

# RISEN TIME: EASTER AS THE SOURCE OF HISTORY

• José Granados •

“Christianity’s contribution to our culture does not need to accept the great rift that divides our modern world, but consists rather in healing it. The resurrection of the flesh is precisely a witness that this healing is possible.”



When Michelangelo’s fresco of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel was unveiled for the first time, Pope Paul III fell to his knees in an act of reverent adoration, fearful before the figure of Christ in judgment.<sup>1</sup> This impression of a Christ condemning the damned has become a widespread interpretation of the painting. It is not the only possible reading, however; Jesus’ raised hand could indeed signify a rejection of the wicked, but it may equally well be viewed as an invitation to the blessed to advance toward him. In this view, Christ in judgment is the dynamic center of the painting and sets the entire scene in motion.

This interpretation is reinforced if we consider that Michelangelo’s original intention may have been to illustrate not the final judgment but rather the resurrection of the flesh.<sup>2</sup> If this is the case,

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Timothy Verdon, *Michelangelo teologo: fede e creatività tra Rinascimento e Controriforma* (Milan: Ancora, 2005), 130.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Marcia B. Hall, “Michelangelo’s ‘Last Judgment’: Resurrection of the Body and Predestination,” *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 85–92: “It is not anger but

what the painter intends to focus on is precisely the body of the Redeemer, together with the bodies of all the risen. The center of the picture would then be the powerful strength that radiates from Christ and causes all the figures in the painting to move around him.

In this regard, it is important to note that the body of the risen Christ is not the type we find in Greek sculpture.<sup>3</sup> Michelangelo does not portray the self-contained body depicted in ancient art, a body that expresses the nobility and harmony of the soul. To the contrary, this Christian body is full of energy, it is a body that exerts a magnetic attraction over the other bodies on the Sistine wall, a body endowed with a force that springs out into the rest of the picture.

The dynamism that Christ's risen body bestows upon the entire scene helps us to see the resurrection not only as the destination point of history, the final moment of a long series, but also as the very source of history's dynamism. Thus, Easter brings with it a new understanding of time. Is it also a spiritual time, analogous to the spiritual body of the glorious Lord (cf. 1 Cor 15:44)? If so, how can we describe it?

In order to answer these questions we will first present the content of Christian faith in the resurrection (1) and its implications for a correct interpretation of history (2). We will then discuss how this understanding is not alien to the experience of body and time (3), an experience assumed by Christ throughout his earthly life (4). We will then be ready to consider the resurrection as the beginning of a risen, spiritual time (5).

### *1. Resurrection: coming from the Father*

The first confessions of faith in Jesus' resurrection come to us directly from the liturgy of the first Christians. They attest to joy at the surprising event of Easter and its world-changing character: that very Jesus of Nazareth who preached in Galilee and was

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Michelangelo's characteristic energy that he [Christ] embodies. Christ's gesture does not consign the damned to Hell, but rather puts into motion the process we see taking place before us" (89).

<sup>3</sup>Cf. John W. Dixon, *The Christ of Michelangelo: An Essay on Carnal Spirituality* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); cf. Verdon, *Michelangelo teologo*, 125.

crucified under Pontius Pilate has now been raised by the Father to his right hand.<sup>4</sup>

In order to interpret this unique event, the Church had an essential conceptual background at her disposal: the Old Testament scriptures. According to Jewish expectations, the resurrection was not a return to normal life, but the inauguration of the definitive stage of time and of its eschatological fulfillment, which entailed God's final transformation of the world. Should we deduce from this vision that the resurrection entailed a reviling of history, a sort of spiritual flight into the beyond? To the contrary, this fulfillment was described in continuity with the history of Israel. The God who had made a covenant with his People and had come down to live with them in the Holy Temple, promised to rebuild this Temple with his own hands and to bestow new life on his children in order to make a permanent dwelling with them. Thus, resurrection meant the assumption of this concrete world and history into its ultimate destiny. Ezekiel's parable of the dry bones that come back to life (Ez 37:1–14) can serve without contradiction as an image both of the People that returns to Jerusalem after the exile, and of the final resurrection of the dead.<sup>5</sup>

Aided by this Jewish backdrop, the disciples formulated how the Easter event was in continuity with the history of the earthly Christ while it also brought a radical transformation. The image of the body of Christ as the new Temple, destroyed and rebuilt, is important in this regard. The sentence "one and the same," which was to be applied later by the Church Fathers to express the unity of man and God in Christ, finds its roots in the unity between the risen Lord and the crucified Christ. "It is I myself" (Lk 24:39), says Jesus when he appears to his disciples; and he shows them his wounds in his hands and side (cf. Jn 20:20).

While the Old Testament context was necessary for the interpretation of the Easter event, Jesus' resurrection surpassed the scope of Israel's expectations. For while the resurrection was conceived in Jewish circles as an event that was to affect the whole of humanity once history had been concluded, in Jesus' case the

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Heinrich Schlier, *On the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (Rome: 30 Giorni, 2008).

<sup>5</sup>For an interpretation of the text in the context of Old Testament belief in the resurrection, cf. N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3: *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 119–28.

unsurpassable *eschaton* found fulfillment in one concrete individual and within the course of history. Although the event differed from the Old Testament assumptions, it was interpreted within the communitarian categories of Scripture: the disciples understood it not only as the private fulfillment of the individual Jesus, but as the beginning of a new era that had consequences for the whole of world history. The question, then, had to be raised: how is it possible that the definitive time of fulfillment could take place together with the continuation of history and its attendant trials and expectations?

The second essential novelty in the Easter experience, with regard to its Old Testament background, is that Jesus did not attain only a privileged place very close to God, as Israel's martyrs were expected to enjoy in their resurrection. The exaltation and enthronement of Christ at the Father's right hand meant that he had been granted the Name that is above every other name, that is, God's very name (cf. Phil 2:9; Heb 1:4). How was it possible for a human being to reach this height? How could a concrete human history, lived out in the midst of uncertainty and threatened by the continuous presence of death, arrive at the end of its trajectory in the heart of the divine essence?

The Church developed its first Christology by reflecting on Jesus' earthly path in light of his final glorious destiny. The Easter event, precisely because it extended to the core of the divine essence, could not simply be the continuation of a purely intra-historical thread. No one could go so high if he did not come from above; no one could ascend into heaven, had he not descended from heaven (cf. Jn 3:13). Faith in the resurrection was the departure point for understanding the eternal preexistence of the Son and his eternal coming-forth from the Father, a belief that led to the confessions of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Thus, Easter is as much a mystery of Jesus' final destination as it is of his origin; it is as much about his going to the Father as about his coming from him. The risen Christ appears indeed to the disciples as coming from the Father with the Father's own authority and glory.

The language used in the New Testament to speak of Easter reflects what we have said. Two schemes are used: that of Jesus being raised again to life (resurrection), and that of Jesus' glorification at the Father's right hand (exaltation). The first highlights Easter's continuity with the history of Jesus; the second, its novelty. It is important to note that the emphasis is on the Father's action, though

the Son's activity is also mentioned. In this way the resurrection is presented as a new birth and prompts the question of Jesus' origin in the Father. Paul's encounter with the risen Lord is described as the Father's revelation of his Son in the Apostle (Gal 1:16).

Faith in the resurrection redefines our vision both of God and man. With respect to God: it is at Easter that he is revealed unequivocally as a Father. For if, as the disciples experienced in their encounter with the risen Christ, God has space within himself to receive Jesus as his only Son, it is because his relationship with the Son was internal to God from all eternity. Otherwise, God would constitute himself as a Father somewhere in the course of history and would not be able to bring salvation to history. With respect to the human being: if human history is able to enter into such a fullness of communion with God, it must have been capable of this fulfillment from the beginning. From the final destination of time we illumine man's origin and path as a journey toward the fullness of divine filiation. Maximus the Confessor summarized this view when he wrote: "the one who has been initiated in the ineffable and hidden force of the resurrection knows the purpose for which God created originally all things."<sup>6</sup>

We have, then, two statements about Easter that are in continuity with Jewish expectations, while also presenting a radical novelty: a) the resurrection as the eschatological fulfillment of history in the person of Jesus; and b) the resurrection as Jesus' entrance into the very essence of God as his Son. The Christian theology of history develops from the union of these two statements. At Easter the history of the world comes into its meaning because it is included in the dynamism of love between Father and Son that constitutes God's deepest mystery. The worldly course of events is not guided by chance or determined by an anonymous deterministic law, but can rather be explained in light of the Son's path from the Father to the Father.

The Church Fathers expressed this claim by saying that Easter took place on the eighth day, a day which both follows upon the seventh day in the series of the week, and also extends beyond the week's circular rhythm into eternity.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the resurrection

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Gnostic Centuries*, 1, 66: PG 90, 1108 B.

<sup>7</sup>Cf., for example, Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 138, 1–2; English translation: *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington, D.C.: The

was also joined to the first day, Sunday (day of the Sun), in which God created the world: “we all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the Universe, and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.”<sup>8</sup> In this way Easter appeared as the final revelation of the origin of all things in God. At the dawn of Easter a search for the source of all things begins, a search that starts with the life of Jesus and moves backwards to the rest of time. This search implies that the Gospel’s reflections on the virgin birth, on Christ as the new Adam, and on the eternal coming of the Son from the Father are all internal to the experience of Easter. In this sense the resurrection is not just one mystery among others, but a dimension that pertains to every mystery of Jesus’ life, the light in which the entire Gospel is written and ought to be read.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. *History and its meaning*

We can conclude that at Easter the concrete history of the world plunges into the Son’s eternal filial relationship with the Father, into his coming from the Father and his going toward him. In this light, Easter is as much an affirmation about eternity as it is about time. For what Christians learn in this mystery is not a desire to run from history, but rather the ability to affirm its goodness fully in light of its primordial origin and final destiny in the Father’s love.

The attempt to affirm Jesus’ return to the Father and the manifestation of his divinity, but not that he took with him human flesh and human time in their concreteness and materiality, is the core of the Gnostic temptation, which takes different forms in the history of the Church. This temptation is related to various contemporary attempts to reduce the resurrection to a mystical experience, as if it happened only within man’s interiority. In this vein, it has been said that the empty tomb is not necessary for belief in the

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Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 207.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67; English translation: *The First and Second Apologies*, trans. Leslie W. Barnard, Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 71.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Anthony Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008).

resurrection;<sup>10</sup> or that the experience of the disciples is just a light that allows them to reinterpret their memories of Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

As we have seen, the continuity with the Old Testament background excludes the possibility of such an explanation: since the Bible tells the story of God's coming to man's flesh and history, its fulfillment too must be related to corporeality and time.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, this connection with our concrete space and time is of extreme importance for understanding Easter's significance for contemporary culture, for the problem Christianity faces in postmodernity has to do precisely with the possibility of God's manifestation in bodiliness and history. To isolate Christian faith from these realms in order to make it acceptable only condemns it to irrelevance. As Romano Guardini has noted, if God is not the God who acts in our body and time, then he is not real enough; he is not present in a significant way in man's life and can be reduced to a beautiful or a consolatory theory.<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis expresses a similar point in *The Great Divorce*, where risen bodies are described as heavier, more solid, than earthly ones.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, solidity ought to be added to the traditional properties of the glorious body, such as clarity and agility.

Robert Spaemann, in an article devoted to the existence of God, has recently insisted on this point.<sup>15</sup> What does it mean, he asks, to believe in God? The answer lies in the connection between two fundamental aspects of human experience. Human action is pursued, on the one hand, with the implicit assumption that meaning exists and can be found; that there is goodness in the world and that we can live according to it. On the other hand, the human being is continually faced with the irrefutable facticity of things: the laws of nature that rule at every moment do not depend on us and

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<sup>10</sup>For a discussion, cf. *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung?: Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, ed. Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 155 (Freiburg: Herder, 1995).

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Roger Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999).

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Philippe Lefebvre, *Livres de Samuel et récits de résurrection: le messie ressuscité selon les écritures*, *Lectio divina* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 27: "le texte biblique déploie une histoire de la chair avec Dieu."

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Romano Guardini, *Die Sinne und die religiöse Erkenntnis: Drei Versuche* (Würzburg: Werkbund, 1958).

<sup>14</sup>Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001).

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Robert Spaemann, *Der letzte Gottesbeweis* (Munich: Pattloch, 2007).

do not necessarily contribute to the construction of a meaningful life. These two realms seem to coincide only by chance, for man perceives that the events of the world proceed according to their own necessity and independent of his intentions.

Spaemann argues that faith in God means to believe in the coincidence of these two realms, which he relates to two divine attributes: goodness and power. Everyone knows that in the world there are areas of meaning and goodness; everyone knows that in the world there are effective forces beyond our will that influence the course of events. Only the believer knows that these two elements are not extrinsic to each other but are rather one in God's providence. In other words, the believer accepts that God is good and that his goodness is powerful enough to determine the course of events. In this regard Spaemann complains that many a preacher talks only about a loving God but does not mention faith in God's omnipotence. A confession of God's love that would then deny his capacity to act in the world would ultimately confess a love that is full of good intentions but not real enough and, therefore, not good enough. On the other hand, a powerful God without goodness would not be powerful enough, for this power would be conceived always as in opposition to other forces of reality, and thus limited by them.

In this light we can turn to Christian faith in the resurrection, with its insistence on the connection between the earthly life of Christ and his exaltation at Easter. Easter tells us that the concrete course of history finds its fulfillment when it is located in the current of love that unites the Father with his Son. The facticity of things, with its apparent lack of meaning, is explained as a path that leads from the Father's love to his final embrace. Because the resurrection is God's final word on Jesus' concrete life and death, we know that his love is powerful enough to act in the world; because the life and death of Jesus are included in the resurrection and not canceled by it, we know that this power is the power of love, which reigns in the world through the self-offering of the Father's Son. The resurrection is the exact point in which we find the confluence of both affirmations: God is good; God is omnipotent.

Once we accept that the resurrection brings forth the final reconciliation of history, then we can measure the extraordinary power it requires of God. For Easter is not just a happy ending, a way to escape time and leave behind all the accumulated traces of evil through the centuries, a new beginning that would forget what

had gone before. In order to achieve its real goal, the resurrection has to be powerful enough to bestow meaning on the whole of history from beginning to end. For this purpose, a simple reinterpretation of the events does not suffice, since this would take too lightly the non-coincidence of fact and meaning in our experience. In other words, it does not suffice to reveal to us how things have gone according to a wise plan, even if we could not see it at the time. The keys held by the risen Lord, the keys of death and of the netherworld according to Rev 1:18, must not only disclose the meaning of every single event of the world's history (showing what was hidden) but must also transform it, purifying it from evil and allowing it to be fulfilled and assumed into eternity. It is in this regard that Benedict XVI cites the German thinker Theodor W. Adorno in *Spe salvi*: “[Adorno] asserted that justice—true justice—would require a world ‘where not only present suffering would be wiped out, but also that which is irrevocably past would be undone.’ This would mean, however . . . that there can be no justice without a resurrection of the dead.”<sup>16</sup> When formulated this way, the resurrection appears as the most powerful act of God (cf. Phil 3:10). “The One who raised Jesus from the dead” (cf. Rom 4:24; 8:11) becomes God's honorific title par excellence.<sup>17</sup>

How can we explain this confluence of the power and goodness of God that are proper to the resurrection? How is it possible for the concrete time of the world to be infused with fullness of meaning? To understand the resurrection as the arrival point of history allows us to see in turn the path that leads from the human experience of time toward Easter. If history is able to bear the fullness of the divine presence, if it is able to enter into a total relationship with the divine, this is because it was ready for this transformation from the beginning. We will now trace the path that leads from our experience of time to its fulfillment in Jesus.

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. *Spe salvi*, 42; cf. also Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 1995): “At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology. Its great desire would be the resurrection of the flesh, a desire utterly foreign to idealism, the realm of the absolute spirit” (207); “that no reforms within the world sufficed to do justice to the dead, that none of them touched upon the wrong of death—this is what moves Kantian reason” (385).

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Schlier, *On the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, citing Rom 4:25; Acts 3:15; 2:24; 5:30; 1 Cor 6:14; Eph 1:19; Rom 6:4; Rom 8:11; and 1 Pt 3:18. According to Schlier, the resurrection is God's action par excellence.

### 3. *The mystery of human time*

As we have already pointed out, there have been various attempts to conceive of the resurrection as taking place only in the interiority of the believer and manifested externally by its effects in the believer's words and works. When Rudolf Bultmann accepted Barth's characterization of his position that "Jesus is risen in the *kerygma*," he wanted to insist on the novelty and power of the disciples' preaching as an expression of their existential encounter with the living Jesus.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, he rejected as mythological any talk of the corporeality of the resurrection: in his view it conflicted with the affirmations of science, thus jeopardizing the possibility of faith for modern consciousness. In this way Bultmann was able to secure a "safe area" for faith that was unaffected by the intrusions of science.

The cost of this operation, however, was extremely high, for an enormous region of being—that of the material universe—was excluded from the transformative power of the Gospel. The Christian experience, which in this view could speak only to the isolated consciousness of man, lost its relevance for shaping community and society. Contrary to what Bultmann thought, Christianity's contribution to our culture does not need to accept the great rift that divides our modern world, but consists rather in healing it. The resurrection of the flesh is precisely a witness that this healing is possible.

One difficulty in understanding the Easter event is that, influenced as we are by Cartesian dualism, we conceive of matter and time as devoid of meaning. In this understanding, man's relationship with the divine is viewed as taking place apart from his corporeal presence in the world. This, however, does not correspond with the biblical view of the human person. It is precisely his concrete situation on the earth from which he is formed, his place in the concrete events of history, that allows the human being to relate to God.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. Walter Kasper, *Jesus, the Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).

<sup>19</sup>Cf. José Granados, "Taste and See: The Body and the Experience of God," *Communio: International Catholic Review* (forthcoming).

### 3.1 *The body's openness to transcendence*

There are elements in contemporary philosophical reflection on the body that, in harmony with the biblical vision of man, offer a way out from the dualism that characterizes a Cartesian perspective. While Descartes considered the body as a secondary component of man with regard to the soul's original *cogito*, today we see attempts to develop a vision of the body as a constitutive dimension of the person's core identity.<sup>20</sup> In this vision, bodiliness is the space of man's openness toward reality. It is only through his body that man is able to participate in the external world and to manifest himself in it. Because of his embodiment, man is not an autonomous and isolated self, but rather a being who is constitutively open to relationship. Moreover, by encountering in his body the otherness of the world, human life opens up to new encounters on a journey toward ever greater horizons, toward transcendence.

Primary among the encounters that man undergoes through his corporeality is the experience of personal love, which, by revealing the inexhaustible greatness of the other person, opens up the transcendence of man's path in a definitive way. The different ways man participates in the world through his corporeality do not find their fulfillment in themselves, but always point beyond, into the horizon of personal love. Eating, for example, does not consist only in the assimilation of food, but points toward the possibility of sharing a common world with others, as expressed symbolically in the fraternal meal. In the same way, sexual desire does not stop at the physical or affective union between man and woman, but calls out to be integrated into a communion of love that accepts the other person in his or her fullness. The body, which enables man to relate to the world, appears here as the place where the mystery of the other enters into man's life, calling him to go beyond himself.

It is precisely here, in this personal encounter made possible by man's embodiment, that God's mystery and transcendence appears in human life. If God were to show himself to the Cartesian luminous consciousness, he would always run the risk of being enclosed within man's gaze. God would then become an idol, an

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<sup>20</sup>Cf. a summary of some of these contemporary attempts in José Granados, *La carne si fa amore: Il corpo nella storia della salvezza*, trans. Francesco Pesci (Siena: Cantagalli, 2010).

object placed “in front of man,” and not the all-embracing mystery that sustains man’s existence. To the contrary, man’s corporeality (an ensouled corporeality, to be sure), by linking man’s interiority with the external world, offers a space in which God can show himself as both immanent and transcendent, interior to his creature without any diminishment of his majesty. In the Bible, this space is represented by man’s heart, the place where his life opens up for the divine Spirit to descend.<sup>21</sup>

Man’s embodied condition, because it allows him to encounter the otherness of the world in the horizon of God’s transcendence, opens up life as a journey in time. Embodied life is always temporal life. It is to the consideration of this temporality, which is intimately linked with bodiliness, that we now turn.

### *3.2 Time and transcendence*

The human person lives in time and finds his identity in time. In order to pronounce who he is, he needs to tell his own story, from the immemorial past to the unforeseeable future, and only through the mediation of this narrative can he express his own mystery. What this means is that the human person not only “has” time, but “is” his own time.

From this viewpoint, man’s being in time seems to be a painful fragility and dispersion. Because it is in time, man’s life is dispersed in the rapid and unceasing flow of past, present, and future. By recognizing that past and future are part of his identity, man acknowledges regions of his being that are not under his direct control and do not fall under the luminous light of consciousness. As the poet says: “Time past and time future, / Allow but a little consciousness. / To be conscious is not to be in time.”<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, it is precisely time’s openness to otherness that gives time an ecstatic character, a way of prompting man to come out of himself and to find his identity in communication with the world and others. It is indeed impossible for the

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Geist und Bewußtsein,” *Theologie und Philosophie* 79 (2004): 481–90.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. T. S. Eliot, “Four Quartets,” in *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), 120.

isolated consciousness to arrive at a meaning for its being in time. The enigma of each person's temporality, because of its dispersion into the past and future and the resulting evanescence of the present, can only be illuminated from a point outside the limits of the individual's own borders. Temporal man requires personal mediation in order to configure a meaningful relation to his past, present, and future. What does this mean? We will briefly show three dimensions of the connection between time and the interpersonal encounter, dimensions we will develop later.

a) Our being in time elicits, first of all, the need to understand our origin. Man's having a past reminds him that he is always dealing with things he has received and that he cannot change at will. This could cause him to interpret his own life as governed by blind fate, or to see his existence as a "being thrown into the world." The question "where do I come from?" receives an initial answer only when the child discovers that he is the fruit of the love of his parents. In this light of filiation the human being understands that the givenness in his life is not the product of arbitrariness or luck, but is rather a personal gift that, if received with gratitude, enables him to act in freedom.

b) Man's existence in time also forces him to face the question of the continuity of his own life. How is coherence possible in the face of time's constant dispersion? Is there a thread that allows him to find meaning in the succession of past, present, and future? As we will develop later, it is the experience of receiving and giving a promise—which is only possible within the encounter of love—that assures man that this continuity is possible. The promise, by assuring me of the presence of the other and enabling me to be present to him in faithfulness, expands the narrowness of the instant and enables a meaningful narrative of my life.

c) Finally, to be in time means to face the question of one's destiny. What is the future, this time of uncertainty that lies before us? Can it be fully deduced from the past, as, for example, in the experience of an unrelieved boredom? Does the future's total openness harbor a continuous threat, the dissolution of our being into something utterly different? It is, again, the encounter of interpersonal love—now in its dimension of fruitfulness—that allows man to gauge his relationship to the future. The promise of love does not only ensure continuity, but it also announces an excess of being, a growth beyond oneself in the "we" of the union with the beloved. Through this encounter the future appears in a different

light: one's life has an inexhaustible novelty and the ability to expand beyond one's own projects and plans. This experience is confirmed in the birth of a child, who is the fruit of the love of the spouses, and who inaugurates for the parents a new time, a time of creativity, in which their life extends beyond themselves.

At this point our reflections on time converge with what we said earlier regarding the body. If the body is the space of man's openness toward the world, others, and God, and the space in which man learns that relationship constitutes his own identity, then time is the openness of our life to others, the space that enables a covenant with them that reaches to the core of who we are.

The question remains whether the temporality of these experiences can be applied to the whole range of man's activities. Can every event be said to relate to the past in a way analogous to the experience of being born; can the fleeting present always be related to keeping a promise; and can the future always be related to the experience of generating a child? The fact that this does not always seem to be the case, that many situations in life do not seem to come from a previous love, and that many acts do not seem to generate fruit, leads to the crisis of man's identity in time. If it is deprived of meaning, time witnesses only to the brokenness of our identity, to its lack of unity, and to its boredom. Time, when it is viewed mechanistically, is reduced to a time of death, from which we would like to liberate ourselves.

Against this backdrop, death constitutes the ultimate obstacle for a meaningful interpretation of time. A vision of human existence as dependent on body and on time (as *being* his body and his time) makes the problem of death more difficult to solve than it would be with a dualistic understanding of man. Since man's body is a crucial part of his identity, death is certainly not a liberation from a prison but rather a real threat to man's integrity; its loss is a real loss; the scandal of death is the seemingly definitive denial of all goodness and meaning.

On the other hand, our viewpoint permits a new horizon to open in the question of death, which can be posed not in terms of the subsistence of an isolated spirit, but rather of the perdurance of the relationships in which man preserves his identity. In other words, man's presence in body and in time, in showing his openness to transcendence beyond the isolation of a self-sufficient soul, opens the

way for an answer in terms of dialogical immortality.<sup>23</sup> In fact, interpersonal love implies the discovery of something eternal in the beloved. The categories of filiation, promise, and generation allow man to see the connection of his time with transcendence, which is grasped as the primordial origin, the ultimate destiny, and the foundation of our capacity to promise. This link offers a foundation for hope in a final victory over death. While it is true that the body is the most fragile element of man's constitution, and that time is a witness to dispersion and mortality, the body and time are also the way in which man opens up his life to a covenant with the immortal God.

Who wins in the battle played out between death and life on the battlefield of body and time? While the death of the body seems to be irrefutable, for those who are able to see in depth, the presence of eternity in the encounter of love is made possible by our very corporeality. As the seventeenth-century Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo says in one of his sonnets, death has the power to turn man's body into dust, but this very body, because of the love it has contained, utters a promise of remaining beyond death: "my veins, which a liquid humor fed to fire, / my marrows, which have gloriously flamed, / will leave their body, never their desire; / they will be ash but ash in feeling framed; / they will be dust but will be dust in love."

#### 4. *The mystery of Jesus' time*

A definitive answer to the questions we have raised is disclosed to us only in Jesus' life.

The body, the place of the encounter between man and the world and of his openness to transcendence, is the place assumed by the Son of God, who is total relationality to the Father, when he enters into the world. The presence of the eternal Son in the body is seen not only in terms of the contrast between the infinity of his divine essence and the limitations of corporeality, but primarily as the harmony and correspondence between the person of the Son,

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<sup>23</sup>As, for example, the one outlined by Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 150–53.

who is the fullness of relation to the Father, and the body, which is the place where man's life opens up to communion with others and with God. At the incarnation, a human body, which reveals man's coming from God and his movement toward God, expresses the relationship of God's Son to the Father. This connection allows us to see Christ's body not as a sort of diminished corporeality, but rather as the very fullness of bodiliness.<sup>24</sup>

The connection between the Son and the body is crucial for understanding how Jesus interpreted the world he lived in and its events. Being the Son of God, Jesus experienced his concrete presence in the body in light of his coming from the Father, that is, in light of the primordial gift that constituted his identity and enabled him to act. Because of this precedence of the gift of God, Jesus' acceptance of the concrete facticity of life was not passive resignation before the laws of fate, but rather the active receptivity of a foundational relationship with the Father, from which the Son lived and acted.

From this viewpoint the incarnation is the first step toward the resurrection, which we have described as the interpretation of the course of history in terms of the love between Father and Son. Of course, the incarnation does not fully bring forth the coincidence of the two realms. There are many elements in Jesus' life that do not seem to be easily harmonized with God's goodness and with his loving plan for humanity. Jesus had to face the presence of evil in the world in all its concreteness because it was part of the past he inherited from his People, and part of the future threats he would face, culminating in his death on a cross. In order to integrate the whole of time, Jesus needed to traverse time. As T. S. Eliot writes, "only through time time is conquered."<sup>25</sup>

It is at this point that we need to consider the action of the Holy Spirit throughout Jesus' life, from his incarnation to his resurrection. The Bible associates the divine Spirit with God's capacity to appear in the concrete realm of man's body and time, while simultaneously respecting the difference from his creature and inviting man to walk toward a fuller communion with him. In the

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. Bernhard Welte, "Leiblichkeit als Hinweis auf das Heil in Christus," in *Auf der Spur des Ewigen: Philosophische Abhandlungen über verschiedene Gegenstände der Religion und der Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965).

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Eliot, "Four Quartets," 120.

biblical vision, “body” and “Spirit” are not opposed, but intimately connected: the body is man’s openness to God’s Spirit; the Spirit is God’s capacity to make himself present to man without exhausting his divine presence or losing his always-being beyond. It is proper to the Spirit to animate the dynamism that moves creation toward God: history is the Spirit’s field of action.

Now, since the flesh the Son assumed is also subject to temporality and its patient development, the Spirit has to be at work during the life of Christ. The body of the Son, whose realm is to interpret every single event in the light of the Father’s love, traverses the common time of humanity, which is the time moved by the Spirit, whose realm is to draw everything toward full communion with the Father. The entire life of Jesus is a process in which his body (that is, the place in which he encounters the world, others, and God) receives the action of the Spirit (that is, of God’s openness to and love for man). To the fullness of the Son’s presence from the incarnation on, there corresponds the progressive bestowal of the Spirit’s gift during the time of Jesus’ life. While the Son provides the filial structure of salvation, the Spirit imparts the dynamism that allows the flesh of Christ to be totally configured to the person of the Son. The Son and Spirit, the two hands of God according to Irenaeus of Lyons, work together not only in the creation of Adam, but also in his recreation in Jesus’ time.<sup>26</sup> This perspective opens up a vision of Jesus’ life that fully takes into account Christ’s need of growth. We can describe Jesus’ life as the process in which flesh and time, step by step, by being brought through the Spirit into the dynamism that unites Father and Son, become more spiritual.

In this way the dimensions of temporality we described above (the past as filiation, the present as the maintaining of a promise, the future as fruitfulness) are lived out in fullness by Jesus. By receiving his existence in a filial way and knowing the presence of his Father at his origin, Jesus accepts all of his past with filial gratitude. This reliance on God as the foundation of existence allows him to live in the time of the Father’s promise, which ensures the unity of all the moments of his life: Jesus is sure of the Father’s projects and becomes himself a witness of God’s fidelity to his covenant. This promise, in its turn, opens up toward a new future,

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<sup>26</sup>Irenaeus uses the image of the hands of God to speak of man’s creation in *Adversus haereses* IV, Preface, 4 (SC 100, 390); *Adversus haereses* V, 6, 1 (SC 153, 72).

toward a fulfillment that ensures the fruitfulness of Jesus' actions. Christ is able to generate a new time for him and for the children God has given him (cf. Heb 2:10–13).

Jesus' past is the past of filiation, of his continuous coming from the Father; Jesus' present is the present of faithfulness, a time to receive and keep God's promise; Jesus' future is the time when the promise yields fruit, the future of fecundity and generation. Every single moment of his life is lived according to these coordinates, which are intrinsically interrelated: filial gratitude sustains the promise and opens up the fruitfulness of the future. Thus Jesus' time is not a dispersal of his being and activity, but the gradual gathering of past, present, and future into the unity determined by the arrival of his hour, which is in the Father's hands. Jesus says "my hour" as he says "my Father."

Since, as we have said, the Spirit is the agent of this progressive gathering into unity, Easter can be seen as the final stage of a process that consisted in the gradual spiritualization of the Son's time.<sup>27</sup> Against this backdrop, the resurrection was indeed prepared in time, as the mature fruit of history's womb, and Easter can be seen as the moment of the assumption of time into eternity, the final and complete gathering of past, present, and future. In what does this final change consist? What is the texture of Jesus' risen time?

### 5. *Risen time*

At Easter Jesus enters into God's eternity. Does this fact mean that he is no longer in connection with time? To answer this question we need to note that in the Bible God's eternity is not the opposite of time, but rather his sovereignty over time, which means his capacity to reveal himself in time and to make history a path toward him.<sup>28</sup> Israel finds Yahweh by remembering his saving action

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<sup>27</sup>It is precisely inasmuch as history and the flesh are taken into account that the role of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection appears in fullness. A vision of the resurrection that does not reflect enough on the meaning of bodiliness, leaves only a nominal place for the Holy Spirit, whose function ends up being absorbed by the Son or the Father. Paradoxically, to spiritualize the experience by interiorizing it, eliminates the presence and work of the Spirit as the Bible understands it.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "The End of Time," in *The End of Time? The Provocation of Talking About God*, ed. Claus Urban and Tiemo Rainer Peters (New York:

and by expecting deliverance from its enemies. Interpreted against this Old Testament backdrop, Christ's resurrection is not a flight from history, but rather the final unveiling of history's truth and importance. Since human history is able to contain the Son's journey from the Father to the Father, past, present, and future can be assumed into the dynamism of love that unites Father and Son.

From the viewpoint of Easter it becomes possible to understand the true essence of time: it is not the dispersal into non-being or the fall from perfection which St. Augustine laments in book XI of his *Confessions*, but rather a realm open to the Spirit, who gathers time into the unity of the trinitarian communion. As we will show in the following, Easter allows us to interpret time in terms of an interpersonal encounter of love, turning the past fully into the space of filiation, the present into the time of the promise, and the future into a horizon of fecundity. What we have identified as the true essence of human historicity is here brought to perfection. Without Easter, time is only a diminished image of itself, one that is unable to bear true meaning.

Accordingly, what takes place at Easter is not only a revelation of the hidden truth of history, but is also history's transformation. Precisely because all moments of time are interrelated, Easter is not just the last stage of time's journey but is also the source from which time springs. Given that Easter time alone can constitute true human history, the resurrection, which some have described as non-historical, is actually the foundation of history. As Emmanuel Lévinas wrote: "resurrection constitutes the principal event of time."<sup>29</sup> In this view the resurrection becomes the cornerstone of history, which, even if rejected by historians, is the foundation of the building (cf. Mt 21:42). As a cornerstone, it is not located at the beginning of the arch, but at its center. The first Adam comes first, and the last Adam only afterwards. However, all the forces of the arch converge toward this cornerstone, the single piece providing unity and consistency to the entire structure. We can see in this image the way that the resurrection acts both toward the

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Paulist Press, 2004), 4–25.

<sup>29</sup>Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (Paris: Kluwer Academic, 1990), 317: "La résurrection constitue l'événement principal du temps"; English translation: *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 284.

future and its uncertainty, and toward the past and its unchangeability.

The resurrection, then, inaugurates a new measure of time and a new way of living out this time in its fullness. At Easter, it is not only that something happens *in* time, but something also happens *to* time: time is risen; the texture and rhythm of human temporality is transformed into the closest proximity to eternity.<sup>30</sup> Thus, as there is a spiritual body that contains the ultimate vocation of the flesh, so there is also a spiritual time that contains the ultimate vocation of history. Let us now attempt to describe in more detail the risen time of Jesus and the way it is communicated to the rest of humanity.

### *5.1 Resurrection and the past: risen memory*

The Easter accounts continually refer to “memory.” The disciples are invited to cast their minds back and remember how Jesus had already predicted his own passion and resurrection (cf. Lk 24:6–9). The gospel of John reminds us that only after the resurrection did the disciples remember certain events in Jesus’ life and become able to penetrate their meaning (cf. Jn 2:22). Easter is also the time to look back at the ancient prophecies and see how everything that was written in them has come to fulfillment in Jesus (cf. Lk 24:25–27, 32, 45): he is risen according to the scriptures. This connection between Easter and memory shows the transformative power of the resurrection over the past.

First, Easter overcomes the fragility of memory, which is always trembling on the brink of fading into oblivion. When the traces of memory are erased, man’s identity is called into question. How is it possible to overcome the anguish and fear caused by the risk of forgetting, not only the things that happen to us, but our very self? The fact that memories are born out of our connection with others and are kept alive within a community gives an initial answer to the question: memory is not a solipsistic effort; we receive our

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. Niels Nymann Eriksen, *Kierkegaard’s Category of Repetition: A Reconstruction*, Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series (Berlin–New York: W. de Gruyter, 2000), 56.

memories from others and we maintain them by staying in relationship with others.

Death, however, seems to present an unsurpassable obstacle to memory's capacity to preserve the past. Are not those very others who are the recipients of our memories also threatened by ultimate forgetfulness? It is only because the interpersonal encounter opens up to transcendence, only because God makes himself present in it, that we can catch a glimpse of hope in our quest for an answer. As Israel well knew, memory is able to hold the presence of the divine, of Yahweh's saving intervention on behalf of the People. And if God leaves his trace in memory, then he is also willing to remember all that happens, even when man forgets. In this light, memory could defy the apparent Lethe of death; memory could be as strong as oblivion, could be its match.

But the final answer to this question came only through the life of Jesus. His memory, as the memory of the Son, was always rooted in God. Because it relied totally on the Father, Jesus' memory had unshakeable roots. Against this backdrop, Jesus' cross and death appear as memory's most difficult trial. In this light the resurrection can be seen as the salvation of memory, the witness that memory overcomes the threat of corruption. At Easter the Father remembers the entire life of his Son, beyond the ultimate forgetfulness of death; at Easter he gives back to Jesus the memory of his earthly life. The fact that the wounds of the cross remain in the Lord's body is the sign that his memory is preserved forever. His risen body becomes the true memorial in which all of history is present.<sup>31</sup>

However, it is not enough for memory to be preserved. For everything to be remembered can be both a blessing and a curse. The capacity to forget is also the basis for a healthy memory, a memory that is able to avoid being obsessed by the negative side of history and is able to take a healthy distance from the past. It is also the basis for a transformation of the past, its healing, its continuous renewal. Is it possible for the resurrection not only to preserve

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. Jean Louis Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 97–98: “even if we forget Jerusalem, and our hand withers, the hands of God eternally bear the unforgettable. The following verse says: ‘Behold, I have graven you on the palm of my hands.’ Who could wipe away what God has graven on his hands? The hands of the glorious body of Christ bear forever their scars (*stigmata*) of the unforgettable, as an eternal memorial of time and history.”

memory, but also to transform it, permitting it to forget its evil and strengthen its goodness, thus shaping anew the time that precedes Easter?

We tend to think that the arrow of time goes only in the direction of past to future, following a chain of causes and effects. Human time, however, is a combination of past, present, and future, in which each moment is intertwined with the others. Because of this link, there are instances within our experience in which the arrow of time is reversed and an event in the future modifies the texture of the past.<sup>32</sup>

Forgiveness is an example of this possibility to extend the significance of an event retroactively. Let us note that forgiveness cannot be the mere expunging of the traces of an evil committed. Since a person's past belongs to his identity, sheer forgetfulness would destroy both the evil and the person who committed it. What is required of forgiveness is that it reshape the past, transforming it in goodness and incorporating it into a different narrative of the person's life. To forgive is to untie the bonds of the past and to liberate the person toward a new future. In order for this operation to be possible one must assume the existence of a past that is more original than the past of the evil committed, a source that the evil act was unable to touch and from which regeneration is possible.<sup>33</sup> We are able to forgive a friend because we remember an initial goodness that opened up in our relationship with him, and we judge that this goodness goes much deeper than the offense he has committed against us. The difficulty of forgiveness grows with the depth of the offense and it decreases with the solidity of the perception of this original goodness. This goodness, in its turn, is deep enough only because it is tied to the transcendent origin of the other person, to

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<sup>32</sup>In this sense, as Balthasar argues, the necessity of the prophecies is not opposed to Jesus' freedom of action. While it is true that the prophecies contain the structure of Jesus' life, it is also true that Jesus' life is the ultimate source of the prophecies' truth. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994): "On the other hand, he is not limited in his freedom, nor even (despite the "Did not Christ have to suffer these things?" of Luke 24:26) are his actions laid down in advance. For as the fulfillment he is also the foundation of the Promise, the archetype by which and toward which all the types are drawn. That biography of himself that he learns from sacred history is an account of *him*, not preceding him" (55).

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, 2004), 486–93.

the person's foundation in God. Memory, then, is connected to our coming from God, to our being his children. This link of memory with filiation is at the roots of the possibility of our forgiving.

Forgiveness is only one side of memory's power to reconfigure the past. While forgiveness deals with the evil of the past, there is also a sort of remembering that deepens into its goodness and unveils its roots. This is the happy memory that acknowledges the depths of man's origin in the light of man's coming from the Father. By seeing it in the light of the gift of existence that is always already received, memory restores the past to its fullness.

We can now glimpse how the resurrection is able to transform the past. The Easter witnesses speak of a re-birth, of a new generation of the Son from his Father (cf. Ps 2:7, quoted in Acts 13:33). The history of Jesus, which includes in itself the history of humanity, at Easter is brought completely into the current of love that unites Father and Son. Precisely because the one who is risen is the eternal Son of the Father, the one who comes from the Origin that precedes all pasts, a new foundation of the past becomes available within history. The connection of history with this radical Origin allows for a restructuring of the past. There is no evil, no matter how wicked, that can go deeper than the original goodness of the Father that the Son makes available in history through his paschal mystery. The resurrection allows all past events to be connected with the foundational Origin. Easter can be described, then, as the most powerful act of memory, because it links the concrete time of Jesus of Nazareth with his Origin in the Father. This transformation of time now extends to all of history, back to the first man.

Irenaeus of Lyons speaks in this regard of history's "recirculation." In his view, the resurrection is not only the fulfillment of history in Jesus, but also a force that goes from Jesus to the past, to the very beginning of time. To illustrate this point the bishop of Lyons uses the Gospel scene of the washing of the disciples' feet. According to this symbolism, the feet, as a part of the body, represent Jesus, who came at the end of time. From him comes the regeneration of the rest of the Old Testament, up to Adam, its head.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Cf. *Adversus haereses* IV, 22, 1; for this interpretation: cf. Manuel Aróztegi, *La amistad del Verbo con Abraham según San Ireneo de Lyon*, *Analecta Gregoriana* 294

By transforming memory, the resurrection transforms the texture of human temporality. What the resurrection makes present in human history is the possibility to interpret every past (even the past we ourselves have produced with our free actions and which is no longer at our disposal to change) in the light of filiation, of our coming from another who loves us and pronounces over us a word of approval.<sup>35</sup> When he looks at his own past man does not find mere chance or necessity as his legacy. In the light of Easter he is able to receive the past, even amid the darkness of suffering, as a liberating gift that opens up for him a new path in life.

### *5.2 The resurrection as the time of the promise*

The Risen Lord, in his coming from the Father at Easter, illumines the whole past from the point of view of its foundational Origin. By unveiling history's roots, Christ is able to utter the word that offers a unitary vision of time: "I will be with you all days till the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Easter inaugurates the time of Jesus' promise, which holds days, years, and centuries together.

Man's capacity to promise is a witness to the continuity of human history. The very possibility of making a promise of faithfulness owes itself to the fact that man possesses his own future in advance and knows that he will not lose his past. Otherwise the promise would be only a beautiful wish with no foundation in reality.

We may ask, however: is it possible for a human being, whose existence is limited by birth and death and is subject to the winds of change, to maintain the unity of time that is required for giving a promise? An analysis of the act of promising shows that it exceeds the capacity of an isolated individual who, hovering in his own instant, would be unable to offer any guarantee regarding his whole span of life. According to Robert Spaemann, in order to promise one needs to accept that he himself is a promise, that each person is a sort of ontological promise that cannot be questioned and

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(Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2004), 180–87.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. E. Falque, *Métamorphose de la finitude. Essai philosophique sur la naissance et la résurrection* (Paris: Cerf, 2004).

in which his capacity of promising is rooted.<sup>36</sup> To refer the promise to something more primordial than man's will confirms what Gabriel Marcel argues: it is only reliance on a transcendent ground of existence, which keeps history together and to which man can entrust himself, that is able to account for man's capacity to promise.<sup>37</sup>

In the Bible the God of Israel is the God of the promise who maintains fidelity to his People and thus enables man to keep his own promises. It is only because God himself has entered history and guaranteed the unity of his People's path, that man can maintain a promise in his turn. On the other hand, the history of Israel seems to witness to the final impossibility of man's promise: the covenant is broken again and again, even when Yahweh remains faithful to his word.

The final answer is given only in Jesus' resurrection, the fulfillment of God's promises to man and the foundation of man's capacity to promise. The resurrection witnesses that the promise is possible, both on the side of God, because the Father raised Jesus from the dead, and on the side of man, because of Jesus' faithfulness to the Father up to his death on a cross. The Church's time is kept together by the strength of this promise inaugurated at Easter.<sup>38</sup>

### *5.3 Resurrection and the future: a new fruitfulness*

The uttering of a promise not only ensures the continuity of the present but also opens up the horizon of the future. When we

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 223: "One takes upon oneself the promise which, as a person, one already is. By speaking and demanding to be understood, one has engaged in the same personal relation that is presumed in each separate act of promising. The question of how to secure the promise no longer arises. The final security is the refusal to pose that question, a refusal already made when human beings recognize each other, and claim recognition from each other, as persons. The person is a promise."

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity* (New York: Farrar, 1964), 147–74.

<sup>38</sup>As an example of the transformation of time that took place at Easter we can refer to the indissolubility of the sacrament of marriage. The way in which Christian spouses give to each other the whole of their time, no matter what comes in between, is ultimately rooted in Christ's resurrection: the risen time of Easter makes the future of the spouses available to them in a new way.

promise to stay faithful to a friend we are not counting on our own immobility, which is something more proper to a stone than to a person. For a living being, stability is possible only together with continuous renewal. This is why a promise always has an element of expectation, which constitutes the horizon of its fulfillment. We could speak, in this regard, of the fecundity of the promise. Generation, in fatherhood or motherhood, is in fact possible because it is rooted in the fruitful promise of the spouses.

In a similar way, the promise Jesus received and kept not only contained a way to live out the present; it was also open toward the future. Jesus knew, as his work and preaching attest, that his faithfulness to the Father was able to bring about a new time, the final hour of history. Easter was the final confirmation of this claim, the moment in which Christ's fidelity became able to bear a new fruit. In the resurrection Jesus is not only given new life from God, but he is also able to generate in his turn, to become a source of life for others. This power to give life, which is proper to the Father, has been bestowed upon the risen Jesus: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will" (Jn 5:21). Jesus becomes at Easter a spring of living water (cf. Jn 7:38).<sup>39</sup>

Christ's fruitfulness, like the generation of a child, inaugurates a new future. Plato points out already in the *Symposium* that one way to achieve immortality is to give birth in beauty.<sup>40</sup> Generation, the fruit of a loving encounter with the good and the beautiful, brings about a different relation between man and his tomorrow. The future of Easter is the future of a fulfilled fatherhood: Jesus becomes the Father of the upcoming age, *pater futuri saeculi* (cf. Is 9:6).

What is the transformation that Christ brings to the time of fatherhood? In our experience, generation is connected with death. The transmission of life to the child announces the decay of the father. Fatherhood ultimately requires that the father leave in order to open up a space for the child. But the fruitfulness of Christ at

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<sup>39</sup>The majority of Church Fathers before Origen apply Jn 7:38 to Jesus and not directly to the believer: cf. Hugo Rahner, "Flumina de ventre Christi. Die patristische Auslegung von Joh 7, 37.38," *Biblica* 22 (1941): 269–302; 67–403.

<sup>40</sup>Plato, *Symposium* 205b; English translation: *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 489.

Easter comes precisely from his final victory over death. The risen Jesus reveals the fullness of fatherhood in his ability to become the source of life without having to recede. The opening up of a new space for his children does not require him to disappear. Accordingly, the new life that springs from Christ does not come to us only from the past but, as it were, also from the future, from the fulfillment of time in which Jesus now reigns.

We can say then that for the Christian, the true future is neither the future of uncertainty and chance, nor the future of one's own autonomous projects. The risen future, the future that will last forever, is the future of the fruit, the future of fatherhood and motherhood. Because Jesus is risen, it is possible for all events to become events of generation, pregnant with the novelty of a new fruit. Because Jesus is risen, time becomes a time of rejuvenescence and not of decay, a time in which the best wine is kept for the end (cf. Jn 2:10). If this future still holds its suffering, this is the suffering of labor pains, the time in which all of creation groans (cf. Rom 8:22), for the Church gives birth to her children (cf. Rev 12:2).

## 6. *Conclusion*

We can return now to Michelangelo's painting. His vision of the body, we said, goes beyond the Greek harmony of a self-contained corporeal presence. What we have here is a body that comes out of itself, a body capable of expansion and communication beyond its borders because it is filled with divine strength. It is from the dynamism of Jesus' body, as Michelangelo painted it in the Sistine Chapel, that the whole of history is set in motion.

Jesus' risen body is the source of a risen time, a spiritual time fulfilled by the Spirit's presence. This risen time is not alien to earthly time: its structure preserves an analogy to the human experience of past, present, and future, understood in light of an interpersonal encounter. The past is one with our coming from God and witnesses that the Father is Origin and Fountainhead. The present is the present of fidelity, of the keeping of the promise, first received from God and then uttered by us. The future is transfigured into the fecundity of love, the continuous excess of our encounter with the divine.

Since our time became at Easter a time fully shared in God with others, Jesus' time can be donated to us, it can communicate to

us its rhythm. Moreover, it is capable of expanding toward the past and future to embrace the whole of history. History, from beginning to end, has been inserted into the dynamism of filiation, promise, and fruitfulness that is proper to eternity. At the end of time, history will be fully conjoined to the embrace of love of Father and Son in the Spirit. And what Michelangelo requests in one of his poems will come to pass: “make my whole body an eye, so that there is no part of me that does not enjoy you.”<sup>41</sup> □

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<sup>41</sup>Cf. Valerio Mariani, *Poesia di Michelangelo* (Rome: Palombi, 1941), 65: “Deh! Se tu può’ nel ciel quanto tra noi / fa del mio corpo tutto un’occhio solo / nè fie parte di me che non ti goda . . . .”