical self-revelation (Lk. 22:17) and “strains forward (*epekteinomenos*)” (Phil. 3:13) towards the parousia and

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<sup>147</sup> *In III Sent.*, 29.5.obj. 1, citing Dionysius (Kwasniewski, 160)

<sup>148</sup> *ST*, IIIa.73.5; IIIa.78.3. ad 6

<sup>149</sup> Kwasniewski, 163.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* 165.

<sup>151</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>152</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson; foreword, David Tracy. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 172

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> Gerard Loughlin, ‘Transubstantiation: Eucharist as Pure Gift,’ in *Christ: the Sacramental Word*, ed. David Brown and Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1996), 123-141; here 129



eschatological ecclesial identity.<sup>156</sup> As pledge of the new creation's resurrected body<sup>157</sup>, this dazzling "absolute gift" is "the figure of what we will be"<sup>158</sup> heralding our ultimate union with the Father.<sup>159</sup> "'Given for you' .... 'shed for you'", consecrated gifts disclose "the charity of the gift"<sup>160</sup>, revealing the ecclesial body figured *beyond* sensual signs (1 Cor 2:9).<sup>161</sup>

Whilst rightly countering over-reification, Marion's iconic approach nevertheless underplays Christ's *material* self-signification which mediates tangibly his true crucified, risen, ascended presence in continuity with his pre-passion 'body-to-body' ministry. Christ's eucharistic 'being-for-the-other' does not circumvent corporeality but ennobles material elements, so that inescapably corporeal recipients may likewise be transfigured, conformed for risen bodiliness. Thus Jesus, truly given, truly received, is never constricted or exhausted, for consecrated elements are not *simply* adorable things, but visible, edible, *sanctifying* words-in-action which communicate Christ's self-giving, forever 'in-transit', given enrichingly by the heaven-bound saviour until creation's own return is accomplished. Moreover, Marion's reticence concerning eucharistic corporeality renders Christ's threefold historical, sacramental and ecclesial body (1 Cor. 10-12) strangely unreal. Nevertheless, the raw materiality of transubstantiated, kenotic food arouses the Church's resultant 'kenosis' as Christ's out-flow generates charity's responsive, relational, embodied 'on-flow'.

Marion's Eucharist is distinctly centrifugal, propelling recipients away from concrete sign-gifts towards covenantal anamnesis and parousial *epektasis*. Nevertheless, such centrafugality must be counterbalanced by *concomitant* centripetality which venerates consecrated elements *insofar* as they represent/re-

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<sup>156</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 172

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 178

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 178

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

present Christ, the self-giving, non-containable other who heralds suprasacramental divine communion. The Eucharist is doubly iconic, illuminated by Christ's memorialised/anticipated presence, communicated in and through adorably *solid*, transformatively *fluid* elements. Feeding, but never satiating, the Eucharist intensifies desire through Christ's own unsullied desire, constraining nothing (not least God) but 'containing' everything in sheer gratuity, signifying Christ crucified, risen and ascended (Jn. 6:52-59) and our future selves, transfigured (cf. 1 Jn. 3:1-3). Joyfully confessing Christ given-up-for-us, the sacramental economy depends entirely on his incarnate self-offering, continually memorialised and actualised. The Eucharist entails event as much as object, happening as much as presence, as Christ's historic displacements become sacramentally recast with transformative 'mobility' beyond chronological positioning. Indeed, the Eucharist is God's descending, trinitarian gift, as the Father perpetually gives his Son for the world through the Spirit's unity.<sup>162</sup> This sacrificial meal thrusts us, through the epicletic, propulsive, eschatological Spirit, towards the pure gift of resurrectional bodiliness as Christ's non-commodifiable body – "always in transit....always being transferred"<sup>163</sup> – is received with salvific power. Truly given but never subjugated, consumed but never subsumed, Christ's true gift-of-self bestows our very selves.

As Ford observes, Emmaus' revelatory bread-breaking culminates in Christ's ascension which holds absence and presence in tension as "the final blessing with pierced hands" suggests "the ultimate image of fulfilment in finitude."<sup>164</sup> As the resultant eucharistic assembly blesses Jesus it is blessed by him, discovering human praise immersed in superabundant divine outpouring, as transfigured elements enact human transfiguration.<sup>165</sup> Graham Ward demonstrates how

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<sup>162</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*; trans. Graham Harrison; 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988-95), 5:477.

<sup>163</sup> Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 91.

<sup>164</sup> Ford, 156-7.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 157.

eucharistic language of ‘real presence’ is a late intrusion, occurring only when sacramental analogy (which could grasp the ascension as presence-through-absence) yielded to univocal description, thus rendering meaningless ancient accounts of truly consuming Christ’s body and blood under the ‘appearances’ of bread and wine.<sup>166</sup> Under the earlier consensus, appearance signified “a mode of existing .... a participation in the true”, recognising that “the visible and corporeal is always suspended and incomplete.”<sup>167</sup>

Whilst emphasising “the entire Christ” sacramentally manifest<sup>168</sup>, Aquinas refutes a localised presence like other bodies.<sup>169</sup> Catherine Pickstock carefully extricates his eucharistic theology from later portrayals of reified local presence, observing first how language ‘solidifies’ particular depictions whilst retaining non-deterministic fluidity.<sup>170</sup> Theologically, such indeterminacy climaxes in Jesus’ enacted words “this is my body.... this is my blood”, prompting divergent interpretations as to whether ‘this’ remains anchored in withdrawn, ascended bodiliness or tangible eucharistic gifts.<sup>171</sup> Whereas Calvinists’ metaphoricised readings regard Christ’s body as inaccessibly remote and visible elements as essentially illustrative, Catholicism may over-identify, so favouring presence over absence that Marion’s feared eucharistic idolatry threatens. Although Derrida’s insistence that language resists (dis)closure, endlessly postponing meaning, may seem like barren terrain, such linguistic indeterminacy mediates helpfully between Calvinist scepticism and Catholic over-realism.<sup>172</sup> Pickstock suggests that patristic emphasis on *mystery* suggests “a positive but not fetishizable *arrival* in which signs essentially participate, but which they cannot exhaust, for that mystery

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<sup>166</sup> Graham Ward, ‘Erotic Community’, 173.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *ST*, IIIa.76.1.responsio; cf. *ST*, IIIa.75.1.responsio.

<sup>169</sup> *ST*, IIIa.75.1.ad 3.

<sup>170</sup> Catherine Pickstock, ‘Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist’ in *Modern Theology* 15.2 (1999), 159.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

arrives by virtue of a transcendent plenitude which perfectly integrates absence and presence.”<sup>173</sup>

The Eucharist is thus radically dynamic, as consecrated gifts manifest Christ only through ceaseless participation in him, an ecstatic *action* rather than some inert, controllable *thing*, for, whilst ingested, the elements are not subjugable. Truly communicating the descending Christ, this vibrant eucharistic interchange raises humanity to itself (Jn. 6:51-54), rendering it submissively dependent. Christ reveals food’s deepest meaning as instigating mutual indwelling that participates in eternal trinitarian communion (6:55-6). Delusions of manipulating Christ sacramentally are thus subverted: bestowed repeatedly through non-identical eucharistic repetition, Christ intensifies human participation in his gratuitous, superabundant – ultimately trinitarian – gift (6:57).

Transubstantiation affirms Christ’s dynamic, non-fetishizable, material presence, mediating between sign and reality, absence and presence, for whilst the elements’ substance is transformed, their accidents persist, demonstrating “an imparted and yet not exhausted body quite beyond the norms and capacities of an ordinary body.”<sup>174</sup> So whilst Derrida suggests that Christianity esteems some pure reality *beyond* language, Pickstock posits the reverse since the eucharistic body is signified and communicated only through Christ’s instituting word, thereby enlarging our conception of sign, for whilst no body *appears*, the bread nevertheless *is* Christ’s body, *inexhaustibly* superabundant.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, eucharistic humanity is unveiled as solidly established ‘body’, animated by fluid, oxygen-bearing ‘blood’, a vibrant site of receiving-*and-giving*, transmitting Christ’s entrusted, non-possessable, eucharistic life through unending charity, awaiting communion with God who *is* charity. The eucharistic body thus unites Christ’s historical and ecclesial bodies as strong, participatory *symbol* – a pliant,

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 163; italics original.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

expansive, unmanoeuvrable gift – whilst awakening *yearning* for profounder human-divine intimacy, recognising that there is always more to be given. Christ thus sustains the liturgical economy of dynamic longing, propelled by the eschatological Spirit's pledge: real presence through real presents.

To eat Christ is to eat life”<sup>176</sup> maintains Augustine, yet that life is no discrete commodity but effects profound *reversal*. “You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me”<sup>177</sup>, thus revealing food's ultimate purpose to foster creation's eternal divine indwelling<sup>178</sup>, incorporating the eaters into the body of Christ who forever participates in trinitarian *eros-agape*.<sup>179</sup> This ‘Christifying’ eucharistic terminus thus animates believers’ desirous mobility, for as the incarnate Christ was constantly displaced, so his sacramental transference facilitates humanity’s perpetual, reconstitutive relocation into him. As the wilderness manna reconfigured the pilgrim Israel, so concrete liturgical enactment effects transformation, heralding a new relationship with the divine gift: “the Body of Christ given to eat and drink constructs a new *polis* rooted in participation and reciprocity – a politics of co-abiding.”<sup>180</sup>

### ***“Become what you are”: Augustine on eucharistic sacrifice***

Christ is thus truly given in self-sacrificing plenitude, but never objectified or exhausted; we are truly filled, but never satiated or immobilised, but sustained on our Godward journey and enabled to present the return-gift that Adam eschewed, offering creation back to its source. Every Eucharist enacts change, both of inanimate elements and desirous subjects, anticipating creation's end in glorious

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<sup>176</sup> *Sermon* 131

<sup>177</sup> *Conf.*, 7.10.16.

<sup>178</sup> Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: a Theology of Eating* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 157.

<sup>179</sup> Angel F. Méndez-Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 75.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

communion, yet manifested here in willing sacrifice, both Christ's and ours. Calvary's sacrifice – perfect, complete and unrepeatable – nevertheless persists through Christ's priestly intercession beyond heaven's veil and, by participation, in the eucharistic sacrifice. The Church 'offers Christ' only inasmuch as it participates subjectively in his once-for-all objective 'trinitarian' sacrifice, representing/re-presenting the Son who gives himself eternally to the Father "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14). God has no need of sacrifice but we have, in order that Christ's oblation may intimately transform us and fit us to give ourselves, the Father's adopted children, unreservedly to him.

Augustine's eucharistic theology emphasises this transformative ecclesial self-offering, through sacramental oblation and consumption. Eucharistic bread and wine "become *mysticus* through ritual consecration"<sup>181</sup>, forming an efficacious "visible word" and tethering earthly matter to heavenly reality as true *symbolon*. Gazing beyond worldly 'corporeal works' towards 'luminous comprehension' of God's heavenly mysteries,<sup>182</sup> sacraments transport believers having dulled contemplative capacity through "words and deeds material and sensible, yet fraught with sacramental power."<sup>183</sup> Augustine explains Christ's real, non-idolatrous, venerable presence through quoting Psalm 99:5 as "worship his footstool, for it is holy": through Christ's incarnation and eucharistic self-gift, "a way has been found in which such a footstool of the Lord may be adored and in which we not only do not sin if we adore but should sin if we did not adore."<sup>184</sup>

Christ's sacrificed body matters crucially, both historically and sacramentally for those incorporated into his ecclesial body.<sup>185</sup> Inseparably united with its sinless

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<sup>181</sup> *Contra Faustum*, 20.13. See Augustine, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, N.Y: New City Press, 2007).

<sup>182</sup> *Conf.* 13.18.23

<sup>183</sup> *Conf.* 13.20.28

<sup>184</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 98.9, quoted by Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1909), 109.

<sup>185</sup> Sermon 294.10.

head to form the *totus Christus*, the Church receives holiness as Christ's gift as he effects transformation into his likeness (cf. Lev. 19:2; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Called to profound unity, the Church becomes more truly Christ's ecclesial body through receiving his sacramental body and learning thereby to become sacrificial. Preaching to the newly baptised, Augustine claims:

if you are the body and members of Christ, it is your mystery which is placed on the Lord's table; it is your mystery that you receive. It is to that which you are that you answer, 'Amen', and by that response you make that assent. You hear the words, 'the body of Christ'; you answer, 'Amen.' Be a member of Christ, so that the 'Amen' may be true.<sup>186</sup>

As ecclesial unity is forged through partaking of one eucharistic bread (1 Cor. 10:17), Augustine likens that constitutive bread, composed of many grains, to individual believers, ground through exorcism, moistened into dough in baptism, and baked in the Spirit's fire.<sup>187</sup> Hence he exhorts: "be what you see; receive what you are."<sup>188</sup> Consecrated by divine word, the bread is Christ's body, the wine his blood and so worthy reception conveys the full *res*, namely Christ, both head and members: "if you have received well, you are that which you have received."<sup>189</sup> In Maussian terms, Christ's embodied sacramental gifts forever bear his trace, seeking to it instil it more fully on those already signed with his cross in baptism.

Hence, ecclesial incorporation entails sacrifice: as Christ's self-oblation reveals true sacrifice as self-giving, so the Eucharist memorialises sacramentally that definitive offering<sup>190</sup>, with Christ as both priest and victim.<sup>191</sup> God wills his Church to make tangible offerings to manifest through visible signs the rightful

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<sup>186</sup> Sermon 272.

<sup>187</sup> Sermon 272; cf. Sermon 227.

<sup>188</sup> Sermon 272.

<sup>189</sup> Sermon 227.

<sup>190</sup> *Contra Faustum* 20.21. See, further, William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (Collegeville: Pueblo, 1989), 95.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* Indeed, Augustine talks variously of "the sacrifice of our redemption", "of the Mediator", "of peace", "of love", "of the body and blood of the Lord" and "of the Church" (See Stone, 113).

inner sacrifice<sup>192</sup> – “the sign of the thing that we are”<sup>193</sup> – manifested in works of mercy and fulfilled in holy communion [*sancta societas*]<sup>194</sup>. The Church is offered through Christ as sacramental signification aligns with sacrificial reality:

The whole redeemed community, that is to say the congregation and fellowship of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice, through the great Priest who offered himself in his suffering for us – so that we might be the body of so great a head – under ‘the form of the servant’.<sup>195</sup>

Hence, the ecclesial Body of Christ, is offered in union with Christ, its head, for “in the sacrament of the altar... she herself is offered in the very offering she makes to God”<sup>196</sup>, learning thereby to *become* sacrifice through him who is both offerer and offering.<sup>197</sup> Moreover, as Jesus our priestly head has entered heaven he will likewise exalt his priestly members<sup>198</sup>, for the eucharistic food unites recipients perfectly, rendering them “immortal and incorruptible ... the very society of saints.”<sup>199</sup>

However, Augustine’s emphasis upon ecclesial self-offering became obscured in subsequent centuries, allowing the re-presentation of Calvary – with salvific efficacy for the living and the dead – to predominate. Henri de Lubac’s rediscovery of the Augustinian paradigm in the twentieth century was highly significant as it allowed the Church to be understood as *constituted* fundamentally through its relation to the Eucharist, a perspective recovered definitively at the Second Vatican Council.

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<sup>192</sup> *DCD*, 10.5.

<sup>193</sup> Sermon 227

<sup>194</sup> *DCD*, 10.6.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> Sermon 351.7

<sup>199</sup> *In Johannis* 26.17 (*Tractates on the Gospel of John, 11-27*, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 274).



De Lubac was dismayed to observe how Augustine's alignment of Christ's historical, eucharistic and ecclesial bodies dissolved during the medieval period, thereby defining the Church primarily through socio-political juridicism rather than Christ's eucharistically-constituted body. Most strikingly, the adjectives true and mystical – originally predicated to the ecclesial and eucharistic bodies respectively – were interchanged, thus allowing (over-)realistic – often individualistic – eucharistic piety to flourish whilst the Church's sacramental – intrinsically social – self-perception languished.<sup>200</sup> De Lubac attributed this transference to the loss both of richly typological scriptural exegesis which could accommodate 'surplus' meanings and of a strong, symbolic sacramental understanding where visible signs mediate their reality.<sup>201</sup> Whereas Augustine could discern both Christ and his members signified, offered and given in consecrated elements, the increasing need to affirm Christ's true presence against allegedly heretical deceptions, narrowed the sacramental 'content' and reduced the eucharistic sacrifice from that 'intrinsic' co-offering of Head and Body to the Church's 'extrinsic' offering of Christ to the Father. De Lubac yearned to recover the ancient sense of *mysterium* as "more of an action than a thing"<sup>202</sup>, referring not "simply to either the sign or the intended reality, but ... their mutual relationship and interpenetration."<sup>203</sup> Hence he emphasised the Eucharist as dynamically motive and the Church thus constituted perpetually as mystery and sacrament, "the total *locus* of the Christian sacraments ... herself the great sacrament that contains and vitalises all the others" for "she is the sacrament of Christ, as Christ himself, in his humanity, is for us the sacrament of God."<sup>204</sup> Hence, she

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<sup>200</sup> See Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: the Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds CJ, with Richard Price (London: SCM, 2006), esp. chapter 6.

<sup>201</sup> Raymond Moloney, 'Henri de Lubac on Church and Eucharist', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 70.4(2005), 331-342, here, 335-6.

<sup>202</sup> *Corpus Mysticum*, 49.

<sup>203</sup> Boersma, 249.

<sup>204</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason, reprinted edition (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 202.

“represents [Christ], in the full and ancient meaning of the term ... really [making] him present.”<sup>205</sup>

De Lubac’s fertile eucharistic ecclesiology does not demean or diminish Christ’s real sacramental presence but allows the rich human-divine communion – which is, nonetheless, sacraments’ sanctifying purpose – to be signified more deliberately and received more fully. It coheres with Congar’s insight that external ecclesial structures, whilst essential, constitute the *sacramentum* which exist to communicate the inner *res*, namely entry into God’s life.<sup>206</sup> Congar regarded this dynamic, incorporative ecclesiology as clarifying Aquinas’s *exitus-reditus* vision of the Church originating in God and returning to him, divinised, the true bride, temple and body of Christ, representing “the new life of humanity moving Godwards” solely through “participation in Christ, receiving from Him, yet adding nothing.”<sup>207</sup>

Such profoundly organic ecclesiologies reinvigorate Augustine’s eucharistic vision and reaffirm true sacrifice as works of mercy that direct humanity to God in holy communion.<sup>208</sup> Matthew Levering’s consideration of Aquinas’s eucharistic theology draws significantly on Augustine, arguing that the sacrament completes Jewish yearnings for divine communion achieved through sacrificial self-giving love (as epitomised in the *Aqedah*), participating in Christ’s own self-offering through sacramental re-presentation.<sup>209</sup> Levering’s theology is profound, yet consideration of the ‘desire of Israel’ fulfilled through eucharistic ‘cruciform communion’ might be yet richer if the final *trinitarian* dimension was more intensely emphasised: Israel’s longings for divine intimacy find foundation in the

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<sup>205</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sr. Elizabeth Englund, OCD, reprinted edition (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 76.

<sup>206</sup> Boersma, 266-7.

<sup>207</sup> Congar, ‘The idea of the Church in St. Thomas Aquinas’, *Thomist* 1(1939), 331-59, here, 342.

<sup>208</sup> Augustine, *DCD* 10.6

<sup>209</sup> Matthew Levering, *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

Father and Son's own 'inner' longing for the Spirit's communion, providing the urkenotic ground for creation and recreation in Christ.

Williams, however, expresses eloquently this trinitarian 'form' of true eucharistic offering. Examining Irenaeus' seemingly untroubled use of sacrificial language as denoting more than merely offering material elements for transformation or a spiritualised sacrifice of praise, he observes that eucharistic oblation expresses ritually the Church's thankful love, seeking to inscribe its own offering forever within the eternal trinitarian 'liturgy'.<sup>210</sup> Christ's ecclesial body thus offers itself inasmuch as it is forever 'in Christ', made worthy through his once-for-all self-sacrifice and rendered a priestly "temple community" through being constantly offered by him, the eternal high priest.<sup>211</sup> Adding nothing to Christ's earthly and heavenly self-offering, the eucharistic sacrifice speaks of the overwhelming priority of gratuitous, superabundant, trinitarian love, expressed in Israel's covenants, outpoured climactically in Christ and into which the ecclesial, priestly body is to be enfolded. In the consecrated gifts which embody communion, Christ is "already present *as* sacrificed: his body and blood are saving, Spirit-filled realities, not dead passive objects."<sup>212</sup> Hence 'offering Christ' liturgically means 'present-ing' his prior *self*-offering, his objective, complete, earthly oblation which participates in his on-going heavenly intercession as priestly Son, re-presenting creation to the Father.

The eucharistic Church is thus caught up through its worship into a transcendent movement far exceeding tangible rites, into the Trinity's eternal 'liturgy' of giving-and-receiving, the mystery of being-itself in which all creation participates and within which humanity is beckoned to receive itself ever more intensely.

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<sup>210</sup> Rowan Williams, *Eucharistic Sacrifice – the Roots of a Metaphor* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1982), 11.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.* , 25.

Nevertheless, Christ, who made visible “the mystery in person”<sup>213</sup> and who has passed over into the sacraments<sup>214</sup>, allows liturgical rites to manifest his wondrous epiphany and salvific sacrifice. That historical incarnate act “which flows from God’s depths” to bestow “an endless plenitude of being”<sup>215</sup> is mediated through the ceaseless sacramental spring which preserves his paschal action as “a continual, lasting, mystical and yet concrete presence in the Church.”<sup>216</sup> His eucharistic self-gift thus mediates the pure, trinitarian gift, according our ‘ordinary’ ritualised gift-giving a proper, transcendent ontological horizon, neither voluntaristic nor arbitrary but securely located ‘beyond’ itself whilst given itself liturgically. The Eucharist thus discloses the gift, unveiling the true vocation of food, indeed of matter itself, as drawing the world into trinitarian communion, through Christ in whom creation unfolds and who enfolds us into his own relation to the Father, through the Spirit’s sanctifying outpour.

## The Trinitarian Gift of Communion

This sacramental transformation coheres with the patristic vision of salvation as deification (*theōsis*), mysteriously participating in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) through the grace of Christ’s perfect, prior identification with humanity. Unsurprisingly, Christian history has deployed numerous striking images to express stutteringly humankind’s profoundly mysterious *telos*. Prominent among these is the desire, finally to “see [God] as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2; cf. Mt. 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4), thereby overturning previous prohibitions (e.g. Ex. 33:20). Whilst we now ‘see’ Christ under sacramental signs, the final *visio Dei* will

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<sup>213</sup> Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, ed. Burkhard Neunheuser (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 6.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 74.2 and Ambrose, *Apologia prophetae David*, 58, both cited by Casel, 7.

<sup>215</sup> Casel, 57.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

exceed our current Adamic capacities and herald our transformation, finally, into his likeness (1 Jn. 3:2).

Yet, as Nicholas Healy indicates in his examination of Balthasar's eschatology, this raises the dual problem of how uncollapsible human-divine distinction might be preserved whilst honouring God's desire to share himself with his creatures.<sup>217</sup> This is no merely 'academic' question, for Balthasar insists starkly that, as God is the creature's 'last thing', to 'gain' him means heaven, to 'lose' him means hell: final blessedness requires perfect reception.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, humanity's end entails nothing less than participation in the trinitarian life disclosed by Christ, which, as Balthasar observes, is "Being itself", that plenitude whose permanence constitutes eternity, granting all being its 'triune' 'pro-existent' texture.<sup>219</sup>

We remain different from God, yet somehow become like him. How can this be? East and west have provided distinctive 'solutions' to envisage connection that does not threaten difference. In crude terms, the Orthodox, following Gregory Palamas, emphasise the *uncreated* divine 'energies' which, whilst not identical to the divine essence, allow creatures to participate in God's life, whereas Catholics, Aquinas included, regard the conduit as the *created* 'light of glory' which so elevates the intellect above its natural capacity that vision of God's essence becomes possible.<sup>220</sup>

As Healy observes, Balthasar does not attempt to mediate between the two stances, but stresses that the 'bridge' of deifying grace must enable a thoroughly *trinitarian* vision. Following Aquinas, he accepts that this bridge must be created

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<sup>217</sup> See Nicholas Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Eschatology as Communion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10-12.

<sup>218</sup> See *Ibid.* 12.

<sup>219</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, 5:57.

<sup>220</sup> Whilst the two outlooks remain unreconciled, A.N. Williams ventures a partial resolution in her *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

in order for it to ‘meet’ creatures ‘accessibly’. But it cannot be *purely* created because its purpose is to communicate *God* so that human beings might be deified. It is Christ’s hypostatic union which provides this mediation, for grace – the communicable, transforming divine gift – is nothing but the ‘content’ of his life, universalised by the Spirit.<sup>221</sup> Such a sanctifying model depends upon the analogy of being whereby the real distinction between creatures’ being and their essence – a difference absent in God – is upheld through imagining the fullness of being bestowed in partial measure in the (ongoing) act of creation.<sup>222</sup> So humanity receives fractionally from divine fullness, setting it between the joy of truly participating in unimaginable blessedness and the ‘tragedy’ of merely fragmentary possession, suspended between ‘poverty’ and ‘wealth’, a state in which God – intrinsically full, yet ecstatically self-communicating – also ‘inhabits’.<sup>223</sup> Christ, the concrete, personal *analogia entis* alone mediates between created and uncreated being, revealing both God – as trinitarian exchange – and humanity – as ordered towards eucharistic fulfilment – not simply individualistic or corporate but cosmic, thereby expanding the asymmetric human-divine reciprocity exemplified in the hypostatic union.<sup>224</sup>

Balthasar thus renders the somewhat abstract notion of the *visio Dei* more ‘solid’ through imagining a communion of persons involving genuine, free self-surrender, matched by the other’s similar response, an abiding exchange in which personal mystery is never exhausted.<sup>225</sup> Exemplified in the Trinity’s eternal, urkenotic exchanges, such self-giving is willed, reciprocal and lasting, never static but dynamic and ‘ever new’. Within this journey towards personal, ecclesial and cosmic transformation, the Eucharist does not merely represent obedience to Christ or pious devotion, but reveals, in action and content, the very ‘structure’ of

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<sup>221</sup> Healy, 176f.

<sup>222</sup> See chapter two below.

<sup>223</sup> See Healy, 71-2.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 3.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-3.

being, whilst providing, moreover, means for creation to reach its filial, deified end: “beholding and participating in the Son in his eucharistic self-giving becomes a beholding and participating in the life of the Trinity.”<sup>226</sup>

Following Aquinas, Balthasar understands Christ’s entire incarnate life as expressing his eternal procession from the Father and communicating that reciprocal love in and for the world, enabled and interpreted through the Spirit.<sup>227</sup> Creation is therefore deified inasmuch as it becomes included in Christ’s mission of revealing trinitarian love, realizing its original, God-given purpose through “[acquiring] an inward share in the divine exchange of life” and thus becoming “able to take the divine things that it has received from God, together with the gift of being created, and return them to God as a divine gift.”<sup>228</sup>

Thus, consumable eucharistic gifts are not simply (essentially arbitrary) physical, temporal *means* for divine communion but reveal the *meaning* of matter and time as participation in the Trinity’s eternal communion.<sup>229</sup> Through the Eucharist we are elevated into God’s perfect life of giving-and-receiving, a joyful, reciprocity that fulfils the gift of existence in, through and beyond current physicality, providing a genuine foretaste of the resurrection body. This fullest participation in the trinitarian gift means receiving Christ’s gift-of-self most intently and then, in him, offering ourselves – and all creation – back to its divine source. How might this complementarity function?

First, the Eucharist represents receiving Christ’s self-gift. For Balthasar, Christ’s incarnate life is wholly eucharistic, directed in thankful return to the Father and so in receiving his ‘liquified’ sacramental self-gift we receive his person and his temporal history, particularly his paschal offering, set against his eternal ‘history’

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<sup>226</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, 5:384.

<sup>227</sup> See Healy, 191, for a summary.

<sup>228</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, 5:521.

<sup>229</sup> Healy, 192-3, following Schmemmann.

as the Father's self-gift: we undergo "the definitive recasting of the I ... in the divine fire" through "[contemplating] Christ's self-surrender" to be "transformed into it."<sup>230</sup> Moreover, we receive anticipation of our definitive share in the resurrection where our filiation and ecclesial incorporation find their perfection in being "given a home in the absolute triune love."<sup>231</sup> Thus the entirety of Christ's self-offering – and, by participation, ours also – are 'surpassed' in a 'yet greater' paternal response in the Spirit which reveals the meaning of existence not merely as intrepid self-abnegation but reception of a glorious destiny which forever celebrates life triumphant over death, a life permeating and transforming creation's remotest crevice.

Secondly, within this all-encompassing victory, creation's return becomes possible. Thankfully receiving God's eucharistic and pneumatological gift, human beings learn to give themselves, as Augustine taught, becoming more fully Christ's ecclesial body, allowing creation to glimpse the meaning of bodiliness and matter as given-in-order-to-be-given-up, a dynamic demonstrated supremely in Christ's incarnate life. We can trustfully offer ourselves – even unto death – knowing that Christ's self-gift resulted not in kenotic loss, but plerotic reception, in resurrectional glory. In humanity's eucharistic self-offering, creation becomes enveloped in Christ's prior oblation, enfolded into its divine source, not merely by 'external' action but in being conformed to the 'inward' pattern of reciprocal love revealed in his singular life, death and resurrection.

The Eucharist thus heralds a 'new covenant' operating not through an 'extrinsic' sacrificial model but on an 'intrinsic', ontological level. As Jesus gave himself rather than some other, so cult becomes subordinated to *personhood*, the true temple fulfilled in himself (Jn. 2:19-22) which reveals Israel's profoundest

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<sup>230</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, 5:391-2.

<sup>231</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *et al.*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982-91), 7:406.



longings as participation in his relation to the Father (17:20-26).<sup>232</sup> For López, Christ's kenotic, eucharistic gift-of-self sustains the Church in lasting divine unity.<sup>233</sup> Yet this is no monadic oneness but profound trinitarian communion, for as Christ receives his being from the Father and returns everything to him in filial obedience through a 'pro-existence' manifested in salvific self-emptying, so his eucharistic recipients are drawn out of themselves<sup>234</sup>, into his own "act of self-oblation .... the very dynamic of his self-giving."<sup>235</sup>

With desire reoriented towards God in thankfulness for creation's blessed goodness, humanity recognises itself as fundamentally "*homo adorans*" ... *the priest*" who receives the world as God's gift and returns it to him, thereby finding its life transformed into divine communion.<sup>236</sup> At the Eucharist, the Spirit allows us to find ourselves deified through Christ, touching the mystery of being through tangible sacramental gifts which manifest divine plenitude outpoured and elicit our own self-offering.<sup>237</sup> For Milbank, the Eucharist endlessly repositions participants as those as fed by God's self-gift and given themselves as food so that they become costly food for others.<sup>238</sup> Yet this involves no oblitative self-expenditure: worshippers' self-offerings sustain charity's *reciprocity* for "in giving we are replenished"<sup>239</sup>, even as eucharistic accidents of bread and wine are not annihilated but become more truly themselves.<sup>240</sup> Matter therefore matters: through physical Christ-bearing elements and sanctified ecclesial life, the

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<sup>232</sup> Léon-Dufour, 275-7.

<sup>233</sup> López, *GUB*, 181-2.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>235</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, I.13, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_benxvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_benxvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html). Accessed 12 August 2014.

<sup>236</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

<sup>237</sup> See David Bentley Hart, "'Thine own of Thine Own": Eucharistic Sacrifice in Orthodox Tradition', in Roch A. Kereszty (ed.), *Rediscovering the Eucharist: Ecumenical Conversations*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2003), 142-169.

<sup>238</sup> John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Norwich: SCM Press, 2009), 134.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>240</sup> See *ST*, IIIa.77.1 for Aquinas's discussions of 'free-floating accidents'.

Eucharist sustains loving communion, outpouring the ‘pure gift’ of trinitarian life through liturgical interchange and refining Mauss’ interminable, escalating agonistic gift-exchanges through the restorative fire of the Spirit’s eternally peaceful love-gift. God thus reveals Israel’s bloody sacrifices perfected in corporeal eucharistic gifts and thereby inscribes humanity’s limitless self-oblations within his own inward, transparent mutuality.<sup>241</sup>

Recent Pauline scholarship confirms this human *telos*, albeit from a non-sacramental perspective, understanding Christ’s visible, redemptive kenosis (Phil. 2:5-11) to reveal God’s eternal inward self-giving and, through conformity to Christ, humanity’s deified end. Indeed, Paul’s subsequent call to sacrificial living (3:7-21) reveals striking linguistic parallels with the kenotic hymn that suggest believers’ ‘imitative’ kenosis to be the appropriate response to Christ’s self-emptying,<sup>242</sup> a ‘counter-gift’ embodying a ‘new’ ontology through participation in God’s cruciform character.<sup>243</sup> So human beings discover their true selves in the crucified, risen Christ (Gal. 2:19), understanding Israel’s vocation to holiness (Lev. 19:2) to mean cruciformity,<sup>244</sup> whilst awaiting in the eschatological future God’s ‘counter-gift’ of resurrection with Christ, that *anastasiformity* which completes our deified reconfiguration.<sup>245</sup>

Humanity’s theotic vocation is therefore not to self-annihilation (as Derrida’s unreciprocable gift would propose) but increasing participation in divine kenosis-plerosis. Christ receives-in-order-to-give and gives-in-order-to-receive, with ‘outflow’ matched by ‘inflow’, yet across *delay* – ultimately the hiatus between crucifixion and resurrection – which renders the self-gift not some immediate

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<sup>241</sup> John Milbank, ‘Stories of Sacrifice’ in *Modern Theology* 12.1(1996), 27-56; here, 53-4.

<sup>242</sup> See Morna Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 21; 92.

<sup>243</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 162.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>245</sup> Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 266.

auto-response but engaged fully in the palpable agony of deferred fulfilment. Christian life, though sometimes excruciatingly kenotic, depends upon God's perpetual replenishment from inexhaustible riches, a fullness reserved for our end, yet anticipatorily outpoured through the Spirit's desirous pledge and Christ's eucharistic self-bestowal.<sup>246</sup> Humankind's deifying reorientation constitutes an ontological shift through deepening conformity to Christ's self-giving. However, this represents no esoteric abstraction from everyday life but submits each minor sacrifice before God's ever-greater gift, thereby intensifying participation in Christ who enfolds creation into its trinitarian source.<sup>247</sup>

Mary's teleological path towards God's fullness exemplifies every believer's deifying pilgrimage, a transformation undertaken with kenotic, eucharistic love.<sup>248</sup> In surrendering her Son at Calvary, she becomes mother of believers (Jn. 19:27), revealing love which receives itself through extravagant self-giving.<sup>249</sup> Mary thus participates in "the dialogue of love that constitutes the very divine nature", remaining yearnfully receptive to God's graced working.<sup>250</sup> Pending her final participation in that endlessly generative love, she responds to God's desire for human-divine union through participating in that same free, self-expending love.<sup>251</sup> Such astounding transformation is possible only in her Son, for "Christ's gift-of-self, the icon of the Father's mercy, begets the communion within which one is allowed to be."<sup>252</sup> In Mary's trustful, representative *fiat* we share in Christ's 'Yes' to the Father (2 Cor. 1:19), becoming, like her, "a gratuitous longing for God"<sup>253</sup>, awaiting Christ's glorious parousia and resurrection's embodied fulfilment. Receiving him precisely through entrusting themselves entirely to him,

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<sup>246</sup> See Milbank, 'Stories of Sacrifice', 52.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. John Milbank, 'Stories of Sacrifice' in *Modern Theology* 12(1) (1996), 27-56; here, 52.

<sup>248</sup> López, 'Mary, Certainty of our Hope', 180.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.* 193.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.* 188.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.* 189.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.* 192.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

believers are thereby enfolded, like Mary, into fruitful, nuptial, filial union with God who is kenotic gift, replenishing counter-gift and endless communion.

## Conclusion

Thus the gift is fulfilled: from the living, joyful memory of Christ's self-donation, the Church learns to offer itself ecstatically to God as an asymmetric counter-gift, thus intimating the trace of the pure, perfectly reciprocal, trinitarian gift woven proleptically into its life, whilst longingly anticipating teleological completion through God's superabundant grace. Dynamic eucharistic sacrifice thus becomes humanity's very life, through ever-intensifying participation in the life which 'knows' nothing but love's timeless, unrestrained exchange. Here, self-donation is total, for our gift, however dear, is enfolded deifyingly within, and overtaken by, God's own gift: the Father's *Aqedah*-like Son-offering which perfects ancient, transitory sin-offerings. This gift – eucharistically enacted, endlessly communicable, gloriously transformative – provides the embodied space for humanity to be taken, offered, consumed by the Spirit's fire and then received anew 'on the third day', graciously welcomed back into *this* life whilst already inhabiting the resurrection's endlessly hospitable, cherubim-enveloped gap within which we find fullness.

# General Conclusion and Future Prospects

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Against specific anthropological and philosophical conceptions of the gift I have attempted to show how scripture, read through the broader dogmatic tradition, addresses, overcomes and transcends non-theological theories, proposing the divine – specifically trinitarian – gift in its superabundant, self-diffusive, self-displacing glory as the cornerstone without which the gift edifice collapses into perplexing aporiae. The ‘architecture’ of the pure gift, founded upon Israel’s blessed, yet wounded, rapport therewith, discovers its definitive model in Christ, who reveals true humanity – giving-in-order-to-receive and receiving-in-order-to-give. Yet his giftedness superexceeds exemplarism, for in him, the eternal Word and icon of the Father, creation itself unfolds and will be enfolded at its end. In particular, he discloses his timeless, ‘inner’ filiality – through baptism and transfiguration, and, most particularly, in paschal abandonment, resurrective counter-gift and exalted enthronement – fulfilling Isaac and Abraham’s otherwise inconceivable sacrifice. Thus, in the outpouring of the filial Spirit, adopted humanity is invited to ‘inhabit’ the ‘icon’ of Christ the Son revealed therein, discovering in its inverted perspective that its measureless depths find their vanishing point in the receptive human heart. In this divine grace, desire is reconfigured and belief awakened, and every striving finds its deified rest in the Trinity’s motionless motion.

I have argued that the trinitarian gift resolves and surpasses the gift’s otherwise intractable difficulties, not simply *permitting* anticipation, remembrance and reciprocity through ‘visible’ corporeal giving-and-receiving, but somehow *expecting* them in their fathomless ontological weight. Thus, in Christ and the Spirit, the pure gift appears and is given. But it is no ‘tame’, static gift but

profoundly vectored, demanding to be practised within the ‘in-between’ through which humanity – and thus creation – journeys in its quest for fullness. What, then, of this intermediate state, between what Maximus called well-being and eternal well-being, between creation’s delightful seventh day and its glorious eighth? For Maximus well-being meant the reciprocity of mutual love (Lev. 19:18; Mt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31) whilst eternal well-being entailed Christ-like love-of-others that *surpassed* self-love (Jn. 15.13). Christ’s own destiny shows that sacrificial self-gift to be not Derrida’s annihilative, unreciprocated ‘gift-of-death’ but the immensely fruitful ‘standing-in-the-place-of-another’ that is consummated in God’s resurrective counter-gift.

Yet Christ’s daring, ec-static displacement is not simply means of salvation but its very ‘content’ and ‘texture’. God’s new creation pays little heed to the Enlightenment’s hope for incremental human betterment that self-evolves into an earthly paradise wholly continuous with our current, impaired ‘half-life’ in which glimpses of anticipated glory evocatively shimmer. Only some drastic, decisive divine intrusion will fulfil our amorphous longings and show them to converge sharply on Christ, the incarnate Word, within whose kingdom human realms dissolve. But that disjunctive intervention does not alter the ‘deep structure’ of trinitarian giving-and-receiving which underlies, resolves and perfects the otherwise aporetic gift. So as adopted, Spirit-filled children long for participation in God to be fulfilled, how is ‘ordinary’ giving-and-receiving ‘redeemed’ and transformed? How is deification anticipated in ethics?

It will be helpful to recollect one of the thesis’s key insights about Christ’s life, namely his constant desire to stand outside himself, to be through being-for-the-other. For Christ such displacement affords him repeated opportunities before, during and after his passion to pour himself out, not as nebulous, ineffectual self-squandering but as determined, transformative gift delivered and received in the very place of deficiency. Balthasar’s understanding of the trinitarian life as

eternally kenotic, timelessly ec-static, grounds his dramatic account of the extent of Christ's salvifically ec-static giving to hell and beyond and suggests 'pro-existence' as the deep structure not simply of his own uniquely redemptive self-offering but of true existence *per se*. Christian ethics thus depends on a imitative love-for-the-other that is not 'merely' sacrificial but also *transformative*, given so that the other may exceed current deficiencies to thrive resplendently.

But not all displacement is redemptive; not all kenosis replenishes others and makes for their flourishing. Here I mention three examples where displacement increases bondage and kenosis demeans, as goods, people and even creation itself, are transferred with catastrophic consequences.

First, whilst creation is pure contingent gift, radically dependent upon God's gift-of-being at every instant, its goods may become merely tradeable objects untethered from their divine source, perilously commodified, as bananas, cotton, oil or precious minerals are displaced around the globe. Under unfair trading conditions, such 'gift-giving' can be desperately asymmetric, sometimes fuelling violence as scarce reserves are plundered or producers, forced to sell amid in fluctuating international markets way beyond their control, undergo severe, unholy kenosis that is profound diminishing. Secondly, people, too, may be displaced through conflict or become themselves commodified, trafficked to provide cheap labour or enslaved prostitution, degraded through shockingly depletory self-emptying. Finally, there is creation's own displaced kenosis in the wake of global warming, as rising water levels inundate, overwhelm and destroy both natural habitats and established communities, jeopardizing species' well-being and provoking unwilling human migration. As the primal chaos, tamed at creation, threatened to re-engulf as a result of human lawlessness (Jer. 4:23; cf. Isa. 24:5), so responsibility for climatic disorder is laid by scientists almost universally at the feet of profligate, reckless humanity.

The unjust displacements of goods, people and the natural order may serve the ‘replenishment’ of others such as shareholders of international conglomerates, beneficiaries of slave labour or those whose wealth allows them to pursue environmentally irresponsible lifestyles. Yet they simultaneously represent enforced, life-sapping kenosis for others that diminishes human dignity, sometimes with tragic, fatal consequences. God’s superabundant gifts in creation are meant to provoke joyful, thankful reception that is perpetually transmitted for others’ increasing well-being, truly participating in the here-and-now in the Trinity’s replete communion, the reciprocal being-for-the-other that causes mutual flourishing. Human impoverishment and slavery, alongside creation’s chaotic plight, represents a catastrophic failure, but not one caused due to divine lack; there is, after all, ‘too much’ in God. The problem is, in no small measure, due to God’s dynamic, motive gift – directed to all so that all may prosper – being siphoned greedily so that only a minority thrive, or in some cases, possess a staggering surplus that has become static and lifeless. How, then, might the gift contentions I have demonstrated outline ethical principles for a more life-giving order?

Christopher Steck helpfully analyses the key contours of Balthasar’s call to ethical love on the basis of the theological anthropology emanating from his dramatic account of history. On the basis of Christ’s complete solidarity with humankind, enacted unto hell, my neighbour mediates God’s personalised call and my reaction to her is intrinsically bound up within my worshipful response to God, not as freestanding moral action but as genuine counter-gift that bears the trace of the divine originator and allows the gift to multiply endlessly.<sup>1</sup> The gift that enables such response moreover *shapes* it, marked with theological, eschatological hope for my neighbour that surpasses the world without circumventing it, allowing confidence in the here-and-now through my radical,

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Steck, *The Ethical Vision of Hans urs von Balthasar* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 112-114.



lavish, eucharistic self-giving, my becoming food so that my neighbour may be fed.<sup>2</sup> For Balthasar, then, the purpose of Christian love is to establish communion with the other, participating in God's gracious covenantal love, meaning thereby not mere one-sided kenosis but unity-in-difference, a mutuality that recognises my neighbour's responsibility also to me and understands the gift to be vitally reflexive, sharing in perfect trinitarian reciprocity.<sup>3</sup> Ethical performance is unintelligible outside such teleology, becoming denudedly situational with no overarching 'form'. A trinitarian ontology, however, locates compassionate kenosis within divine surplus and generosity, enabling my neighbour's actualization inasmuch as both of us grasp being to mean being-for-the-other and anticipating the new creation where love received becomes love transmitted.

William T. Cavanaugh observes that Milton Friedman's highly influential paradigm of the so-called 'free' economy rests upon exchanges that are voluntary for both parties – undertaken with some genuine expectation of tangible, mutual gain – and also unrestricted by the influence or interference of external regulatory bodies such as the state.<sup>4</sup> The system ostensibly functions through satisfying the desires of both consenting parties, yet in presuming no *telos* beyond itself, it is not clear what is actually desired other than boundless desire itself, which reproduces insatiably and inexorably. Augustine, on the other hand, clearly emphasized that true desire which had the kingdom of our deification as its concrete destination and which sought to enjoy God alone, merely *using* things *en route* as means for the far greater end of *enjoying* God eternally. By contrast, the conflictual, life-sapping desires of western capitalism are literally end-less, potentially generating more unmanageable restlessness and causing its victims to dwell 'outside' themselves not in a 'salvific' sense that aids the flourishing of others, but an unholy 'ec-stasis' of dissipation and depletion. Fallen Adam was compelled to

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-118.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>4</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

dwell outside Eden, losing his 'where' amid illusory, life-sapping giftlessness, yet nevertheless called, as primal priest-king, to return the superabundant creation to its creator. This unstinting return means not some burdensome, superadded duty but represents Adam's very nature, in trinitarian beginning and end. As long as the world persists in self-centred acquisitiveness that exalts greed over charity and prefers end-less capitalist economies to the divine, kenotic economy of final communion, its protagonists will remain poor, yet possibly without realizing it, materially wealthy, yet ontologically impoverished, ill-prepared for Christ's new creation of transparent giving-and-receiving forever enveloped by divine fullness.

The succinct systematic theology of the gift proposed in this thesis generates a moral theology that probes the contemporary world's impaired rapport with the divine gift in myriad perplexing, life-sapping situations where the *telos* of rich, joyful communion is obscured or undermined.<sup>5</sup> The far-reaching ethical issues unveiled will form the next stage of my research, based upon the thesis's key contentions: a gift forever rooted in trinitarian abundance, involving eucharistic thankfulness and anticipating joyful return, a face-to-face encounter that mediates the pure gift in concrete, life-imparting exchanges. To propose an alternative metanarrative to the all-encompassing sway of capitalism, expecting bounty rather than scarcity and compassion rather than competitiveness, may seem like wishful thinking. Yet it is rooted in the life of the trinitarian God who creates forever out of nothing and who raises the dead, who generates communion from the timeless communion of his own life and subjects sinful death-dealing illusions to his own irresistible excess. It imagines a new order where the stultifying disarray of ruinous inequality yields to harmonious being-for-the-other that cannot represent merely some romantic chimera but a vision of the 'really real', where private

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<sup>5</sup> An example of such endeavour might include the alternative economic models outlined by Cavanaugh (27-28) and current attempts to legislate internationally against practices which wilfully diminish the world's sustainability and its creatures' well-being. See Polly Higgins, *Eradicating ecocide: laws and governance to prevent the destruction of our planet* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 2010).

ownership is permitted only insofar as benefits the needy<sup>6</sup> and where the circulating, transmitted gift means not financial loss but ontological gain, “since one is more oneself and more perfectly oneself in giving to others.”<sup>7</sup>

Such a vision depends upon understanding God as love, both eternally and economically, the One who gives himself constantly and unreservedly for the world’s creation, salvation and deification on the basis of the Father and Son’s mutual self-giving and self-receiving in the communion of the Holy Spirit. It imagines a world governed entirely by charity, that “love received and given” which founds, permeates, redeems and perfects creation, setting mercy, selflessness and communion as its *telos* and immediate working principle and providing the only possible resolution to the world’s grave socio-economic ills.<sup>8</sup> The transformative gift is thus not ‘merely’ ultimate, triune blissfulness but also the world’s blessed, penultimate state. Here the Spirit forms us for embodied Christlike being-for-the-other by which we may be reshaped ecstatically for eternity, prepared, as beloved adopted children, to dwell in the space opened up for us by the Son, close to the Father’s heart.

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<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, IIaIIae.66.1.ad 2 and IIaIIae.66.2.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 5:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html), accessed 13 September 2014.



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