

THE REASONABLENESS OF AN EVENT THAT AWAKENS LOVE

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“What is reasonable is not what corresponds to reason’s self-determined a priori conditions of knowledge; it is rather what aids reason in the fulfilment of its *telos*, i.e., to contemplate the origin without which human existence becomes *il-logical*.”

Aquinas stated that “the ultimate happiness of every intellectual substance is to know God,” to see him for all eternity.¹ I would like to consider here the statement that the event of Christ is reasonable because it allows man to contemplate the face of the Father. My argument, however, does not propose to advance a new apologetics, which might still be liable to the modern dualistic temptation to seek and account for divine love outside love itself. The point is instead to give an account of Christ as an event posited by absolute love. It is the event of Christ in all its dimensions that sheds light on the eventful nature of being—both the being of man, and all finite being. To focus on an examination of the “eventfulness” of Christ will enable us to show how Christ’s allowing man “to see” points to the fact that man—and all of the cosmos given to him (Gn 1:28–31, 2:18–24)—has been created in order to contemplate, i.e., enjoy and worship, the one God who, in the event of Jesus Christ, has revealed himself as a triune communion of love. Reason, therefore, is

¹Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, 25.

“created reason” and is exercised within a human logic. This logic is always already on its way toward seeing the Origin because, as we will see in the first section, man can only make sense of his being if he understands it as gift. The second section of the paper attempts to complement the anthropological exploration with an ontological exploration: in what sense is finite being, as gift, also endowed with an eventful structure? This is not an attempt to make “event” into an all-encompassing category, but rather a demonstration of the richness and depth of created being in its constitutive symbolic nature. Finite being is seen in terms of form or image because its roots are located in being itself, which expresses itself as “other” in the finite being that it has posited. The mission of the Son, as we will see in the third section, offers to the eyes of faith the ultimate ground of man’s and being’s eventfulness and hence the ultimate form of event: the love of the Father.² The event of Christ is the “abbreviated Word” of the Father, who unfolds in his own body the *Logos* of God’s and man’s being (Rm 9:28, Vulgate). The final part of our reflection clarifies that the event of Christ, unlike other historical occurrences, continues throughout history. The Holy Spirit, *communicatio Christi*, makes contemplation of the Father’s face in Christ’s sacramental presence possible because he is the one who brings man into union with God through the Church.³

1. Man’s gift of existence

If it is true that the present is the only dwelling place given to man, then it is impossible to grasp what “seeing” means without first

²Our understanding of “event” incorporates the common sense of the term but has its ultimate foundation in the theological and philosophical meaning. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “event.” For the importance of the category of event, see, among others, Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (=DCE), 1; Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory* (=TD), vol. 5: *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983); Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. III. Abteilung: Unveröffentlichte Abhandlungen. Band 65. Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2003). All of Heidegger’s works in German are taken from this edition, hereafter cited as *GA*, followed by the number of the volume.

³Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, III, 24, 1.

taking stock of man's self-perception today in light of his understanding of God. Instead of attempting to offer an elaborated anthropology, we would like to show, with the help of the French philosopher Claude Bruaire, that man's reason is his capacity to welcome and seek the unknown origin that presents itself as the permanent and surprising source (*arché*) of the gift of his own existence.

Although the disastrous historical events of the twentieth century seem to prove wrong the anthropology of exalted humanism and death of God, as heralded by Nietzsche and others, what these thinkers so painstakingly tried to express apparently continues to govern contemporary patterns of thought. Practical and theoretical nihilism, in fact, is found under the positive guise of, among others, a relativistic and technological *Weltanschauung*. The former, relativism, masks the negativity contained in its rejection of meaning by promoting an alleged positivity of pluralistic societies in which "impartial" procedures, universal rights, and formalistic freedoms have replaced the common good and the idea of the state itself.⁴ In fulfillment of Bacon's axiom that "knowledge is power," the technological mindset cloaks its radical rejection of otherness and transcendence in the offer of an increasing mastery over nature (human nature included) that promises, if not the elimination, at least the confinement of evil.⁵ Here Hegel's "power of the negative" casts a longer shadow than one may have suspected.

This nihilistic worldview is the resilient offspring of a self-limited, autonomous reason and the mechanistic empiricism of the

⁴See, among others, Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance. Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003); Pierre Manent, *The City of Man*, trans. Marc A. LePain (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); David S. Crawford, "Liberal Androgyny: 'Gay Marriage' and the Meaning of Sexuality in Our Time," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 239–65; Livio Melina, "The Eclipse of the Sense of God and of Man," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 100–16.

⁵This is not a rejection of technological progress but rather an attempt to indicate the mindset that has generated it. See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977); George Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1986); Hans Jonas, *Philosophical Essays. From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974); Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005); Adrian J. Walker, "On 'Rephilosophizing' Theology," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 143–67.

modern sciences, which operate with a reduced sense of nature as sheer data that is available for manipulation.⁶ Looking more closely, however, it becomes clear that this concept of reason and its ensuing understanding of nature are also a reflection of an implicit conception of God as an absolute freedom without any sort of relation. Reflection on the absolute, after all, is ultimately what one is dealing with in any philosophical inquiry. One's own perception of God therefore determines and clarifies how one conceives of everything else (rationality, freedom, history, bodiliness, etc.). "Pure reason," thus, in its desire for autonomy—i.e., wishing to provide itself with its own law and to reject its origin—patterns itself after what it conceives as a radically undetermined God. In order to preserve or attain its purity, reason therefore detaches itself from any historical contingency, mediation, or uncriticized assumption.⁷

The reduction of nature to technologically manipulable data, which is perceived apart from the logic of fourfold causality, reflects an absolute, a-logical will whose inexplicable decisions cannot but take place. Furthermore, this concept of nature echoes a notion of an absolute will that randomly ascribes to each being a meaning that therefore always remains extrinsic to it. In light of this concept of reason and its theological presuppositions, "reasonable" becomes that which can be comprehended, interpreted according to an extrinsically imposed meaning, or simply whatever can be done or used. This brief analysis yields a twofold result. The first, negative result that we may observe is that whatever the event of Christ, the "mediator" between God and man (1Ti 2:5), may bring, it can only affect man's being and action at a peripheral level. The event of Christ never approaches the realm of truth, and thus it remains enclosed within the world of natural religiosity, or prophetism.⁸ The second, positive result is that no matter how a-theistic man's

⁶This is one of the main themes in Ratzinger's work. See, e.g., Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*; Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and Reflections" (lecture delivered at the University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006); see also Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Recovery of Wonder: The New Freedom and the Asceticism of Power* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2005); Claude Bruaire, *Pour la métaphysique* (Paris: Fayard, 1980).

⁷Claude Bruaire, "Témoignage et raison," (=TR) in id., *Pour la métaphysique*, 166–79.

⁸Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 94–104.

rationality may believe itself to be, it remains nevertheless ontologically and conceptually connected to God. Man's being is inseparable from God's.

Today's predominant conception of God as absolute, undetermined freedom, and the concepts of reason and nature that flow from this conception, however, run up against the logic of human, bodily existence in which man discovers both himself and nature as gift. As Claude Bruaire has shown, an anthropology that is not forgetful of its own constitutive giftedness will be able to discover and respect the image of the true absolute freedom after which it has been patterned. Faithfulness to the logic of human existence, Bruaire claims, requires acknowledging that reason is inseparably tied to the other dimensions of human existence: the body, desire, and freedom. We would like to mention first of all that in this view, "reason" is not simply a tool that man uses at will. Reason (and man's rationality), in fact, exists in and as language. Language is not just a historical set of grammatical and syntactical rules. It is the wonderful expression of, and participation in, the (onto-logical) truth which, as Plato mentions, has a memory that is older than any historical language or the person who actually speaks it. The existence of reason as and in language, along with its ontological and epistemological universality, indicates that man *is* his having been spoken to and called to respond. Any attempt on the part of reason to retreat into being a limited, self-referential faculty is forestalled by the sheer exercise of language.

Man's participation in the language of truth, it is important to note, is a somatic one. To separate language from man's nuptial body—that place where the world and the human self come to encounter each other, a place therefore which also witnesses to man's being made from and for communion—would amount to severing ideas from (written or spoken) words.⁹ Such a separation transforms words into a set of physical signs that are devoid of meaning and ideas into concepts that have lost their transcendence.¹⁰

⁹For a reflection on the nuptial meaning of the body see John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006); Angelo Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans. Michelle K. Borras (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁰Balthasar, *TD V*, 99–110. Conceptualism tends to conceive the human mind in terms of the divine mind, and thus forgets that it is not possible for man to see

Once this happens, the only possibilities for true knowledge are either divine inspiration or the identification of one's consciousness with one's bodiliness—this latter possibility in fact is at the root of today's ironic reversal of the rationalistic *cogito ergo sum* into the emotivist “what I feel now, is what I consider to be true.”¹¹ Instead, it is not only that “the spiritual word expresses itself with perfect precision in bodily form,” but the physical word, too (which could also be the silent presence of a being that gives itself without audible words) is informed by the spirit.¹² It is through words that man's rationality finds an adequate albeit partial expression. Hence, the connection among words and the body and language—that inexhaustible whole within which single words and ideas acquire their proper form—witnesses to a marvelous twofold fact. First, words are the affective echo that reality provokes in man. They witness to his unity with that reality toward which he is always already open and which, in turn, is always seeking its reception by him. Words, through which truth is expressed, are not a physical mask behind which lurk self-enclosed, inert concepts. They are rather the sign of being's self-transcendent expressivity. Second, the word is the combination of sound (or somatic presence) and meaning, of corporeality and intelligibility. Just as the body is the externalization of the soul, the word is the incarnation of meaning; the sound or the sign that constitutes the word, without having been relinquished, is immediately translated into meaning.¹³ In this sense, words and meaning are inseparable, not because words “mean something” but because they are the expression of being. Man's use of words is always preceded by a “silence,” which is not the mere absence of sound, but rather the indication of words' ontological memory. Words and language come from a preceding ground that gives itself to man. The attempt to sever this unity is, yet again, nothing but a rejection of man's and language's transcendent Origin.

all of being in the name as God does.

¹¹Bruaire, *TR*, 173–74.

¹²Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic (=TL)*, vol. 2: *Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 251.

¹³José Granados, “The Word Springs From the Flesh: The Mystery of the Preaching of the Kingdom of God,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 6–37; D. C. Schindler, “Why We Need Paul Claudel,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 120–49, at 137.

Man's knowledge and rationality are not tied only to his nuptial bodiliness. Knowing and participating in the truth is an act that cannot be severed from the desire to know the truth.¹⁴ The ontological universality proper to truth goes hand-in-hand with the unlimited universality proper to man's desire. Desire, in fact, teaches us at least three crucial aspects of the nature of truth and reason. First, desire reminds reason that truth (and hence language) is *other* than man and that it cannot be mastered by him. At the same time, however, desire reveals that the otherness of truth gives itself to be known in that it makes its appropriation both attractive and open, without being at the mercy of the whims of desire. Second, desire's insatiability is a sign that the truth known is a mysterious, inexhaustible whole that calls man to participate ever-more in its own nature. Desire is the presence in man of the invitation to enter into truth's constitutive never-ending richness—and hence it indicates that man is always already approached by truth. In this sense, truth appears as an ontological promise—in which the logical sense of truth is to be grounded. It is this sense of promise proper to the truth that explains in what sense the radical openness of desire's universality is different from reason's: desire is indeed set in motion by the gratuitous and historical self-offering of truth, yet the fulfilment and final form of this promise is not at its disposal. Through desire, therefore, truth prevents rationality from falling into Lessing's "real" ditch, i.e., that of thinking that eventually man will know (and hence have control of) everything.¹⁵ Third, desire shows us that truth has a dynamic nature. The movement of expression and silence proper to language has its correlate in the ekstasis and enstasis proper to desire; reason desires to receive and rest in what is freely given to it.

Lastly, we need to see that both man's rationality, with its relation to truth, and his unlimited desire to know and to be for the truth, are placed in the hands of freedom. This does not mean that truth is subservient to man's will. Rather, man, in his concrete,

¹⁴"Desires" are here distinguished from "needs." The former have a spiritual connotation (desire for truth, freedom, etc.), whereas the latter have a more physiological significance. See Claude Bruaire, *L'affirmation de Dieu: Essai sur la logique de l'existence (=AD)* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 9–15.

¹⁵Gotthold Lessing, "The Education of the Human Race," in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 82–98.

historical existence, is both brought to knowing—that is, to that wonder-full realization of the inexhaustible wholeness and otherness of being which also gives man back to himself—and at the same time, makes himself available to knowing. Truth gives itself to be known, and thus, it cannot be seen unless it is welcomed by grateful reciprocity. One may therefore put oneself at the service of the truth or, by declining to be attuned to the free expressiveness of the truth, one may fruitlessly seek to possess the truth (language) in a conscious forgetfulness of one's own origin and desires. Freedom reminds reason that truth lets itself be possessed only when one allows oneself to be at its disposal.¹⁶ It is important not to gloss over the fact that freedom is the response to the self-manifestation of the truth, and not a self-originated decision. Freedom is called, through beauty, to answer.

What has the interrelation of reason with freedom, desire, and the nuptial body taught us? The first obvious answer is that reason, in its bodily existence, is always already open and endlessly seeking to know in freedom. More deeply, however, our anthropological reflection indicates that man's reason is of a piece with his own eventful nature. In other words, the fact that man desires to know the truth in freedom is the discrete indication that his existence only makes sense inasmuch as it is given to him by Another (*e-venire*) in order for him to be and to discover his unknown origin. Since the source cannot be less than what comes from it, the logic of human existence is grounded in a God whose nature is not an *a-logikos* absolute freedom—which is the fundamental presupposition of today's nihilism—but a *logikos* God who can address man because language is to be found first and foremost in God himself. Thus, only a reason that denies its ties with all of human existence can claim to be autonomous and pure, and thus seek to possess, to comprehend, or technologically to use what it knows. If, instead of this “pure” reason, one elaborates an account of the reasonableness of the event of Christ, bearing in mind the whole of reason as outlined here, then reasonableness would not primordially mean “comprehension” but rather “contemplation [*theorein*] of” and “unity with” that mysterious inexhaustible Origin of man—a contemplation and a unity that takes place within a

¹⁶On poverty and knowing, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. 1: *Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 120–30.

human existence whose logic is made possible and determined by its transcendent origin. What is reasonable is not what corresponds to reason's self-determined a priori conditions of knowledge; it is rather what aids reason in the fulfilment of its *telos*, i.e., to contemplate the origin without which human existence becomes *il-logical*.

2. What calls for thinking

The foregoing anthropological reflection needs to be complemented by a presentation of the eventful nature of being. In fact, it is not only man's seeing, but also the form of what is seen, "being," that needs to be grasped adequately. Just as our understanding of reasonableness was guided by a concrete elucidation of the logic of human existence, now, in order to avoid abstraction, we would like to address the revelation of being in the form of event within the experience of human love between the parents and the child, following Balthasar's suggestion. This archetypal experience, so he proposes, is *id quo majus cogitari non potest*—that is to say, that experience within which what is to be wondered about gives itself in all its mysterious, inexhaustible, and ever-surprising richness.¹⁷

This archetypal experience of love, Balthasar tells us, teaches us that existence's most fundamental and joyful discovery is to have been gratuitously invited (*Eingelassensein*) into the realm of being to be a spirit who is aware of itself and of the wholeness of the cosmos. The original gratitude for the human other through whom one has been loved into existence soon reveals that every other (human or not) is in the same position as one is oneself, i.e., it also has been allowed to participate in existence.¹⁸ This means then that every

¹⁷Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics (=GL)*, vol. 5: *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Saward, and Rowan Williams (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 617. It goes without saying that this statement is primarily methodological. This does not mean, however, that the experience of love can be severed from its content. In fact, it could be argued that Balthasar's trilogy is a theological account of what is given to man in this archetypal experience. See his *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 111–19.

¹⁸Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 75, a. 5, ad 1. Participation is not taking something from being which deprives it of fullness. It is in light of this experience that evil needs to be understood as rejection of gift.

being is constituted by a mysterious dual unity consisting of two irreducible and inseparable elements: being's *esse* (*existentia*) and its essence (*essentia*). Every existent is thus formed by the coming together of *essentia* (what one is) and *esse* (that being is). Yet, as a whole (*unum*), the existent is more than just the sum of these two elements; it is a self-standing being, a "subject of being" in its own right.¹⁹ It is important to indicate here that the ontological difference between *esse* and *essentia* that constitutes being cannot be correctly understood if *esse* is cast in terms of something that simply happens to an already formed essence. *Essentia* is not a static pole, fully knowable by means of concepts, to which *esse* could eventually be added. If this were the case, as Kant's perplexities over the ontological argument illustrate, existence (*esse*) would add nothing to essence; it would simply be the actualization of form. Instead, Balthasar, aided by Ulrich's work, retrieves the thomistic distinction of *esse* and *essentia* and explains that every single being *is* because it participates in that *esse commune* which "*significat aliquid completum et simplex, sed non subsistens.*"²⁰ The mystery of being is that every concrete existent comes from (*ex-istentia*) an act of being that is plenitude (*esse*) and its essence is itself only inasmuch as it is one with this act of being that is common to every existent.²¹ This act of being (*actus essendi*), however, as Aquinas rightly indicates, does not subsist in itself. Without losing itself in beings, the *actus essendi* only subsists in concrete existent beings. The fact that beings exist, then, indicates something more than their being endowed with a limited chemical, biological, or onto-logical endurance. The *esse* (to be) of existing

¹⁹See Kenneth L. Schmitz, "The First Principle of Personal Becoming," *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (June 1994): 757–74.

²⁰Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia Dei*, q. 1, a. 1, c. As is well known, St. Thomas did not use the words *distinctio realis* but today there is no doubt that he defended the real distinction between essence and being (*esse*). What we do find is the expression *compositio realis*. See Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 27 a. 1, ad 8; *De ente et essentia* iv; *Summa contra gentiles* II, chap. 52; *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 5; *I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 1. See, among others: Etienne Gilson, *L'être et l'essence* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1994); John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984); Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus. Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998); Balthasar, *GL5*, 613–627.

²¹See Adrian J. Walker, "Personal Singularity and the *Communio Personarum*: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas's Doctrine of *Esse Commune*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 457–80.

beings is their participation in one act that is inexhaustibly rich although it does not subsist in itself. Hence, it is not that *esse* is “added to” *essentia*, but that *essentia* is because it participates in the act of acts (*esse*) which, however, does not enjoy a hypostatic existence apart from *essentia*. If being (*esse*) only subsists in existent beings, Balthasar presses further, then it has neither will nor intelligence of its own. Essences cannot simply “come from” *esse*; *esse* does not have the pattern for essences within itself. The responsibility for the essential form of entities in the world, and the world as a whole, therefore, is to be found somewhere beyond *esse*.

To understand the ontological meaning of event, it is important to mention that being’s dual unity of *esse* and *essentia* undergirds the historicity of beings. Time is part of the constitutive form of non-subsistent being. As Heidegger indicated, beings not only are, they are “present.”²² This does not mean, of course, that being and time are identical. It means rather that time is that way of being proper to non-subsistent realities.²³ As with language, the original experience of love and of being loved witnesses that being’s present includes the memory of a rich, deep past, which the present is called to receive. The present receives itself from the past (e.g., tradition as a source), and by accepting its permanent origin the present becomes itself and expects a further confirmation from the future. The present not only receives the past but awaits what has not yet arrived. It is thus also opened to the future in expectation of its promise of more or, alternatively, in the mode of fear of its withdrawal. The relation between *esse* and *essentia* that constitutes the existent and that makes

²²“From the dawn of Western-European thinking until today, being means the same as presencing. Presencing, presence speaks of the present. According to current representations, the present, together with past and future, forms the character of time. Being is determined as presence by time” (Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (=OTB), trans. Joan Stambaugh [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972], 2). See also Balthasar, *TL I*, 193–206.

²³Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), III, 7. For an interesting and novel account of Plato’s famous text see Rémi Brague, *Du temps chez Platon et Aristote. Quatre études* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2003). I dealt with this issue in my “Restoration of Sonship. Reflections on Time and Eternity,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 682–704.

esse be in beings is not a static, a-temporal one. It indicates the history of each singular person and the whole of history.²⁴

The relation of time and being evokes the interplay of the appearing of a being in the way it is (in that dual unity that characterizes it) and that mysterious ground within it that unveils itself in beings while remaining veiled. This interplay of ground and manifestation, however, cannot lead to the conclusion that being loses itself in its appearances.²⁵ Being (*esse*) allows beings to be; it does not identify itself with them, as Hegel's reflection on the absolute spirit seems to suggest. Beings do come into existence and cease to be. Yet, their temporal subsistence is that of a real singularity that becomes while remaining itself (and not the other way around). On the other hand, beings by themselves cannot account for *esse*; they await the reception of a final confirmation in being—their non-subsistence prevents their managing this on their own. History, in this regard, is made possible both by the twofold, free movement proper to the ontological difference and by the wait and search for what is coming toward the present—i.e, for that other which will sustain and make ultimately fruitful the unity that characterizes being and beings, and the whole of existence.²⁶

Although the reciprocal dependence of being (*esse*) and essence in the existent signals the mysterious *eventful* constitution of being, Balthasar warns against a hasty removal of the mystery of being to an eternal interplay between being (*esse*) and that which is (*essentia*). If the eventful nature of being were to be limited to this

²⁴The perception of the relation between the dual unity and time cannot lead to the conclusion that the dual unity itself is the coming together of two pre-existing halves.

²⁵Hence “appearance” has a twofold meaning. First, it indicates the relation between essence and the categories. What is seen, the object, is (1) a subject of being that (2) offers itself to be known through the richness that the human senses are able to perceive. Second, it means that what is known comes to be seen, that is, makes itself really “present” through the appearance. Finite forms are not a deceptive image of the real “essence” of finite beings. See David C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth. A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 163–254.

²⁶It is beyond the limits of this paper to give a fuller account of the nature of history. Our interest here is to indicate the ontological root of history in order to avoid the reduction of “event” to “becoming” or the subordination of being to sheer chance. What is stated here will be supplemented by the theological reflection of the following section.

twofold movement, either Hegel's critique of the wrong sense of dialectic would also be the final word on metaphysics, or one would be forced to flee to a post-Christian immanentistic perception of the whole, as Heidegger seems to have done.²⁷ The eventful nature of event does indicate the dual unity constitutive of beings and also hints at its historicity. Yet the "event" of being, *pace* Heidegger, must reach further to justify the form of its existence; *esse comune* or the dual unity of *esse* and *essentia* are not the ultimate ground.

Heidegger's philosophy also used the term "event" (*Ereignis*) to answer the question regarding "what is." His answer, however, is conceived in opposition to the metaphysical framework that we are presenting here. We thus need to look at it briefly. Although it may seem surprising, Heidegger's philosophy was not concerned primarily with "being," in either its ontological or phenomenological meaning. Rather, it emerged that the *Sache des Denkens*, that is, according to Heidegger, the proper object of thought, is what enables manifestation (*parousía*) or presence (*Anwesen*) to be given at all.²⁸ This, which, according to Heidegger, is philosophy's "fundamental question" (*Grundfrage*), can be asked adequately only by way of a leap out of metaphysics.²⁹ The metaphysical question regarding

²⁷Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic, With the Zusätze: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), § 81.

²⁸"Das Sein is nicht mehr das eigens zu Denkende" (Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, GA 14, §44.6–7). "But Hegel also, as little as Husserl, as little as all metaphysics," comments Heidegger, "does not ask about Being as Being, that is, does not raise the question how there can be presence as such. There is presence only when opening is dominant" (Heidegger, *OTB*, 70).

²⁹See, e. g. GA 65, §117. Heidegger dedicates GA IV, §§115–67 to defining the meaning of *Sprung*. For "Ereignis" see GA 65 and 71. Also see GA 9 (= *Wegmarken*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann); English translation: *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Also see GA 11 (= *Identität und Differenz*); English translation: *Identity and Difference (=ID)*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Although we would disagree with him on certain points, we are indebted to Thomas Sheehan's work on Heidegger's concept of *Ereignis*. See Thomas Sheehan, "Kehre and Ereignis: A Prolegomenon to *Introduction to Christianity*," in *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 3–16, 263–74; id., "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research" (= *PSH*), *Continental Philosophy Review. Formerly Man and World* 34 (2001): 183–202. See also William J. Richardson, *Heidegger. Through Phenomenology*

the eventful form of being triggered by the ontological difference is, according to Heidegger, nothing but a “guiding question” that leads us to the need to spring over to that which “is.”³⁰ To approach being first from the point of view of “*Da-sein*” (which means openness, and not “being-there” or “human existence”), and then as the “givenness” of entities (the phenomenological approach), prepares the ground to allow language to speak about what occasions the reciprocal belonging of *Da-sein* and what appears: *Ereignis*. Although *Ereignis* is normally translated with “event,” for Heidegger this term refers neither to a sheer historical occurrence of greater or less significance, nor to the act according to which a mysterious One would “give” being.³¹ The reciprocal being-with of *esse* and existent as described above is here hypostatized in a reciprocity (*Gegenschwung*) according to which givenness needs that to which it gives (*das Brauchen*) and the latter belongs to the former (*das Zugehören*).³² In its appearing, one observes that “being” claims *Da-sein*, which is open to being, and, simultaneously, that *Da-sein*’s opening takes place only inasmuch as “being” appears. Thus, event for Heidegger is the movement (*kínesis*) of opening itself up and belonging, a reciprocal expropriation. In contrast to our own account, nothing else is required.³³ *Ereignis*, as T. Sheehan explains, is not what

to *Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003); Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, trans. Christine-Marie Gros (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987); D. C. Schindler, “Wie kommt der Mensch in die Theologie?: Heidegger, Hegel, and the Stakes of Onto-theo-logy,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 637–68.

³⁰For an example of Heidegger’s emphasis on thinking outside the ontological difference, in addition to *GA* 11, see *GA* 65, §258.

³¹“What the name *Ereignis* names can no longer be represented by means of the current meaning of the word; for in that meaning ‘event of appropriation (*Ereignis*)’ is understood in the sense of occurrence and happening—not in terms of Appropriating (*Ereignung*) as the extending and sending which opens and preserves” (Heidegger, *OTB*, 20).

³²“*Dieser Gegenschwung des Brauchens und Zugehörens macht das Seyn als Ereignis aus, und die Schwungung dieses Gegenschwunges in die Einfachheit des Wissens zu heben und in seiner Wahrheit zu gründen, ist das Erste, was uns denkerisch obliegt*” (Heidegger, *GA* 65, §133). “Being belongs with thinking to an identity whose active essence stems from that letting belong together which we call *Ereignis*” (Heidegger, *ID*, 39).

³³This mutual belonging has led to the inaccurate English translation of *Ereignis* as

accounts for what is—it is not the ultimate ground, cause, or source of what is. Rather *Ereignis* is “what is.”³⁴

Is there anything that originates this mutual, symmetrical belonging? If *Ereignis* is what is, then there seems no need for a cause behind the event itself. “What gives” (*es gibt*) is not something outside of the “event” but part of the constitution of event. The reciprocal belonging of appearing and *Da-sein* is not grounded in having been posited by another, but rather in the “withdrawing” of *Dasein*. According to Heidegger, “withdrawing” allows one to account for *Ereignis*’s whylessness without falling back into onto-theology. “But suppose,” asks Heidegger, “that be-ing itself were the self-withdrawing and would hold sway as refusal?”³⁵ Withdrawal (*Entzug*) as gift is “what is peculiar to *Ereignis*.”³⁶ Still, one might ask, “why this withdrawal?” Heidegger’s “forgotten mystery of *Da-sein*,” as T. Sheehan rightly observes, is man’s finitude.³⁷ The giving and reception proper to the “event” is not due to a cause behind *Ereignis*, but to man’s finitude itself. If *Da-sein*’s finitude accounts for *Ereignis*, not as the extrinsic cause but as being within *Ereignis* itself, then finitude is no longer a dialogical partner of the infinite, as our anthropological reflection suggested. For Heidegger, finitude no longer has an absolute that is able to render its existence intelligible. Finitude is to be accounted for from itself.

Without confusing the relationship between *esse* and *essentia* in the existent (as disclosed by the archetypal experience of love) and Heidegger’s idea of the reciprocity between what gives itself and that which is claimed in this opening, we do see a necessary

“event of appropriation.” Relying on GA 71, Thomas Sheehan explains that *Ereignis* does not come from *er-eigens* but *er-äugen* which means “bringing something out into view” or “to appear by having been opened up.” In this sense *Ereignis* would mean “the opening of the open on the basis of a concealment.” See Thomas Sheehan, *PSH*, 196–8. Joan Stambaugh concurs with this reading. See *ID*, 14.

³⁴“The deity enters into philosophy through the perdurance of which we think at first as the approach to the active nature of the difference between Being and beings” (Heidegger, *ID*, 71).

³⁵“Wie aber wenn das Seyn selbst das Sichentziehende wäre und als die Verweigerung weste?” (Heidegger, *GA* 65, §129, §246). See also *GA* 65, §168.

³⁶Heidegger, *OTB*, 22. For Heidegger, this withdrawal is what causes history to be.

³⁷Sheehan, *PSH*, 198–199.

relation emerging. The structure of the event, in fact, not only requires that the form of being be an interplay of ground and manifestation; it also requires, at the same time, someone to whom it happens. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to see that finitude can indeed be understood fully only within immanence, as Heidegger claims. It seems that the question of why finitude should be understood as withdrawal, and this negativity as that which gives, remains unanswered. Heidegger's thought appears unable to justify the inexhaustible wonder one experiences before the fact of being, of having been gratuitously invited to be. Heidegger's understanding of *Ereignis* can indeed leave space for man's destiny, responsibility, and perhaps even admiration before existence, but it cannot account for the wonder of being. As understood by Heidegger, *Ereignis*, so it seems, traps man in a solitude so radical that it makes any discourse on the "gods" simply rhetorical.³⁸

The inability of Heidegger's thought to account for man's archetypal experience of love is the result of an explicit disregard of it. If the anthropological analysis led to the discovery of man's

³⁸Perhaps Heidegger's conclusion is an echo of his radical decision to think apart from and thus against God. Heidegger himself expressed his position on religion very clearly: "The past two years in which I struggled for a fundamental clarification of my philosophical position and put aside all specialized academic tasks have led to conclusions I would not be able to hold and teach freely, were I bound to a position outside of philosophy. Epistemological insights extending to a theory of historical knowledge have made the system of Catholicism problematic and unacceptable to me, but not Christianity and metaphysics—these, though, in a new sense" (Martin Heidegger, "Letter to Fr. Engelbert Krebs [1919]," in *Martin Heidegger. Supplements. From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond*, ed. John van Buren [New York: State University of New York Press, 2002], 69–70, at 69). It is important to see that the radical opposition of Heidegger's philosophy to his own faith transformed his thought into a radically secularized reading of Christianity which, although attractive, cannot be adopted by theological reflection without bringing its own end upon itself. This is why Hans Jonas commented: "My theological friends, my Christian friends—don't you see what you are dealing with? Don't you sense, if not see, the profoundly pagan character of Heidegger's thought? Rightly pagan, as it is philosophy . . . ; but more pagan than others from your point of view, not in spite but because of its, also, speaking of call and self-revealing and even shepherd . . . [for Heidegger] revelation is immanent in the world, nay, it belongs to nature; i.e., the world is divine. Quite consistently do the gods appear again in Heidegger's philosophy. But where the gods are, God cannot be" (Hans Jonas, "Heidegger and Theology," in id., *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology* [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001], 235–61, at 248).

giftedness, and the dual unity of the ontological examination of being's form cannot ultimately explain man's wonder at having been loved into existence, then, as Balthasar cogently proposes, the movement and co-belonging of *esse* and *essentia* in the existent cannot but be grounded beyond itself. Only the difference between God (1 Jn 4:8) and the world (that totality and each singular being) disclosed in Christian revelation can preserve the integrity of both *esse* and the existent and offer an adequate reason for its being there in the way it is.³⁹ This account of the event of being remains incomplete until one acknowledges that the ontological difference rests on a theological one. The world and its otherness are grounded in a self-subsisting (and therefore endowed with freedom and reason) *esse* whose *essentia* would be his *esse*: *ipsum esse*. The experience of being loved reveals the structure of existent beings as eventful in that, from within themselves, the structure always already points to a mystery, *ipsum esse*, which accounts for them but whose face remains unknown.

The "leading beyond" (*analogia entis*) of the "e-ventful" form of being also gives man to himself by making him aware of both his unique singularity and his personal destiny, while asking him to allow being (both the existent and the being of the existent beings) to be.⁴⁰ Beings lead beyond themselves to their ultimate source because, originally, they were given to themselves. At this moment we can better understand the possibility for and radicality of man's perception of his own giftedness as indicated in the previous section. If this ontological analysis is true, the lack of self-subsistence would not be simply a tragic intimation of nothingness, but the sign of the participation in being as gift. The fact that *esse* and the existent have not been given absolute subsistence indicates that being's fundamental nature is gift. Perhaps what Heidegger was hinting at with his explanation of *Ereignis* and expropriation was, in reality, what with Balthasar and others can adequately be called donation. In this sense, it is not so much "withdrawal" as "gift," but the gift that is given to itself without either the giver's imposing itself through the gift or the

³⁹Balthasar, *GL V*, 624–27.

⁴⁰Balthasar thus accounts for the classical doctrine of analogy of being within this meta-anthropology. For the latter see, among others, Martin Bieler, "The Future of the Philosophy of Being," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 455–85.

gift's being blind to its own source.⁴¹ The ontological difference and the theological difference therefore are the permanent source (*arché*) of wonder because they turn the gaze of the one who contemplates them away from all ideology and toward the inexhaustible miracle that beings (himself included) are.

The *eventful* nature of being indicates, then, on the one hand, the historical interplay of *esse* as “complete and simple but not subsistent” and *essentia*. On the other hand, the event of being is the unfolding of the ultimate ground in the appearance. This interplay is neither necessary nor the fruit of chance; unlike Heidegger's *Ereignis*, it has the “whylessness” proper to love. Event does not dissolve the unfathomable mystery in historical appearances; the ground gives itself to be known within a unity of meaning. Thus the appearing of being, as the archetypal experience of love witnesses, not only discloses the difference and unity between the parents and the child, and the dual unity that characterizes every being. It also speaks of the ultimate Origin from which things come. Balthasar, however, insists that it is thanks to the light of revelation (Jn 8:12) that one is helped to avoid closing the movement of *esse* and *essentia* in an abstract pendular movement and to see that being's epiphanic nature conveys its own meaning: love, a plenitude (*esse*) given away to what is other. Let us look at this aspect more carefully.

3. Christ, icon of the Father's love

Thus far, by attending to the concrete logic of human existence and the archetypal experience of love, we have been invited to acknowledge the eventful nature of being. It is not difficult, however, for wonder to be reduced to simple admiration and to miss the rootedness of the ontological difference in God. We need therefore to see the complete form of event and to do so without letting go of the concrete approach we have adopted. Love, the love revealed in Jesus Christ, the “mediator between God and man” (1Ti 2:5; Hb 9:15) will allow us to enter into the roots of being. The encounter with Christ will also clarify in what sense wonder is preserved and deepened in faith. The hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ in fact requires us to ponder

⁴¹Balthasar, *GL V*, 626–627.

the meaning of love as disclosed by the Incarnate Logos with the eyes of faith. It is only thanks to the Holy Spirit that man is introduced into God and thus permitted to see the Father's face in Christ and, within it, to rediscover his own. "It is not possible to know God without God," said Irenaeus.⁴² Man is able to contemplate the Father's love and hence the meaning of the whole world when he enters into the mind of Christ, that is, when he allows himself to comprehend himself within God's own comprehension of him (1 Cor 13:12). At the same time, however, the union of the person of the Logos with human nature in the event of Christ also warns us against reducing the preceding anthropological and theological reflections to mere preparatory remarks that could be discarded once the Son of the Father enters into history. As the figure of Mary witnesses, the event of the Incarnation is not possible if there is no human flesh willing to receive it. There is no event if no one welcomes it. The *Logos* of love remains incomprehensible without the flesh of Mary, a flesh that bears within it not only the hope of the people of Israel, but also the expectation of the promise of final salvation given to Adam and Eve at the moment of their expulsion from paradise. Thus we need now to see in what sense the event of the person of Christ, as Pope Benedict XVI says along with *Dei Verbum*, discloses in itself the final meaning of the event of being.

To describe Christ as an event is not to say that his person and message have a significance that is ultimately confined within the limits of history. Christ indeed enters into time—both in its chronological and ontological sense, as indicated above—but he also remains above time (Jn 17:24). Christ, unlike any other finite being whose dual unity, as we indicated, points to and receives its own form from its unknown origin, does not simply participate in that inexhaustible mystery of God. In Christ there is an unfathomable identity with the source (Jn 10:30; Mt 11:27); an identity, however, that does not blur a greater distinction (Jn 14:28). In him God discloses his own mystery (Eph 3:3) without giving away its secret.⁴³

⁴²Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* IV, 6, 4: "Edocuit autem Dominus quoniam Deum scire nemo potest nisi Deo docente, hoc est sine Deo non cognosci Deum; hoc ipsum autem cognosci eum, voluntatem esse Patris. Cognoscunt enim eum quibuscumque revelaverit Filius."

⁴³"And for this reason did the Word become the dispenser of the paternal grace for the benefit of men, for whom He made such great dispensations, revealing God

Christ therefore is not simply another prophet whose words shed light on human existence. He is the archetypal event because his person—the hypostatic union of divine and human nature in the person of the Logos—as the incarnation of the Father’s love, is the clarification and fulfilment of the eventful structure of being and hence of man’s endeavors to see the face of God (Ex 33:12–23).⁴⁴ Christ’s significance therefore is unique and universal (Hb 9:26) in that he reveals that the meaning of time, being, and history is the Father’s love.

To perceive the theological significance of “event” when it refers to Christ, we have to note that, according to Scripture, the Johannine term *Logos* means both “event” and “word” (Jn 1:1.14).⁴⁵ *Logos*, in this sense, does not only intend to say that Christ taught—and hence he used words—and performed miracles. As his whole existence, and particularly the Paschal Mystery, shows, “in him, person and message are always identified, [Christ] always is what he says.”⁴⁶ His “word” is the self-explanation of God’s triune love in himself and for man, and the event of his incarnation, death,

indeed to men, but presenting man to God, and preserving at the same time the invisibility of the Father, lest man should at any time become a despiser of God, and that he should always possess something towards which he might advance; but, on the other hand, revealing God to men through many dispensations, lest man, falling away from God altogether, should cease to exist” (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, IV, 20, 7).

⁴⁴Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 173. It is in this sense that, as Balthasar suggests, Christ is the analogy of being. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 220–30. For the relation between religion and truth, see Massimo Serretti, *The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ. In Dialogue with the Religions*, trans. Teresa Talavera and David C. Schindler (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004); Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*.

⁴⁵Although it has occasionally been thought that the presentation of Christ as the logos was due to the influence of Philo’s and Stoic philosophy on Scripture, exegetical research has shown the difference between these two. The logos, if we are to follow St. John, is not an idea, a demiurge, or the first of the sons of God. The logos is not the intelligence and the divine forces immanent in the cosmos. He is the pre-existent Son of the Father, with whom he is one and who therefore is the light of the world and the source of light. See F. Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la bible* (Paris: Letouzy et Ané, 1912), 327–28. For “Logos,” see also J. Bergmann, H. Lutzmann, and W. H. Schmidt, “dabar,” in *TWAT* II, 89–133; Gerhard Kittel, “légo,” in *TWNT* IV, 71–136.

⁴⁶Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 152. See also Balthasar, *TD* 3, 149–259.

and resurrection is his word. “Event” and “word” are therefore equi-primordial and they both name the very person of the Incarnate *Logos*.

If, as major representatives of Protestant contemporary exegesis seem to do, one severs “word” from “event,” then, although trying to be faithful to the event of Christ, one would instead be adopting a scientific methodology that is foreign to the nature of the event of Christ itself. As Ratzinger explains, this methodology inevitably leads to the belief that historical facts can be accounted for by means of “purely immanent efficiencies.” This perception of immanence without interiority, however, reduces “pure” facts to the fruit of necessity or chance, and in both cases they remain intrinsically meaningless.⁴⁷ As we saw before with regard to language, here too, as Ratzinger clarifies, when the words of Christ are separated from his body they become ultimately unable to “mediate sense.”⁴⁸ Christ’s own existence is the offering of his own body (Hb 10:5) on the Cross once and for all (Hb 10:10). Every word pronounced by him points to this event and seeks to explain the absolute depth of its meaning (Jn 3:16). Thus, when one severs Christ’s words from his own somatic existence and his eucharistic sacrifice on the Cross, it is not only that the “events” of his life become meaningless; his words, too, become unintelligible. If, instead, one tries to read the significance of Christ’s words based on his own self-interpretation, then it becomes possible to see that the “event” of his kenotic self-abasement unto death is his “word” (Phil 2:6–8). His eucharistic offering and death on the Cross therefore are “the place where meaning communicates itself.” Thus, the equi-

⁴⁷Ratzinger continues: “But what is useful as a methodological principle of natural science is already a banality as a philosophical principle; as a theological one, it is absurd” (Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today,” in *Escritura e interpretación. Los fundamentos de la interpretación bíblica*, ed. Luis Sánchez Navarro and Carlos Granados (Madrid: Palabra, 2005): 19–54. English translation forthcoming. See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968).

⁴⁸Ratzinger explains further that such a separation between word and event breaks the unity of Scripture. On the unity of word and event in Aquinas, Ratzinger refers to Maximino Arias-Reyero, *Thomas von Aquin als Exeget. Die Prinzipien seiner Schriftdeutung und seine Lehre von den Schriftsinnen* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1971).

primordial nature of “word” and “event” in Christ’s somatic existence helps us to see not only that “event” cannot be dissociated from meaning (word, *logos*), but, more radically—and thanks to their identity with the person of Christ—that *logos*, “true reason is love, and love is true reason.”⁴⁹ Christ’s word is the event of divine and human love to the utmost.⁵⁰

If Christ’s love is the unity of “event” and “word,” the eventful nature of his historical existence is not fully accounted for until we see that it is irreducibly trinitarian. The event of the Logos, as Aquinas indicated in speaking of the missions of the Son and the Spirit, is the opening up in history of the inexhaustible fountain of triune love. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).⁵¹ The inseparability of the three divine persons in the economy, however, not only indicates the different role that each has within the unity of the divine action. It also suggests that the event of Christ has its mysterious roots in the intra-trinitarian relationships and thus has to do with God’s own eventful being. The love of Christ for man to the end (Jn 15:13) reveals that God is an exchange of love in which the Father is his absolute giving to the Son and the Son is his receiving and responding in gratitude. This exchange of love is yet another one, the Holy Spirit. He is the one in whom “the intimate life of the Trinity becomes totally gift, an exchange of mutual love between the divine Persons,” the one through whom “God exists in the mode of gift.”⁵² God is therefore the incomprehensible unity of (a) an absolute, immutable love which (b) always already exists only as a tri-hypostatic exchange of ever-new love. The event of Christ, therefore, is not only the historical moment at which God reconciles man to himself once and for all. It is so inasmuch as this event is the gratuitous self-presentation of the ever-greater mystery of divine love that from the beginning of time

⁴⁹Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 183.

⁵⁰Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 25.

⁵¹ST I, q. 43.

⁵²John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 10. I explored the possibility of thinking of God himself in terms of event in “Eternal Happening: God as an Event of Love,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 214–45.

wished to take on flesh and deify man.⁵³ The event of Christ, says Maximus the Confessor, is the “living icon of love” who “revealed the heart of hearts of the Father’s loving kindness.” He offers with himself the whole of truth: his relation with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴

The mysterious significance of the fact that the trinitarian depths of the event of Christ also indicate the gratuitous and loving disposition of God toward man needs to be considered carefully. When John, in his prologue, presents Christ as the pre-existent *Logos*, he is not only saying that he is the eternally begotten Son of the Father. He is also indicating the inexplicable decision of God to create everything in him (Jn 1:3) and, without any change in himself, to be “for” man. God’s unchangeable eventfulness has also set into existence what is not himself and, without being determined by it, he seeks to be recognized by this other. God conceives himself for man. “Before the beginning of created beings,” wrote Maximus the Confessor, “God [wished] to mingle, without change on his part, with human nature by true hypostatic union, to unite human nature to himself while remaining immutable, so that he might become a man, as he alone knew how, and so that he might deify humanity in union with himself.”⁵⁵ God’s desire to mingle with man, even at the risk of “turning against himself,” requires that God create the world and man in such a way that his loving union with man may take place.⁵⁶ God therefore shapes man in the image of his Son so that

⁵³St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 9, 23.

⁵⁴Maximus the Confessor, PG 90, 621AC and PG 91, 644B quoted in Christoph Schönborn, *God’s Human Face. The Christ-Icon*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 123–29.

⁵⁵Maximus the Confessor, “Ad Thalassium 22,” in id., *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert L. Wilken (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 115.

⁵⁶Benedict XVI, *DCE*, 10 and 12: “When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form.”

man can be truly himself by being united with the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit.

This divine disposition of being for man, which is disclosed in the event of Christ, is the final ground of the outcome of the preceding anthropological and ontological reflection, which suggested that finite being has an eventful form in that (a) it comes from another, (b) its constitutive dual unity and common participation in *esse* is a sign of this trinitarian ground, and (c), at the level of human spirit, it seeks in wonder throughout its historical existence to behold in freedom the Origin from which everything comes. Finite being is eventful because it reflects, in a greater dissimilarity, the triune form of divine love. It is then possible to say that the form of creaturely being is an *imago Trinitatis* in that the event of finite being “intrinsically unfolds as ground (Father), manifest appearance (Son), and unity of meaning (Holy Spirit).”⁵⁷ This statement, however, remains incomplete. To think of the eventfulness of finite being as an image of the Trinity requires us to raise the difficult question of the relation between generation and creation. Obviously we cannot offer here a full account of this fascinating issue. For our purposes it is enough to offer three crucial elements in order to have a better understanding of the continuity and discontinuity between the event of Christ and that of finite being.

First, while it is true, as Aquinas and Bonaventure repeatedly stated, that in the *Logos* the Father speaks all of himself and everything else, this simultaneity cannot dispense with the radical meaning of *ex nihilo*.⁵⁸ If one were to disregard Athanasius’s arguments against the Arians, for example, and consider the act of creation in a way that made it homologous with the generation of the *logos*, it would be difficult to avoid ending up at Hegel’s impasse: not giving created being its real, although not absolute, alterity. Absolute divine freedom is indeed able to create a real finite freedom. Created being is ontologically different from its creator. When the Council of Chalcedon clarified that the union of the divine and human natures in Christ happened “without confusion, change, division, or

⁵⁷Juan Sara, “Knowledge, the Transcendentals, and Communion,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 517. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 605–18.

⁵⁸See, e.g., *ST I*, q. 34, a. 1; Bonaventure, *Sent.*, I, d. 27, p. 2, q. 3.

separation” (DS 302) it not only corrected Eutyches’s, Apollinaris’s, and Nestorius’s Christologies. It also stated implicitly that divine love gratuitously seeks union with what is *other* than itself. Divine love desires the union inasmuch as the creature is other than himself: confusion or change would entail the denial of human and divine otherness as other. It is only a triune God whose absolute plenitude, out of love, can posit an other than itself in order for this finite other to be inasmuch as it participates in (it is one with) divine love. In this regard, docetic, monophysitic, monothelitic, and Nestorian Christologies are also born from the incapacity to accept that absolute love can posit another than itself within itself and, even more, can become one with his creature without needing it or losing himself in the process.

Second, if the difference between God and creation is so radical, how are we to think of the similarity between them? To think of begetting and creating in light of gift could help us to offer an answer. The Father’s generation of the Son is the perfect communication of all of the divine essence and thus it expresses both an identity of divine being (with the Father and the Holy Spirit) and an absolute personal difference (from the Father and the Holy Spirit). The Son truly differs from the Father in the way he is God: as gift of the Father that is fully received and reciprocated in gratitude. It is the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, who prevents the theological difference between the Father and the Son from being confused with a Plotinian unity. The Holy Spirit, as Augustine said, is the one “in whom the other two are united.”⁵⁹ He is the divine person thanks to whom the other two persons remain eternally different, and who thus secures the final justification for the trinitarian ground of creation. Unlike the generation of the Son, the creation of finite beings indicates the ontological difference between God and the created world and, like the Son, the identity of having-been-given. The form of finite being therefore cannot but be filial. Like the Son, the world is completely given to itself, yet it does not receive the divine self as the Son does: its subsistence and final confirmation in being is yet another gift which can only be waited for.

Third, in this sense, the “image” of finite being indicates its “being,” its “being other,” and “its being other after the form of the

⁵⁹Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, 5, 7; VII, 3, 6; V, 11, 12.

Son's otherness": gift. Like the Son and without envying his divinity, finite being is called to welcome and reciprocate in freedom the gift that is received. Here we come to see why we mentioned earlier that the finite being is an *imago Trinitatis* of ground, manifestation, and unity of the created being that has the form of a gift given to itself. Ground in that its ultimate source is the Father; manifestation in that finite being is the expression of being (in unity and distinction from that of the Son); and unity of meaning in that it is the Spirit who is the guarantor of the unity of being as love.

If this elucidation is accurate, then the *imago Trinitatis* expressed in the eventful nature of being may well be located, as others have already indicated, first of all at the level of *esse*. In this sense, the event of Christ offers with itself the ultimate reason why the non-subsistence of *esse*, as we mentioned in the second section, is both an indication of finite being's dependence upon the creator and, more radically, the sign that finite being is completely given to itself—without having received the divine self. Finite being is a gift which is called to participate fully and gratuitously in the divine *esse*. Non-subsistence, therefore, does not indicate precariousness; it is not a negation of eternity. Rather it is the possibility to participate in it as other. Thus “non-subsistence” is first of all the ontological memory (that becomes aware of itself in man) of having been allowed to be. It is the constitutive memory that the absoluteness of God is an absoluteness that gives its being to what is not itself: being, *ipsum esse*, is pure act which has revealed itself a plenitude that is always already given away and always already reciprocated superabundantly.⁶⁰

4. Ecclesial memory

If the previous section gave an account of what it means to say that Christ is the event par excellence, and that as such he reveals the meaning of the eventfulness of being, this fourth section seeks to consider briefly the fact that the event of Christ fulfills man's

⁶⁰See Ferdinand Ulrich, *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1999). Perhaps in this sense, what Heidegger indicated before is true: “*Ereignis*” is “what is.” Yet, this would only be true because of what he denied: the ontological difference between God and creation which is rooted in the theological difference between the hypostases.

contemplation of the Origin because he allows him both to see and to indwell the Father's love.

The experience of love that gives form to the logic of human existence causes man to wonder at the fact that he and all of the cosmos have been allowed to be. It is God to whom man, and with him all the created order, owes his gratitude. This seeing the form of the event of being, as Augustine understood, has from the beginning the form of faith.⁶¹ If we consider the previous reflections in order to say a word on the structure of knowledge, it becomes possible to see in what sense "knowing" requires a mediation (and hence has the form of a "natural" faith). It is enough for our purpose to highlight three elements. First, being gives itself through its form (the eventful manifestation of being), which in this sense witnesses to the depth that constitutes the form. Second, this character of mediation that marks every event requires, too, the participation of finite freedom in order for truth to be perceived. Being is not seen until it is welcomed. Third, since being, in revealing itself, retains its own origin, it remains unknown. One does not know the gift's constitutive origin, although the latter makes itself visible in and through the form. Reason alone is unable to account for this mystery, which still communicates itself to the human being in the eventful form of finite being. Only the awaited and yet unforeseeable historical event of Jesus Christ, as we have seen, grants access to the original meaning of being: the relation of love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To see this meaning, of course, goes beyond the human capacity to comprehend. Yet it is "beyond" in the sense that this seeing fulfills, by means of grace, reason's encounter with the ontological structure of being's self-presentation. The contemplation of God granted in the archetypal experience of love finds its *telos* when Christ, the one sent by the Father, comes to meet man and sends his Spirit to allow him to see and to remain in his love.⁶² This

⁶¹Hence, faith here does not indicate the theological virtue. It simply means knowledge of something via a witness. See, for example, Augustine, *De Uti. Cred.* XII, 27; id., *De Fide Rer. non Vide.* II, 4; *De Trinitate* VIII, 6, 9; *Ep.* 147.

⁶²Augustine, *De Trinitate* XV, 19, 37; See also id., *On the Spirit and the Letter* (=DSL) in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Series I, vol. 5: Saint Augustine: Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 197–251.

is why the theological virtue of faith for Christianity is not first of all the assent to certain propositions, but, as Benedict says, the personal encounter with Christ, an encounter which engages all of the human being and makes him become fully a person.⁶³ “The Son,” said Irenaeus, “who is in [the Father’s] bosom, declares to all the Father who is invisible. Wherefore they know Him to whom the Son reveals Him; and again, the Father, by means of the Son, gives knowledge of His Son to those who love Him.”⁶⁴ To love the Father in Christ, and Christ because of the Father, is possible only thanks to the Holy Spirit. He is the divine fire sent by Christ and the Father that allows man to see divine love from within.

It would be a reduction, however, to think that the outpouring of divine love within man’s heart (Rm 5:5) could be limited to a psychological emotion. The action of the Holy Spirit does not leave the event of Christ behind; on the contrary, it allows man to enter into it. In this sense, we need to consider the fact that the event of Christ is historical not only because it happened within history and respected the ontological structure of time, as we mentioned previously. Unlike other events, the person of Christ, thanks to the Holy Spirit, remains present in history. He does so, however, according to a new form that both reflects God’s triune love and reconstitutes human unity.⁶⁵ The crucified risen Lord

⁶³This understanding of faith, of course, is not in opposition to its meaning as an assent to propositions. Faith ends, as Aquinas noted, in what is believed, that is, the person of Christ. See Jean Mouroux, *Je crois en toi. La rencontre avec le Dieu vivant* (Paris: Du Cerf, 1965). Newman, Rousselot, and Balthasar offered major contributions toward overcoming this intellectualistic understanding of faith. See John H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Pierre Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990); Balthasar, *GL* 1.

⁶⁴Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, III, 11, 6. For an explanation of this passage see Antonio Orbe, *La Espiritualidad de San Ireneo* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1989), 241–58.

⁶⁵Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism. Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Victoria H. Lane (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 48–81. John Paul II explained that, “[a]ccording to the teaching of Vatican II the Church in her very essence is a mystery of faith . . . and . . . the mystery of the Church is rooted in God the Trinity, and therefore has this trinitarian dimension as its first and fundamental dimension, inasmuch as the Church depends on and lives in the Trinity from her origins to her historical conclusion and eternal destination.” He clarifies further that this “root” is not a model, but more importantly a sacramental

remains present in the communion of the Church; that is, both in the sacrament of the Eucharist and the sacramental union of those who have been given and accepted the grace to love the Father. The Church, as the complementarity between the Councils of Nicea (DS 125) and Constantinople (DS 150) witnesses, is the permanence of the event of Christ in that mysterious union and distinction that only divine triune love is able to posit and maintain. The Church is indeed the people of God, but also the body of Christ, “the most personal of beings.”⁶⁶ The inseparability of the sacramental Church from the Incarnate Son of the Father prevents us therefore from narrowing the horizon opened up by Christ’s event of love (and hence of being itself) to a historical, transient occurrence or to a psychological reverberation of a presence that has come and gone.

The connection between the Holy Spirit and the event of Christ is fundamental not only because the Church is “Christ spread abroad and communicated,”⁶⁷ and hence the “place” in which the sacramental presence of the living icon of the Father’s love gives itself to be contemplated, enjoyed, and worshiped. It is crucial for the very nature of knowing. Seeing the Father’s love in the living icon of love through the Spirit of love can occur only within the communion of the Church because knowing Christ is a participation in his knowledge of the Father, a knowledge which is a “unity in being” with the Father (Jn 1:18).⁶⁸ There is no contemplation away from this union with divine love (both in its historical and eternal form) because “the knowing that links Jesus with ‘his own’ exists within the space opened up by his ‘knowing’ oneness with the

reality and a vitalizing principle: “The Church’s unity reflects the unity of God, but at the same time it receives its vitality from the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which is reflected in the richness of the ecclesial life” (John Paul II, *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community. A Catechesis on the Creed* [Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998], 76–80). See also Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion. Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996); id., *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith. The Church as Communion*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

⁶⁶Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (New York: Alba House, 1969), 3. See also id., *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Victoria H. Lane (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999).

⁶⁷This quotation from Bossuet is cited in de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 48.

⁶⁸Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 340.

Father.”⁶⁹ Contemplation of the event of Christ is, in this sense, coincident with being one with the triune God in the space opened up for man within the theological difference in God. To see the Father’s face therefore is inseparable from allowing the triune love to indwell in oneself (Gal 2:20) and permitting one’s own existence to be enlarged so as to attain to the expanse and personhood of the Church herself. The “ecclesial soul” represents the continuous transfiguration of the human self who acquires the divine form of love; he thus shelters the “we” of mankind within himself in his prior having-been-sheltered by the communion of love that God is.

To conclude our reflections on the eventfulness of Christ and its capacity to awaken love because the Paschal Mystery is the event of love itself, it must be specified that contemplation of the Father’s love not only participates in the form of trinitarian communion: the contemplation of divine love is also called to enter into the movement proper to triune love. As Mary witnesses, the contemplation of the Father is memory. Marian memory is nothing other than allowing oneself to be guided by the Spirit of love into the depths of the event of Christ, the ever-greater Father who hands his only-begotten Son over to men so that they who betray him may know from within love that the Father’s mercy governs man’s historical endeavors. This memory, therefore, has its permanent source in the Father’s initiative; dwells in the present event of the communion of the Church, the body of Christ; and waits with joyful and certain patience until “God may be everything in everyone” (1 Cor 15:28). The more man allows himself to remain in his love (Jn 15), the more he is able to discover that without love nothing *is* (1 Cor 13:1–3). Positively stated, in time, man’s memory, like Mary’s, is able to see that Christ is “all and in all” (Col 3:11). This awareness of the inexhaustible fullness of the triune Origin enables him gratefully to participate in the transfiguration of the cosmos begun in Christ (Mt 17:1–7).

The reasonableness of the event of Christ therefore is not man’s capacity to make sense of him. Rather, it is divine triune love that, first of all, awakens being, i.e., calls it to existence and shapes it according to its own form so that finite being, when the appropriate time comes, may receive it. God creates man and being in his image by endowing being with the richness proper to divine love:

⁶⁹Ibid., 282.

gift of self. The contemplation of reality and the archetypal experience of love begin to teach man the truth of the whole revealed in the person of Christ: the relation of absolute love of the Father and the Son in the Spirit. The incarnate Word discloses that the logos of love is the event of the affirmation of another that goes to the uttermost: allowing a finite other to be. Christ awakens love, that is, allows man, and the whole cosmos with him, to be freely and gratuitously in that communion of love in which being is a reciprocal, selfless, and ever-new indwelling. □

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