Fides Quaerens Intellectum
and Its Temporal Performative Basis

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This article analyses the aftereffects of Heidegger's critique of ontotheology. In the light of such criticism, the question arises which form of metaphysics or ontology might be suitable for theology. The paper argues for a relational ontology that gains its basic concepts from temporal and embodied experiences, and that recognizes in these experiences the gift of the supernatural within the natural.

At the outset, let me cite three short texts that will set the tone of my essay.

The first is from Meister Eckhart. It is a well-known passage from one of his German sermons, where he was more blunt and radical than in his Latin lectures: "Whoever is seeking God by ways is finding ways and losing God, who in ways is hidden."[1] The second short text comes from a recent article by the American progressive political commentator Ezra Klein: "Amateurs talk strategy; professionals talk logistics." The context is the difference between those who might be called "political hobbyists," who amass information in order to fuel the outrage they pour out on Twitter and Facebook, and those more realistic political actors who practice the "accumulation of power in service of a defined end."[2] In other words, amateurs talk in order to talk, professionals talk in order to get specific things done. The third and final text, most probably not familiar at all, comes from Blaise Pascal's *Penseés*.

> "Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is to first show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect.
> Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is.
> Worthy of reverence because it really understands human nature.
> Attractive because it promises true good."[3]

In the first part of this essay, I look closely at the title of the context for which it was written: "Theology Without Metaphysics" – not as a brutal Derridean-style interrogation of the terms that would lead inevitably to an *aporia,* but rather defining the terms in order to establish the presuppositions for my constructive proposal at the conclusion. In the second part, I will insist that "without metaphysics" does not mean "without ontology," and I will use a relational ontology as a clue for a theological thinking that is a better "fit" for the

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[1] *Meister Eckhart*, Sermon 5b ("In hoc apparuit charitas dei in nobis"), in: *Meister Eckhart*, The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense, trans. Edmund Colledge, OSA and Bernard McGinn, New York 1981, 183.

[2] *Ezra Klein*, Steve Bannon Is On to Something, in: New York Times, 9 January 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/09/opinion/trump-bannon-trumpism-democracy.html (24.10.2022).

[3] *Blaise Pascal*, Pensées, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer, rev. ed., London – New York 1995, 4 (no. 12).

biblically-driven experience of discipleship. Finally, my constructive conclusion will consider temporality, embodiment, and performance as a way of putting some flesh on the bones of "without."

1. Theology. Without. Metaphysics.

First, *Theology.* If you have taught a course on theological foundations, you know that once the textbooks have spelled out the obligatory Greek etymology of the word, they are likely to quote two venerable sayings when setting out to define the topic in more detail. One is from the First Letter of Peter, whose author encourages his audience to "always be ready to give an explanation [*apologia*] to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (3:15). The other is one of the most common definitions of theology, coming from the prologue to Anselm of Canterbury's *Proslogion*: theology is "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*), Anselm's own preference for the title of this work. There is a subtle yet important difference between these "definitions", one that describes the tightrope that theology always walks, a balance of present and future. Christian theology has a double task in determining what is authentic Christian revelation both in the short term (in 1 Peter 3:15 we are to give "a reason for our hope" right now, when we are challenged or beseeched) and over the long term (Anselm's meditative and temporally unfolding *fides quaerens intellectum* with its hermeneutic circle: "I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless I do believe I shall not understand"[4]). These tasks rule out any objectivist, extrinsicist theology that floats above the particular performances of discipleship in Christ, as well as any "boutique" theology that chooses a particular theoretical niche and ignores the concrete implications of the universal claims of faith.

However, both authors agree on the substance of the task. Both emphasize the need for on-the-spot, feet-on-the-ground skills in discerning and articulating clearly both for ourselves (Anselm) and for others (1 Peter) how the presence of God courses through our lives. In addition, both assume that clarity needs to be *worked at*: we "give an explanation," we "seek to understand." A hermeneutic is necessary, since the meaning of faith is not all clear at first sight and must be interpreted. We theologians do this by using the materials of experience in which our faith is embedded, the embodied experiences from which we have constituted our lives and that have been inflected by the historical and cultural settings where they have occurred. Here is theology's hidden life: while pointing to God (which, as Thomas Aquinas emphasized, is theology's primary task[5]), it also discloses possibilities for holiness within everyday life lived out in real time in ordinary places.

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[4] *Anselm of Canterbury*, Proslogion, in: The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm, trans. Benedicta Ward Harmondsworth 1973 (RP 1986), 244 (end of chap. 1).

[5] In the first question of the Summa theologiae (ST), where *Thomas* discusses the nature of sacra doctrina (one of whose meanings is theological reflection on God's revelation), he asserts that "*Sacra doctrina* does not pronounce on God and creatures as though they were counterbalancing, but on God as principal (*principaliter*) and on creatures in relation to him (*de creaturis secundum quod referuntur ad Deum*), who is their origin and end." [S.Th. Iª,

What theology intends to disclose, in other words, is "the sacrament of the moment." This phrase, from the eighteenth-century classic *Abandonment to Divine Providence* ascribed to the Jesuit Jean-Pierre de Caussade, calls attention to the presence of God at each point of our time-bound lives. God gives God's own self in everything, at every moment. No flashy miracles or complicated theological methods are needed to demonstrate this presence, only the discernment of faith. "What is the secret of finding this treasure?" the author asks. "There isn't one. This treasure is everywhere. It is offered to us all the time and wherever we are . . . God's activity runs through the universe. It wells up and around and penetrates every created being. Where they are, there it is also."[6]

It may seem odd to invoke the insights of the apparently anti-intellectual spirituality of passive abandonment in support of the practice of theology. But the emphasis on God's initial act of giving and our response to it follows Thomas Aquinas' theological method precisely, in a more affective key. What Caussade was resisting was the sterile rationalist piety of his time and its over-reliance on the supposed certainty of humanly-concocted spiritual methods. What authentic theology needs to resist today is a similar extreme: the reduction of Christian belief and practice to an infinitely repeatable trademark or a set of bloodless objective statements. Today, when "the sacramentality of the moment" is in danger of being swamped by other explanations that claim to be *the* most likely story about reality (left-right culture wars, neoliberal economics, celebrity consumer culture, sectarian ideologies, etc.), theology's historically-, culturally-, aesthetically-aware capaciousness is more important than ever in bringing the sacramentality of reality to the fore.

Secondly, *Without.* In the wake of recent discussions of "religion without religion," "God without being," and so forth, it is clear that "without" as a term of exclusion suggests ambiguity as well. The use of the phrase "X without X" in recent phenomenological theology is used in two ways, as the philosopher and theologian Kevin Hart has noted. One is a kind of *via eminentiae,* where "the first X is affirmed to an eminent degree that cannot be done with the latter. So, if we talk of God as 'being without being,' we mean that God's mode of being, *ipsum esse subsistens,* is of a qualitatively higher order than our mode of being, *ens creatum.*" The other use suggests a metaphor of depth rather than height, "something that never quite rises to the level of a phenomenon," a withdrawal of any self-presentation that would engage our perception and thought, an "empty depth" from which "all intuition has been drained," as in Maurice Blanchot's "self without a self" or Derrida's *différance*[7] – or even, to stretch the metaphor, Meister Eckhart's "I pray to God that he may make me free [*or* rid me] of 'God'."[8] "Without" signals the hint or trace of the "ghostly" non-presence of the excluded other that still exerts a non-objectifiable effect – or, even better if you are musical, the missing yet eerily-sounding third degree of a chord composed only of the

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q.1, a.3, resp., in: Summa theologiae, trans. T. Gilby, Blackfriars edition, vol. 1, London 1964, 14 (Latin), 15 (English)].

[6] *Jean-Pierre de Caussade*, Abandonment to Divine Providence, trans. John Beevers, Garden City, NY 1975, 25–26.

[7] *Kevin Hart*, Without, in: Marko Zlomislić; Neal DeRoo (ed.), Cross and Khôra: Deconstruction and Christianity in the Work of John D. Caputo, Eugene, OR 2010, 80–108, esp. 83 f.

[8] *Meister Eckhart*, Sermon 52 ("Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum"), in: *Meister Eckhart*: The Essential Sermons (cf. fn. 1), 202.

octave and the fifth (is it a flat or a natural, a minor or major chord?). My proposal will fill in that chord as far as I am able.

Thirdly, *Metaphysics.* My understanding of this term is resolutely Heideggerian. Heidegger's announcement of the "end" of metaphysics and his critique of ontotheology continues to exert profound influence on the continental discussion of the relation of theology and metaphysics.[9] Heidegger's radical critique, following in the wake of Friedrich Nietzsche's own blistering analysis, marks a rupture in recent Western intellectual history.[10] This rupture affects the history of Christian theology as well, dividing it so clearly into periods of "before" and "after" that Christian reflection on God after Heidegger's "overcoming of metaphysics" looks fundamentally different from what came before. The widespread reception of this critique destabilized the traditional identification of God with Being and forced a re-evaluation of the role of metaphysics within Catholic theology.[11]

For Heidegger, philosophy's intrinsic identity as metaphysics is revealed in its obsessive quest for the unifying ground of beings. By locating this ground in a realm exterior to our experience, "metaphysical thinking departs from what is present in its presence," Heidegger claims, "and thus represents it in terms of its ground as something grounded".[12] The consistent objectifying representation of Being as a being, the tendency to ignore the fundamental phenomenality of beings (that is, their sheer givenness as modes of active presencing), and the persistent misunderstanding of reality in terms of dualistic oppositions (e. g. Being as "ground" over against beings as "grounded") all add up to the fatal flaw of metaphysical thinking: that despite its totalizing claims, it misses what Heidegger calls the "ontological difference," the very condition which makes the differentiation between Being and beings possible. Rather than the two elements which metaphysics wrongly identifies as fundamental, there are rather *three* factors which become apparent to thought: Being (the process of presencing), beings (which are present and take their stand within our field of attention), and the differentiating process which simultaneously connects and holds them apart – *dif-fers/de-fers* them, hence the "difference".[13]

Metaphysics compounds its errors by representing the ultimate unifying principle as the "highest being," the divine ground. Here, Heidegger argues, is where metaphysics becomes ontotheology. "When metaphysics thinks of beings with respect to the ground that is common to all beings as such, then it is logic as onto-logic. When metaphysics thinks of beings

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[9] Much of the material in this section comes from *Anthony J. Godzieba*, A Theology of the Presence and Absence of God, Collegeville, MN 2018, 138–42, summarized here and with slight revisions.

[10] According to a story told by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Nietzsche's impact on Heidegger was overwhelming. "And then there is a remark I repeatedly now invoke, ever since I first heard it from Heidegger's son, that in the last months of his life, Heidegger constantly repeated 'Nietzsche ruined me!' One could hear that declaration from him regularly, acknowledging his own failure." See Hans-Georg Gadamer, Heidegger und Nietzsche: „Nietzsche hat mich kaputtgemacht!", in: Aletheia 5 (1994) 5–8, cited and translated according to *Babette Babich*, Heidegger's Will to Power, in: Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology 38 (2007) 37–60, 58, n. 35.

[11] See *Anthony J. Godzieba*, Ontotheology to Excess: Imagining God Without Being, in: Theological Studies 56 (1995) 3–20; *Anthony J. Godzieba*, Bernhard Welte's Fundamental Theological Approach to Christology, American University Studies, series VII, vol. 160, New York – Bern 1994.

[12] *Martin Heidegger*, The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking, in idem, On Time and Being, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York 1972, 56.

[13] See *Martin Heidegger*, The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics, the second essay of Heidegger's Identity and Difference, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York 1969, 42–74.

as such as a whole, that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything, then it is logic as theologic."[14] God enters philosophy when identified with *Being,* the unifying Ground of the perduring of beings.

However, this God is thereby inscribed within a metaphysical schema which is "bigger" than God, so to speak. This all-encompassing schema employs God as part of the dualistic formatting of experience. God thus rests in the grip of the differentiating process which is always already present ahead of the Divine Highest Being who is distinct from beings. In other words, both the character of God as Being and the relationship of God to beings is determined by an always already-present third "factor," the ontological difference. This God, in Heidegger's famous description, is "the god of philosophy. Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god . . . can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god."[15]

What are the consequences of Heidegger's critique of ontotheology in the light of the ontological difference? Is every image of God identified with the God of ontotheology? Is all talk of God automatically illegitimate? Some recent commentators would read Heidegger's critique in such an extremely unilateral way, as rendering *all* theological discourse impossible, *all* images of God identical with "the God of philosophy" and thus illegitimate, *all* faith in God suspect because of its alleged totalizing tendencies. But it is clear, even in the passage from *Identity and Difference* cited earlier, that such extreme readings are mistaken if they claim to explain Heidegger's intent. He recognizes the legitimacy of belief and of theistic discourse; indeed he wants to speak of an experience of God which reaches back beyond the image of God constructed by ontotheology and philosophical theology to the God before whom one can indeed "play music and dance". The critique of ontotheology in the light of the ontological difference is Heidegger's way of clearing the decks, saying in effect that human reason's attempts to use the idea of God to gain the highest metaphysical vantage-point and thus make the whole of being intelligible are instead betrayals of the divine God who is beyond "the God of philosophy".

One might call this a project in the style of Pascal: protecting the experiential content of faith from any sort of theoretical distortion.[16] It has earlier sources in Heidegger's thought. His early lectures on the philosophy of religion presented a phenomenology of faith derived from St. Paul and Augustine, an interpretation very much influenced by Luther and Kierkegaard. His later critique of the metaphysical objectification and dissolution of "the divine God" was a development of an explicitly Lutheran view of faith's relation to theology which he had already laid out in the 1920s.[17] And his 1927 lecture course on "the basic

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[14] Ibid., 70 f.

[15] Ibid., 72.

[16] See *Merold Westphal*, Overcoming Onto-Theology, in: John D. Caputo; Michael J. Scanlon (ed.), God, The Gift, and Postmodernism, Bloomington, IN 1999, 146–169.

[17] See *Martin Heidegger*, Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens, in: Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, II. Abt.: Vorlesungen 1919–1944, Bd. 60, Frankfurt a. M. 1995; *Martin Heidegger*, The Phenomenology of Religious Life, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, Studies in Continental Thought, Bloomington, IN 2004. See especially the lectures on the phenomenology of religion (1920–21, which include the Pauline interpretations) and on Augustine and neo-Platonism (1921). See also Heidegger's 1927 lecture *Phenomenology and Theology* in: Martin Heidegger, The Piety of Thinking, trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo, Bloomington, IN 1976, esp. 10 f.

problems of phenomenology" characterizes the Greek and medieval understanding of be-
ing, as well as the Christian theology of creation, as caught in a metaphor of "produc-
tion/manufacture" (*Herstellen*), where "being, being-actual, or existing, in the traditional
sense, means presence-at-hand."[18] Taking this longer-range context in account, one com-
mentator notes that the critique of ontotheology "is not directed toward the God of the bible
or the Koran, before whom people do fall on their knees in awe, pray, sacrifice, sing, and
dance," but rather is directed at "the 'metaphysical' tendency . . . to imprison theological
discourse within a primacy of theoretical reason under the rule of the principle of sufficient
reason."[19] A way is thus opened toward other possibilities of meaningful discourse about
God.

The periodizing and destabilizing nature of Heidegger's critique of ontotheology marks
a clear dividing line. On the one hand no authentic Christian theology that comes after
Heidegger can afford to be un-reflectively metaphysical without a rigorous argument which
demonstrates how its fundamental understanding of being escapes the Heideggerian defi-
nition of metaphysics as an objectifying and indeed deadening representationalism. But
from my Roman Catholic perspective it is also clear that Heidegger's thought offers little
help in discerning what a "post-ontotheological" theology – both natural and "theological" –
should look like. No contemporary Catholic theology committed to incarnation and sacra-
mentality can simply follow Heidegger's subsequent path and take up the rather diluted
apophatic notion of *das Heilige* ("the Holy") that he articulated in his later works.[20] What
would that meaningful discourse, a "theology without metaphysics," look like?

2. A Chastened Natural Theology

Theology, with or without metaphysics, has two fundamental issues to grapple with. Here
is the first: God is ineffable, and yet we claim that experience of God is available to us.
The prologue to the Gospel of John expresses it with delicious irony: "No one has ever
seen God," the evangelist says, and yet at the same time believers have indeed seen God
because "the only Son . . . has made him known" (John 1:18). Impossibility and contradic-
tion abound: God as ineffable, yet available; not seen, yet seen; absent, yet present.

Here is the second issue, neatly summed up by Joseph Stephen O'Leary in describing
the "lack of fit" between metaphysics and biblical experience:

> "No divine name can fix the identity of God forever. The naming is always a context-bound
> and culture-bound performance . . . the event of naming is a narrative event. To name 'God'
> without such narrative context is a helplessly vague gesture at some unthinkable ultimate. Only

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[18] *Martin Heidegger*, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, trans. Albert Hofstadter, Bloomington, IN 1982,
108 (*Herstellen*), 109 (presence-at-hand), 118 (creation as production).
[19] *Westphal*, Overcoming Onto-Theology (cf. fn. 16), 148, 160.
[20] See, e. g. *Martin Heidegger*, What Are Poets For?, in: *Martin Heidegger*, Poetry, Language, Thought, trans.
Albert Hofstadter, New York 1971, 91–142; *Martin Heidegger*, Letter on Humanism, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi
and J. Glenn Gray, in: David Farrell Krell (ed.), Heidegger: Basic Writings, rev. ed., San Francisco 1993, 217–265.

stories, explicit or implied, taking the form 'the God who . . .', give the proper name its bearings."[21]

Only within a network of meanings (what classical phenomenology calls a "world") is the identity of God apprehendable to any degree. This is why a *narrative* about God – a network of lived meanings generated by experiences with God – is crucial to knowing anything about God at all.

For centuries metaphysics has supplied the conceptual imagination that has dealt with divine ineffability and identity. But it fails on both the counts noted here: its drive for unity eclipses the fundamental dialectical paradox, and the necessary time-constituted narrative remains literally un-thought in the pursuit of timeless absolutes. Even a catalogue of abstract divine attributes, in the end, has its origins in embodied temporal experience. And yet the heart of religious faith is the relationship between the divine and the human, the *chiasmus* of divinity with embodied human experience. How does *fides quaerens intellectum* account for that criss-crossing? How do we give a reason for the hope that arises from that intersection?

What I propose here is a *natural theology* – not the traditional philosophical version that rises up out of the modern extrinsic view of God and Enlightenment natural religion, but rather a more Catholic version, one that can give an account of the "sacrament of the moment" and the incarnational imagination that puts relationality squarely at the center of thought and practice. This is a natural theology that shades over into a "theological" theology. This account (to put it in Pascal's terms) must show that it "really understands human nature" and is "attractive because it promises true good." It must show how the structure of everyday reality already involves a *chiasmus* of the finite and the infinite, the infinite that can ultimately be construed as personal. And let's raise the stakes even higher: in our North Atlantic world driven by the neo-liberal imagination and late capitalist consumer culture, this natural theology must demonstrate a "more likely story" about meaning and desire, showing how the incarnational and sacramental imagination truly discloses a "clearing" in everyday experience where divinity and humanity personally encounter each other and where the deepest human desire for fulfillment can be accomplished. The key here is "accomplish." What this natural theology discloses has to be more than abstract speculation about divine attributes or proofs. Its attractiveness must lead to *performance*, to the fulfillment of possibilities of human flourishing that can only be successfully enacted when they are a participation in divine life.

I rely on Walter Kasper's short description of this sort of natural theology: it is the search for "the natural access-point of faith."[22] Elsewhere he describes the task as one of demonstrating "the internal reasonableness of a faith which has its substantiation in and from

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[21] *Joseph Stephen O'Leary*, Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth, Edinburgh 1996, ix–x ("lack of fit"); 160 f. (narrative and naming).

[22] *Walter Kasper*, An Introduction to Christian Faith, trans. V. Green, New York 1980, 20; dt. *Walter Kasper*, Einführung in den Glauben, in: ders., Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 5: Das Evangelium Jesu Christi, hrsg. v. George Augustin und Klaus Krämer, Freiburg i. Br. 2009, 33: "die Frage nach dem sogenannten natürlichen 'Anknüpfungspunkt' des Glaubens."

itself."[23] The focal point is *access*: access to transcendence from within immanence, and remaining within the paradox. In a context of what Charles Taylor has called "buffered selves" and "exclusive humanism", the theologian's task is to show that this intentionality-toward-transcendence is not only plausible but actual.[24]

If you remember the tripartite schema of the Neoscholastic fundamental theology manuals (*demonstratio religiosa, demonstatio christiana, demonstratio catholica*), you can see that this is really a contemporary retrieval of the first "demonstration", which dealt with the possibility of divine revelation and the access to it through human experience. Every natural theology argument is thus a transcendental limit argument, whether anthropological (Anselm), cosmological (Thomas Aquinas), a combination of the two (as in Hans Küng's clever and convincing use of "fundamental trust"), or arguments made in the wake of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and ontotheology (such as Jean-Luc Marion's "God without being").[25] In other words, natural theology's task is to show how human experience is inherently open to transcendence and participates in a dynamic movement toward God that can be more fully articulated through a faith commitment to God's further self-revelation.

Can theology demonstrate this without metaphysics? Yes – without metaphysics, but not without ontology, specifically a *relational ontology*. Theology, as a second-order discipline, must still rely on a background reflection on being and existence in order to be able to account for the transcendental intentionality of human experience and thereby break through the buffer of the buffered self.

In my recent book *A Theology of the Presence and Absence of God* I sketch out just such a Catholic natural theology by relying on Kasper's retrieval of a quintessentially modern insight: that freedom and free activity are more primordial than being. "Being," he says, "is act, accomplishment, happening, event. Not self-contained being but existence, or freedom that goes out of itself and fulfills itself in action, is now the starting point and horizon of thought."[26] This sets the stage for a shift to a *personal* metaphor of encounter, his argument for the finite person as fundamentally open and relational, "characterized by a tension between an always concrete and irreplaceable individuality and an unlimited openness to the whole of reality."[27] This self-transcending openness "can reach definitive fulfillment only if it encounters a person who is infinite not only in its intentional claims on reality but in its real being; that is, only if it encounters an absolute person."[28] The concept of person

[23] *Walter Kasper*, The God of Jesus Christ, new ed., trans. [Matthew O'Connell and] Dinah Livingstone, London – New York 2021, 71; dt. Der Gott Jesu Christi, in: ders., Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 4, hrsg. v. Georg Augustin und Klaus Krämer, Freiburg i. Br. 2008, 145: "*Ihre Aufgabe* [d. h., der natürlichen Theologie] *ist es vielmehr, die innere Vernünftigkeit des in sich und aus sich selbst begründeten Glaubens zu erweisen*" (emphasis in original).

[24] Cf. *Charles Taylor*, A Secular Age, Cambridge, MA 2007, 38–41.

[25] See *Godzieba*, A Theology of the Presence (cf. fn. 9), chap. 3 for these arguments and their references.

[26] *Kasper*, Der Gott Jesu Christi/The God of Jesus Christ (cf. fn. 23), 153/255: „Sein ist also Tat, Vollzug, Geschehen, Ereignis. Nicht die in sich stehende Substanz, sondern die Ek-sistenz, die Freiheit, die aus sich heraustritt und die sich im Vollzug verwirklicht, ist jetzt Ausgangspunkt und Horizont des Denkens."

[27] *Kasper*, Der Gott Jesu Christi/The God of Jesus Christ (cf. fn. 23), 154/257: "Schon im endlichen Bereich ist die Person also ausgezeichnet durch die *Spannung zwischen dem jeweils konkreten, unvertauschbaren Einzelnen und dessen unbegrenzter Offenheit auf* das Ganze der Wirklichkeit."

[28] Ibid., 154/257 f.: "Ihre endgültige Erfüllung kann die menschliche Person nur finden, wenn sie einer Person begegnet, die nicht nur ihrem intentionalen Anspruch, sondern ihrem realen Sein nach unendlich ist, wenn sie der absoluten Person begegnet."

as a unique realization of being-as-relational can also apply to God, this time without the tension of constraint, and portrays God "rather in the horizon of freedom and defines him as perfect freedom." If human fulfillment can only occur "by emptying ourselves out in love, so as to realize our own intentional infinity," this means for Kasper that "seen in the horizon of the person, the meaning of being is love … To call God a person is to say that God is the subsistent being which is freedom in love. Thus the definition of God's essence brings us back to the biblical statement: 'God is love' (I John 4.8, 16)."[29]

Kasper defines the fundamental structure of reality as relational and as freedom-in-gift, the gratuitous granting of open space in order for the possibilities that constitute the incommunicable individuality we call "the person" to be discovered and actualized in relationship to other persons. The transcending openness that marks human selfhood thus mirrors the character of the transcendent freedom that is its ground and in which it participates. And that intentional and paradoxical selfhood, incommunicably particular and yet constituted in relation to all others, can only be fulfilled in person when it experiences love and relationship without constraint – when it experiences, as Kasper puts it, "an absolute, a divine person." What is also clear is that if the term "being" is retained, it has been redefined. "The meaning of being is therefore to be found not in substance that exists in itself, but in self-communicating love."[30]

This search for the *natural* access-point of faith, then, has a double focus, parallel to the double *kenosis* involved, the double gift within relationality. It is *anthropological,* providing an analysis of that natural access-point all the way down to its fundamental intense desire for fulfillment – a *personal* desire that can only be fulfilled over time *in a personal and relational way.* And it is *theological*, pointing to the only possible way definitive fulfillment can come about: through a *personal* reception of love given without constraint. This claim is daring: that being itself can only be adequately disclosed in active and personalist terms – freedom, relation, love, gift – and that any static or "substance" language is a distortion. Kasper draws out the conclusion of this radical claim: not only does this allow a natural theology to provide a clearing for a theology of the Trinity, but it upends metaphysical thinking as well.

> "If we consider the statement that God and he alone is love, it follows that love is the widest horizon of all reality and love is the meaning of being. This amounts to a kind of revolution in the field of metaphysical thought. For this insight leads to the realization that neither the self-subsistent substance nor the modern autonomous subject are actually the fundamental reality. Rather, the starting point and foundation are what Aristotle called mere accident and the weakest state of being: relationship. Thus the theology of the Trinity leads us to a relational and personal ontology."[31]

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[29] Ibid., 154 f./258: "Im Horizon der Person erscheint der Sinn des Seins als Liebe. … Die Personalität Gottes besagt dann, dass Gott das subsistierende Sein ist, das Freiheit in der Liebe ist. Damit führt uns die Wesensbestimmung Gottes zurück auf die biblische Aussage: 'Gott ist Liebe' (1 Joh 4.8.16)."

[30] Ibid., 156/260: *"Der Sinn von Sein ist also nicht in sich stehende Substanz, sondern sich selbst mitteilende Liebe"* (emphasis in the original).

[31] *Kasper*, Der Gott Jesu Christi/The God of Jesus Christ (cf. fn. 23), xxvi/37: "Denkt man den Satz, dass Gott und er allein Liebe ist, zu Ende, dann folgt daraus, dass Liebe der umfassendste Horizont aller Wirklichkeit und

It is remarkable that four decades ago, Kasper was among the first to use the concept of "gift" in the context of philosophical theology, before Derrida and his commentators made it a major philosophical theme, and contemporaneous with Jean-Luc Marion, whose *Dieu sans l'être* was published in 1982, the year *Der Gott Jesu Christi* first appeared.[32]

What is also remarkable is that in the wake of the collapse of the Neoscholastic metaphysical universe and Heidegger's sweeping critique of ontotheology, other Catholic thinkers turned to find a relational ontology within the sources of the tradition. From a more phenomenological angle, for example, Klaus Hemmerle's small volume *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie* interprets reality in terms of divinely-grounded kenotic love. Hemmerle recognizes that while faith's object is God and is evoked by God's self-revelation, at the same time it is also a deeply human act that includes embodied and temporally-saturated understanding – it needs a starting point within our experience, a phenomenality to launch a progressively deepening encounter with God. A "double apriori" operates here, a simultaneous two-fold presupposed dependency: God's self-giving occurs in the midst of and through the conditions of embodied and temporally-saturated human experience, while at the same time the very possibility of human experience is always already grounded in God who gives it space to be.[33] Indeed, following upon this surprising act of divine discretion at creation, God again constrains divinity to "fit" humanity at the Incarnation. We do not control or force that presence; rather, we respond to a prior active givenness, one that "overflows" any restriction to a particular object. The clue to its personal character is the revelatory and yet discreet phenomenality of Christ's action in the gospels, giving us a glimpse of the primordial source of this transfiguring power: the all-encompassing love of God for all that God has created. As 1 John 4:19 puts it, "We love, because he first loved us." The fundamental character of this love is so absolute that Hemmerle does not hesitate to argue that it forces us to re-read reality itself according to a new understanding of being.[34] The very nature of the triune God as a communion of persons in love enters into all aspects of reality and transforms them by "the rhythm of Being; it is the rhythm of giving that gives itself" and by the invitation to participate fully in divine life.[35] "This perspective becomes apparent in the structure of all being, all thinking, and all events," says Hemmerle; "it leads

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Liebe der Sinn von Sein ist. Das bedeutet eine Art Revolution im Bereich des metaphysischen Denkens. Denn diese Einsicht führt zu der Erkenntnis, dass weder die in sich stehende Substanz noch das autonome neuzeitliche Subjekt die eigentliche und die grundlegende Wirklichkeit sind; Ausgangspunkt und Grundlage sind vielmehr, was bei Aristoteles bloßes Akzidens und die schwächste Seinswirklichkeit ist, die Relation. Die Trinitätstheologie führt uns damit zu einer relationalen und personalen Ontologie."

[32] *Jean-Luc Marion*, Dieu sans l'être: Hors-texte, Paris 1982.

[33] *Klaus Hemmerle*, Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie, 2. Aufl., Einsiedeln 1992, 18–19; English *Klaus Hemmerle*, Theses Towards a Trinitarian Ontology, trans. Stephen Churchyard, Brooklyn, NY 2020, 17–18.

[34] *Hemmerle*, Thesen (cf. fn. 33), 38–60/ 35–56. See also *Anthony J. Godzieba*, Prolegomena to a Catholic Theology of God between Heidegger and Postmodernity, in Heythrop Journal 40 (1999) 319–339, esp. 331–333. Kasper makes a very similar point: "By defining God, the all-determining reality, in personal terms, *being as a whole* is personally defined. This means a revolution in the understanding of being … To put it in more concrete terms: *love is the all-determining reality* and the meaning of being … So wherever there is love, we already find, here and now, the ultimate meaning of all reality" (*Walter Kasper*, Theology and Church, trans. Margaret Kohl, New York 1989, 29–30; emphases in the original).

[35] Ibid., 38/ 35.

to a re-reading in faith of what the phenomenon reveals in direct reference to this perspective. Thinking itself learns anew from this phenomenology; it becomes transformed insofar as, in accompanying the path of self-giving, it becomes a path of love."[36] The key for Hemmerle is experienced phenomenally, the gift of sheer being, a space to be – not merely an open clearing (as with, say, Heidegger), but a givenness that extends and grounds a personal relationship between the giver and the recipient, the creature.

These redefinitions of "being" mark a farewell to any of the usual understandings of "metaphysics," even if Kasper (as we saw earlier) desires to retain the term. The description of experience at the natural access-point of faith also reveals that supernatural revelation (of the character of God, of God's inner life, and of God's relationship to the world) is not extrinsic to that experience. Rather, revelation is the super-abundant fulfillment of the intentional openness of finite experience and of the natural knowledge of God which flows from that experience.

3. Theology, Time, and a Performance Hermeneutic

Let me recall the second of the texts I proposed at the beginning: "Amateurs talk strategy; professionals talk logistics." My paraphrase: "Metaphysics talks strategy; relational ontology talks performance and discipleship." If our theological-reflection-without-metaphysics is true to its evidence and its outcome regarding self-communicating love and relationality, then it must impel us to participate in that love in order to experience their truth. We are thrown back into the paradox: the truth of the ineffable God who is love can be experienced only by participation in that divine love by finite persons realizing the possibilities of that truth in embodied temporal performance. The Johannine prologue gives us a clue: "No one has ever seen God", and yet at the same time believers have indeed seen God because "the only Son … has made him known" (John 1:18).

Paradox is the very structure of revelation. The reason is God's "discretion" from the beginning of creation, God's holding-back in order to give all reality space to *be*. As Christian Duquoc puts it, "God does not give himself in experience; he announces himself in witnesses … Nothing defines his identity or his essence except the action he takes within a framework which he has fixed, the covenant, and a promise which opens up the present to the future in a positive way."[37] But what signals do we have *in this temporal, embodied life* that God is love and that this love is directed to us? After all, as a phenomenologist, I am hungry for the *phenomena* toward which the intentionality of my embodied consciousness is directed. How is the ineffable triune God available to us within our embodied, time-bound lives? Where is *fides quaerens intellectum* supposed to look?

"Looking" might actually be the problem. Our language for experiences or non-experiences of God is pervaded with the visual metaphor. Beyond the Platonic roots of the

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[36] Ibid., 54/ 50 (translation modified; my thanks to Francis Schüssler Fiorenza).

[37] *Christian Duquoc*, "Who is God?" becomes "Where is God?" The Shift in a Question, trans. John Bowden, in: Christian Duquoc; Casiano Floristán (Ed.), Where is God? A Cry of Human Distress, Concilium 1992/4, London 1992, 1–10, esp. 2 f.

metaphor that knowing is like seeing, the modern way of framing experience with the visual metaphor posits a seeing/knowing "I" at a fixed central point with all that is "real" positioned outside at a distance from this point. To "see clearly" is to engage reality, but always at a distance with a gap to be bridged.

To shift the metaphor doesn't eliminate the paradox but makes it more approachable. I like Kevin Hart's phenomenological way of putting it:

> "When we pray to the Trinity, we do not constitute the triune God as phenomenon; we dispose ourselves so that we receive him as mystery. We do not bring God into presence; we enter into his presence, which may be quite different from human modes of presence. The triune God is not an object or a being, nor strictly being itself but rather *ipsum esse subsistens omnibus modis indeterminatum,* to use Aquinas's fine expression, that is, wholly undetermined subsistent 'to be' itself. God is an absolutely singular *event,* and doubtless His triune nature is an index of that singularity."[38]

The earlier discussion of the natural access-point of faith gives us some sense of the "clearing" in our everyday lives where we might have access to this "singular event", and Kasper's analysis of freedom as the overarching reality, rather than "being" or "substance," gives us a way of discerning our encounter with transcendence as personal. But to confess God as "Trinity", as a communion of persons in love, is even more personal than concepts of "transcendence" and "absoluteness". Where do we find the clues for that?

We find them in the gospels – in the life, preaching, practices, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' active presence and embodiment of the values of the Kingdom of God is itself a theophany. We find them as well in the continual *performance of these values over time* as a community of faith guided by the Spirit. Jesus invites us to put aside the power-arrangements of world that obscure the already-graced structures of our lives, and to live as *disciples* – that is, live a Jesus-like life that is the applicative performance of those Kingdom values and their possibilities. It is an invitation to participate intensely in trinitarian ontology, performing in our particular historical and cultural contexts the love that is the very being of God who enters into all aspects of reality and transforms them by "the rhythm of self-giving"[39]. In this way, we constitute the truth of that gift of love for ourselves and the world.

This is akin to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's claim that through the interaction of our temporally-saturated and embodied subjectivity (perception and reflection), the true human world that we inhabit, a "world of meaning," is built up. We disclose the truth of the world even as we perceptually constitute it. His image of a pianist knitting together the truth of a musical piece while sight-reading the score – *prima vista,* without preparation – is analogous to the work of *fides quaerens intellectum* in real time:

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[38] *Kevin Hart*, Notes toward a Supreme Phenomenology, in: ders., Kingdoms of God, Bloomington, IN 2014, 159–178, esp. 168. He cites Thomas Aquinas, S.Th. Iª q. 11, a. 4, resp.: "[God] exists supremely, because he has not acquired an existence which his nature has then determined, but is subsistent existence itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*), in no way determined" (cf. Summa theologiae, vol. 2 [1a. 2–11]: Existence and Nature of God, trans. Timothy McDermott, 1964; repr., Cambridge 2006, 166–169).

[39] *Hemmerle*, Thesen (cf. fn. 33), 38/ 35.

"All knowledge of man by man, far from being pure contemplation, is the taking up by each, *as best he can,* of the acts of others, reactivating from ambiguous signs an experience which is not his own, appropriating a structure … of which he forms no distinct concept but which he puts together as an experienced pianist deciphers an unknown piece of music: without himself grasping the motives of each gesture or each operation, without being able to bring to the surface of consciousness all the sediment of knowledge which he is using at that moment. Here we no longer have the positing of an object, but rather we have communication with a way of being."[40]

Likewise we reveal the truth of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God by performing its possibilities over time, possibilities that cannot be realized in timeless metaphysical speculation. Jesus' ultimate response at the end of the Good Samaritan parable to the lawyer who raised the question "who is my neighbor?" is that the truth is found in performance: "Go and *do* likewise" (Luke 10:37).

Discipleship as applicative-performance-over-time is a tough sell these days, especially in a late capitalist consumer culture pervaded by de-temporalization. Since I have written elsewhere about the erasure of time and Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration as applied to the Christian life, I won't go into details here.[41] But the "now-ism" that afflicts contemporary life in the West, the conception of time as constricted spaces, the slicing of everyday life into unrelated temporal fragments, the constant onslaught of obligations and information that keeps us hopping from one disconnected moment to the next, leading strangely enough to inertia – this is the context of Christian life today. Discipleship runs counter to this default lifestyle because it implies duration, a developing narrative over time.

Let's recall Pascal's radical suggestion about how to win back credibility for religion and the religious imagination: have good people "wish it were true" by making it attractive, and then "show that it is" by its view of the human condition and its promise of "true good."[42] The starting point is thus *desire* and *praxis,* and this why in my recent work I have strongly argued that theological aesthetics with a performance hermeneutic is a more appropriate starting point for theological reflection. I have emphasized art, architecture, and especially music as analogues for Christianity and Christian theological reflection because the arts are adept at disclosing glossed-over aspects of our experience and navigating the porous boundaries of the visible and the invisible, time and transcendence – placing us inside the paradox. The arts demand time to unfold: through vision (as we explore a painting), through touch (epic architecture that has felt centuries of footsteps, a room whose character changes as the light shifts during the day), through hearing (that Beyoncé clip or that Bach fugue takes time to unfold its meaning). That we respond the way we do – we do take time – reveals that our embodied subjectivities are indeed temporally-saturated, despite the default culture that hammers us into inertia masquerading as frantic change. And

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[40] *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, The Metaphysical in Man, in: ders., Sense and Non-Sense, trans. Hubert Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, Evanston, IL 1964, 83–98, esp. 93.

[41] See *Anthony J. Godzieba*, "…And Followed Him on the Way" (Mark 10:52): Unity, Diversity, Discipleship, in: Anthony J. Godzieba; Bradford Hinze (Ed.), Beyond Dogmatism and Innocence. Hermeneutics, Critique and Catholic Theology, Collegeville, MN 2017, 228–254.

[42] See *Pascal*, Pensées (cf. fn. 3).

so we can still experience time and duration, which means that the narrativity of disciple-ship, our participation in the discreet gift of divine love *in* and *as* reality, and the application of its possibilities over time in an ensemble of practices, beliefs, and reflections, is still within our experience.

The paradox is never "solved" because there is no unraveling the "double apriori" that is operative in reality: God's self-revelation occurs in the conditions of human experience, and the very possibility of human experience is grounded in God whose discretion gives it freedom to be. It is a mutual dependency, occasioned by divine initiative. Revelation, from biblical times until now, ties the ineffable God and the finite particularity of human expe-rience together closely. God is *present* by fulfilling our innermost desires for love and meaning, and yet disturbingly *absent* by shattering our expectations and exceeding our at-tempts at a complete synthesis or definitive understanding. Our awareness of the infinite triune reality of God cannot occur without an encounter with the love of God in partial and fallible performances of grace in real time. Metaphysics can offer talk, but not logistics. Our experience and confession that "God is love" must have some real-time catalyst, some footing in reality, and some continuity in history. Since these encounters keep on occurring, no definitive synthesis of knowledge is ever possible, only the fragile certainty of faith that continues to seek understanding.

One reason for this fragility is that, for the most part, these encounters with God do not verge on the spectacular. They occur as part of the ordinariness of time-bound everyday life that participates in divine presence by the sheer fact of its existence: the person who finds love against the odds; unexpected help from a kind stranger on the street; the destruc-tion of a community's life overcome by that community's trust in one another and in grace; an overwhelming liturgical experience after a string of blandly rote attendances; one's spirit deeply moved by a piece of music that one has heard a million times; a nation's trust in justice and peace over violent confrontation. Whoever wrote *Abandonment to Divine Providence* was correct about "the sacrament of the moment". The shattering of expecta-tions that occurs in these events is not because they are other-than-normal, but rather that the normal includes experiences on the porous boundary between the visible and invisible, that from within immanence we are offered access to the ineffable mystery of God's love.

Der vorliegende Beitrag analysiert die Nachwirkungen von Heideggers Kritik an der Ontotheologie. Im Lichte dieser Kritik stellt sich die Frage, welche Form von Meta-physik oder Ontologie für die Theologie geeignet sein könnte. Der Beitrag plädiert für eine relationale Ontologie, die ihre Grundbegriffe aus zeitlichen und verkörperten Er-fahrungen gewinnt und in diesen Erfahrungen das Geschenk des Übernatürlichen im Natürlichen erkennt.