

Towards a spousal metaphysics of the Eucharist

Persons, Powers, and Mary

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Der Beitrag lotet die Chancen einer interpersonalen Ontologie von Personen, Kräften und Kontingenz für das Verständnis der Realpräsenz aus. Ein allgemeiner Aufriss dieser metaphysischen Rahmentheorie wird dahingehend erläutert, dass Personen und deren freien Entscheidungen die irreduzible Quelle von Kontingenz in dieser Welt sind und dergestalt der kreativen Freiheit Gottes ähneln. Ein „infinity mirror“, innerhalb dessen zwei Personen ihren unbedingten Wert wechselseitig erkennen, ermöglicht neues und anderes Leben. Dieses Modell dient zur metaphysischen Modellierung der Inkarnation und – darauf aufbauend – des letzten Abendmahles und des Kreuzesgeschehens.

1. Introduction: On purpose and method

This paper aims at exploring a contemporary metaphysical framework in which the doctrine of real presence is at all conceivable. The verb ‘exploring’ indicates the limited scope and ambitions of this very contribution. The contemporary metaphysical framework loosely refers to work in contemporary analytic philosophy on the so-called metaphysics of powers. The very role metaphysics might or should play for a theological *datum* like the real presence of Christ raises a host of methodological questions with deep philosophical and theological roots and implications. Suffice it to say that, methodologically, this is neither about turning philosophy into a subservient handmaid of theology, nor about only making room for faith within the bounds of mere reason. The goal is rather to *enable* a deeper (metaphysical) *understanding* of a (theological) *datum*, along the traditional Anselmian lines of *fides quaerens intellectum*. Historically, the metaphysical distinctions between person and nature or essence also enabled a deeper understanding of the central trinitarian and christological mysteries without any exhaustive, reductionistic, or rationalistic ambitions.

Scripturally, this methodological approach is like asking Mary’s simple but open and honest question – “How shall this be done?” (Luke 1,34) – in the form of “How can this (the real presence, the transubstantiation) metaphysically be done?” There is a subtle difference between Mary’s sense of wonder, and Joachim’s skeptical “Whereby shall I know this?” (Luke 1,18). More than an *ad hoc* scriptural reference, Mary’s epistemic position is

arguably highly relevant for this kind of philosophical inquiry in a theological terrain.¹ Moreover, as we will see, she not only plays a methodological, but also a ‘substantial’ role in this debate.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section is largely based upon some earlier work which is more fully available elsewhere. It briefly sets out a contemporary metaphysical framework of powers and dispositions and applies it, for specific reasons, to a metaphysics of institutional reality. This is combined with a radical notion of contingency, enabled by free will as a two-way power of both created and uncreated persons. All of the created order is then the result of a contingent act of creation by (an) uncreated person(s).

The second section explores the metaphysics of a spousal self-gift within that preceding framework. What happens, metaphysically, when two persons fully give themselves to each other? Within the horizontal order of institutional reality, this pertains to the metaphysics of marriage, and in light of the theistic dimension it is crucially related to the reality of procreation. The crucial concept here is that of an infinity mirror, a contingent necessity arising out of the total mutual self-gift between two persons. In the vertical order between created and uncreated persons, this enables a metaphysical understanding of Mary’s *Fiat* and the Incarnation.

The third section applies the preceding sections to the core issue, namely the metaphysics of the real presence and the possibility of transubstantiation. Although the terminology which uses the phrases “substance” and “transubstantiation” is retained, the goal is to frame the understanding of these terms within interpersonal metaphysics. More specifically, transubstantiation is metaphysically conceived as an extension or prolongation of the Incarnation. That is, the same kind of metaphysics that was operative in the Incarnation is operative in the transubstantiation.

This results in a significant and permanent connection between the *Fiat* of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Eucharist. That relation is an old and traditional theological theme, arguably especially over the course of the past century.² In that sense, the overall approach is to try and answer the more general question of how the real presence is metaphysically possible by answering the far more specific question of how such an intimate connection between Mary and the Eucharist is metaphysically possible.

¹ For the relationship between Mary and philosophy, cf. *Pope John Paul II*, *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998, para. 108, in: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html [accessed on 05.29.2020]; *David Vincent Meconi*, *Philosophy in Maria*, *Fides et Ratio* and Mary as the Model of Created Wisdom, in: D. R. Foster; J. W. Koterski (Eds.), *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought. Essays on Fides et Ratio*, Washington, DC 2003, 69–88; *Michaël Bauwens*, *A Mariological Metametaphysics*, in: *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 8/3 (2019) 255–271.

² For a recent overview, cf. *Mauro Gagliardi*, *María, Mujer Eucarística*, in: *María, Estrella de La Nueva Evangelización. Congreso Mariano, Vida Y Espiritualidad*, Lima 2003, 237–259. The older and traditional reference work is *René Laurentin*, *Marie l’Église et le sacerdoce. Essai sur le développement d’une idée religieuse* (Nouvelles Éditions Latines), Paris 1953.

2. A metaphysics of powers and contingency

This section will simply set out the metaphysical framework that will be used to do the work in the other parts, without developing an argumentation for it – the interested or skeptical reader can avail him- or herself of the references. The past few decades have witnessed an increased interest within analytic philosophy on the metaphysics of powers, potentialities, or dispositions – often used interchangeably, as it is here. In response to a neo-Humean skepticism about powers that was dominant for a large part of the 20th century, this movement by and large takes a realist position towards powers.³ Powers like elasticity, fragility, i. e. what things can do or can bring about, are a real and irreducibly part of reality, even when not actual or manifest. They are not mere figures of speech to express what could happen in a counterfactual or future state of affairs. This allows for richer and more multi-layered metaphysics, reminiscent of the traditional Aristotelian act-potency distinction.

One specific choice that is made here is that the manifestation of power is not triggered by something that remains external to the power but is always the mutual manifestation of reciprocal disposition partners.⁴ The fragility of a vase is made mutually manifest with the hardness of the floor as a reciprocal disposition partner. The flammability of a paper is made mutually manifest with fire and oxygen as reciprocal disposition partners. Many powers have more than one way of manifesting themselves, depending upon their reciprocal disposition partners – compare the difference between the heat of the sun melting ice versus hardening mud, or Martin and Heil's example of water sprayed on burning oil versus water sprayed on flaming timbers. Powers thereby always stand in relation with reciprocal disposition partners for their mutual manifestations.

Moreover, powers can be iterated – powers can be the power to acquire another power. Think of the power to learn a language, or the power of a university degree to give you access to further studies. In combination with reciprocity, this results in a holistic power net or power web.⁵ Powers can become manifest in a wide array of ways, depending on their reciprocal disposition partners, and along many different trajectories where each new manifestation can result in a modified set of dispositional properties. In brief, the world does not consist of things, events, and processes, but is an intricate web of powers permanently acting upon each other as reciprocal disposition partners for mutual manifestations – or counteracting each other's influences.

In this world, human freedom is a specific kind of two-way power, a power to become manifest in one way or another. As just noted, many powers have more than one way of manifesting themselves, but the human will has the source of the contingency of its manifestation within itself, rather than depending on something external to itself – i. e. one reciprocal disposition partner rather than another. Whereas the contingency of all other power

³ For some relevant sampling, cf. *Stephen Mumford; Rani Lill Anjum*, *Getting Causes from Powers*, Oxford 2011; *Ruth Groff; John Greco* (Eds.), *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy. The New Aristotelianism*, New York 2013; *Jonathan D. Jacobs*, *Causal Powers*, Oxford 2017.

⁴ Cf. *Charles Burton Martin; John Heil*, *Rules and Powers*, in: *Nous* 32/S12 (1998) 283–312; *Mumford; Anjum*, *Getting Causes* (see fn. 3).

⁵ Cf. *Martin; Heil*, *Rules and Powers* (see fn. 4), 295.

manifestations can in principle always be traced back to an underlying causal story explaining why things are the way they are rather than something else, human freedom is an irreducible source of contingency – i. e. the irreducible source of why things are one way rather than another way. Hence, (human) persons and their contingent decisions are ultimately the *explanans*, not the *explanandum*, of reality.⁶

As a first point, human freedom is thereby not an oddity in an otherwise deterministic universe that is running along a diachronic causal chain. In such a picture, human freedom as a power for alternative possibilities would require the diachronic chain of causality to be almost miraculously broken with every free human decision. Rather, the free human choice to direct one's efforts in one way rather than another is at any point contributing to the overall tug-of-war between the countless forces that are synchronic – at any single point in time – operative. If a magnet could 'choose' to attract iron or not, it wouldn't break any laws of nature but simply be like an electric magnet that can be turned on or off, thereby altering the entire set of forces synchronically influencing the course of events.

If one pushes this proposal to its metaphysical limits, it implies that human persons can exhibit the same kind of radical contingency as divine creative freedom can – not in the sense of having the power to create *ex nihilo*, but the power to contingently co-create *or not*, co-create one reality *or another one*. The ultimate metaphysical question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' hits rock bottom in the case of a contingent decision by a (created or uncreated) person. Although created persons are very limited as to what they can contingently co-create or not since they are radically enabled and conditioned by the preceding and primordial act of creation *ex nihilo*, they do possess the same kind of radical contingency.

This is most easily perceptible in the creation and alteration of human institutional reality whereby human persons can create, alter, or destroy realities almost literally at will, through the mere use of words. We can speak something into being, sometimes hardly without any material mediation. Human institutional reality thereby metaphysically acquires a self-similar or *fractal*-like structure vis-à-vis God's creation – the metaphysical position of human institutional reality vis-à-vis the two-way power of human persons to co-create or not is a self-similar (fractal-like) structure of God's creative freedom vis-à-vis all of creation.⁷ That is, the metaphysical position of human beings towards institutional reality is structurally similar to God's metaphysical position vis-à-vis all of created reality. Human creative freedom is thereby an extension of divine creative freedom, albeit enabled by it.

Moreover, the metaphysics of *institutional* reality is inherently interpersonal, which fits well with the kind of metaphysical interdependence enabled by a metaphysics of powers. Perhaps most importantly, institutional reality is by and large invisible, as are powers and dispositions in their unmanifested state.⁸ A promise is, like an insurance, invisible, but its

⁶ This paragraph and the next are more fully elaborated in *Michaël Bauwens*, *Causes, Contingency, and Freedom. A Reply to Anscombe, Mumford, and Anjum*, in: *RPF* 77/4 (2021) 1315–1338.

⁷ Cf. *id.*, *From Searle to Scotus and Back. Institutions, Powers, and Mary*, in: *HeyJ* 64/1 (2021) 3–15.

⁸ For a fuller development, cf. *id.*, *Institutions as Dispositions. Searle, Smith and the Metaphysics of Blind Chess*, *Journal for the Theory of social behavior* 48/3 (2018) 254–272.

presence and reality are crucial, nevertheless. Human persons can change their will, thereby only changing the dispositional structure of institutional reality without anything visible happening, but metaphysically this makes all the difference.

However, this kind of irreducible contingency faces the classical randomness objection faced by libertarians in the free will debate – if nothing whatsoever ultimately ‘determines’ a choice, doesn’t the choice become random or unintelligible, something which is at least as problematic for our sense of free will as determinism? A more extensive reply has been developed elsewhere,⁹ but very briefly for our present purposes it can be pointed out that the intelligibility and meaningfulness of a contingent action is indeed ultimately not to be found in the preceding causes, but in the very object or state of affairs at which it is aimed. The very similarity of human freedom to divine (creative) freedom can elucidate this point. Although one cannot, in a strict sense, explain why God created rather than not – God was free to create or not – creation itself is highly intelligible and meaningful and in a certain sense the very purpose of the act of creation, underscoring the sheer gratuity of God’s creation.

This two-way power becomes manifest in a contingent choice for a certain state of affairs that is thereby valued into being by being valued more than alternative states of affairs that could (synchronically) have been chosen and valued as well. To contingently choose something is to value it more than what otherwise could have been the case.¹⁰ In the case of institutional reality, valuing the keeping of a promise is one of the most fundamental kinds of glue holding society together. Further on, different contingent valuations and the myriad ways these valuations interact with and act upon each other, are the ‘bread and butter’ of economic reality. These valuations can be gradual and conditional – there can be a difference in the degree of intensity between the valuations of different states of affairs, and these valuations as well as their intensity can be conditional upon other states of affairs obtaining or not, thereby making their manifestations more likely or conditional upon other manifestations.

Finally, one can value a certain state of affairs to such a degree that one is thereby in principle willing to abandon all other possible states of affairs that could contingently be valued but are incompatible with this one. One thereby values a state of affairs to a greater degree than which none can be thought of since its value even surpasses the total set of all other possible states of affairs which would exclude this one. If one vows to wear red shoes for the rest of one’s life, come what may, even when threatened at gunpoint to take off these red shoes, one has given oneself totally to the wearing of these red shoes. This state of affairs might be compatible with a whole range of other states of affairs that can therefore still be freely and contingently valued, but if it would be incompatible with any other state of affairs, the state of affairs of wearing the red shoes would be valued over and above the state of affairs that is incompatible with the wearing of red shoes. The opportunity cost

⁹ Cf. id., Will We Be Free (to Sin) in Heaven?, in: S. Cushing (Ed.), *Heaven and Philosophy*, Lanham 2017, 231–254.

¹⁰ Cf. id., Sur Les Fondements Métaphysiques et Les Contours Théologiques Des Sciences Sociales. Réalisme, Nominalisme et Création Contingente, in: O. Peniaz (Ed.), *Le Réalisme En Sciences Sociales* (Editions du CERF, forthcoming).

of valuing that state of affairs therefore possibly includes all other possible states of affairs. One totally ‘gives’ oneself to that state of affairs by valuing it over and above all other possible states of affairs.

As mentioned at the outset, the roughness of this sketch is accounted for by its limited scope, and in the case of this section by its background function compared to the two subsequent sections which will develop some points implied by this metaphysical picture into greater detail. What is key is the combination of contingent valuations with their necessary conditions and implications. The radical contingency of valuing one state of affairs rather than another one, as persons are assumed to be able to do, does not lead to chaotic metaphysics. Social and institutional reality has a kind of necessity and robustness of its own and is theologically highly relevant as arguably the best case of human co-creative freedom.

3. The spousal *Fiat*

These contingent valuations can be directed at a state of affairs – building a house, winning a war, getting a degree, etc. ... – but also at another person. In that case, the state of affairs that is valued is the very existence and well-being of that other person. Moreover, it can be a valuation greater than which none can be thought, whereby one gives oneself to the other person, valuing him or her more than anything else, even at gunpoint. In the case of a servant or a slave, this threatens to deny or destroy the very personhood of the one person by reducing him or her to a mere means to sustain the existence of the other person.

But that kind of total valuation of a person can also happen mutually, whereby two persons give themselves to each other, thereby valuing the existence (and well-being) of the other person as that greater than which (within the created order) nothing can be valued. Moreover, this mutual self-gift can happen conditionally, i. e. upon the very condition of the reciprocal total self-gift of the other person. This creates (co-creates, makes manifest) a distinct reality, here called an infinity mirror. The total self-gift of person A, valuing person B more than anything else (in the created order) is reflected in the total self-gift of person B to person A, and so on *ad infinitum*. Whereas in the case of a visual infinity mirror the image fades out in the distance, in this case, the reciprocity of the valuation intensifies and brightens it into a distinct reality. Such an infinity mirror is then the mutual manifestation of a specific (namely: total) kind of contingent valuation by two persons as reciprocal disposition partners.

What makes this infinity mirror metaphysically special, moreover, is that this specific mutual manifestation of these two persons as reciprocal disposition partners can bring forth a new person. A total reciprocal self-gift includes, in the case of human persons, their bodily existence, which enables in this created order the bringing forth of a new person. Almost any manifestation of power can be a step towards another power – the fragility of glass can become manifest in shards of glass, which have the power to cut, which can become manifest in blood pouring out of a wound, etc. Similarly, an infinity mirror can thereby be the reciprocal disposition partner with the divine creative power that is the enabling condition of the very own being of these two persons – hence, the third person is begotten, not made.

Given that any contingent valuation is an act of co-creation (even when it is destructive of creation, that remains its most adequate metaphysical characterization), if an infinity mirror is an act of co-creation that enables the process of pro-creation, it is arguably that act of co-creation greater than which nothing can be thought.¹¹ The highest kind of creative freedom is the bringing forth of a person in one's image and likeness, which holds in a particular sense the relationship between parents and children.

In brief, reality has been contingently valued into being by the primordial act of creation by uncreated persons. Within the created order, created persons have a similar two-way power to contingently value one state of affairs over and above another one, thereby irreducibly altering the course of affairs compared to what it would have been otherwise. If two persons value each other totally, they manifest an infinity mirror which can result through an act of pro-creation in a third person, thereby indicating a unique partaking in the primordial act of creation by tapping into the very source of their own life.

A trinitarian dimension can be discerned in this train of thought, which has been developed elsewhere.¹² Very briefly, this metaphysical structure is arguably a sign of the Trinity within the created order – two persons simultaneously becoming one flesh (one substance) *within and through* a third person embodying that very unity. The father becomes a father and the mother becomes a mother at the same moment, namely the moment whereby the child is conceived, thereby literally embodying their 'becoming one flesh'. The family would then be a fractal-like extension of the trinitarian life within the created order. In its highest degree, human co-creative freedom as a fractal-like extension of divine creative freedom becomes pro-creative, passing from divine freedom *ad extra* to contingently value something into being, into a fractal-like similarity with trinitarian divine love *ad intra* by loving someone into being.

The next point is that Mary's *Fiat* can now be metaphysically understood as the establishment of such an infinity mirror, but not along a horizontal axis *within* the created order, but along a vertical axis *between* the uncreated and the created order. Given a univocal concept of 'person' and the noted similarity between the Trinity and the family, it is conceivable that such an infinity mirror can arise between a created and an uncreated person. In brief, what normally happens within the created order through an infinity mirror between two created persons, resulting in the mutual manifestation of another created person, now happened between the created and uncreated order through an infinity mirror between a created and an uncreated person, resulting in their mutual manifestation of the hypostatic union – an uncreated person within the created order.

Whereas within the created order both a human mother and father are required as reciprocal disposition partners for the manifestation of God's creative power in a new human person, in this case, God is the direct, total, and exclusive source of the fatherhood of Christ, not mediated through a human fatherhood.¹³ Turning water into wine normally takes

¹¹ Cf. id., Will We Be Free (to Sin) in Heaven? (see fn. 9); id., Freedom, Contingency and Self-Gift. From Duns Scotus to Humanae Vitae, in: Philosophical News 16 (2018) 19–28.

¹² Cf. id., An Institutional Metaphysics for the Trinity, in: TheoLogica. An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology 6/2 (2022) 219–244.

¹³ This does not diminish the importance of the fatherhood of St. Joseph, on the contrary, cf. again *ibid.*

a vine, sunlight, and time as reciprocal disposition partners, but it can also happen directly by the direct application of the primordial divine creative power that stands at the origin of the powers of the vine, the sunlight, and time. The same thing can be said about turning bread and wine into one's flesh and blood – over time, that is what a human body can also do.

Within the Trinity, God the Son was begotten necessarily, but the contingency of creation and the contingency of Mary's *Fiat* make his Incarnation contingent in a double sense – both upon the contingent act of creation as well as on Mary's contingent *Fiat*. The necessity of God's existence and the necessity of the trinitarian processions are thereby intertwined with the contingency of creation and the contingency of the Incarnation. The necessity of God and the necessity by which God the Son, the light of this world, proceeds from God the Father, shines through the contingency of the infinity mirror thus established by Mary's spousal *Fiat*. What remains to be seen and explored now is whether and how this same kind of infinity mirror is operative in the act of consecration and the resulting transubstantiation, continuing or passing on the same light and life that was received by Mary in her womb upon her contingent *Fiat*.

4. The metaphysics of the Eucharist

The first crucial assumption here is that the same kind of metaphysical structure that enabled the Incarnation is operative in the case of the Eucharist. This cannot be exhaustively argued for here. The trinitarian dimension of the spousal self-gift within the created order has already been mentioned and referenced. It is through this lens that the scene on Calvary is interpreted – Christ and Mary as the new Adam and the new Eve, whereby Christ addressing Mary as 'woman' (John 19,26) is taken in the spousal sense of the Greek 'Γύναι' which can mean both 'woman' in a generic sense or the specific spousal sense of 'wife' or 'bride'. John, the beloved disciple, becomes their spiritual son on the cross. With this interpretive frame of the theological and scriptural *data*, the metaphysics of the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist is explored.

As a first point, the power-manifestation relation easily allows for a numerical identity between a power and its manifestation. A lighted bulb is numerically identical to its unmanifested state, a stretched-out rubber is numerically identical to its loosened state, and a promise is numerically identical to its fulfillment. The unity between the Last Supper and Calvary is then the numerical identity of a dispositional structure instituted by Christ's words with its manifestation on Calvary. The contingent institution of a certain reality (e.g. a new and everlasting covenant) is numerically identical with its necessary manifestation or fulfillment (the sacrifice on calvary), given the circumstances of the fall and original sin.

If one changes the dispositional structure of a vase from 'unbreakable' to 'fragile' while the vase is falling to the ground, it hitting the floor and breaking to pieces merely manifests the important dispositional change that had already happened before. In our case, the hard floor is the combination of original sin and the countless personal sins added to them, whereas Christ's total self-gift instituted during the Last Supper is what rendered his dispositional state such that He would willingly submit Himself to this harsh reality. His self-

gift happened both on Thursday and on Friday, but it would be metaphysically inadequate to capture this in terms of two events. The contingent change in the dispositional structure happened on Thursday, it was made manifest or visible on Friday, but it remained the same, numerically identical, reality – Christ's total self-gift.

More to the core of the issue, the metaphysical similarity we are exploring is the one between the Trinity and the human family (in the background), and the Annunciation and Calvary (in the foreground). In all cases, there is a trinity of persons, and a unity of substance as a passing on, or generating of, life. In the first case, this pertains to divine life, in the second case to human life, in the third case to the unique life of the hypostatic union, and in the fourth case to the extension of this life to all believers. In the first case, the order is Father-Son-Spirit, in the second case Father-Mother-Child, in the third case Spirit-Mary-Christ, in the fourth case Christ-Mary-John. In each case, an infinity mirror is set up that enables the kind of life to be passed on. In the first case, the infinity mirror passes on the life of the divine essence. In the second case, the infinity mirror passes on natural human life. In the third case, the infinity mirror sets up the hypostatic union of divine and human life. In the fourth case, the infinity mirror sets up an institutional structure that enables all human life to partake in the divine life.

The first two cases in the background will remain in the background, the third case was already treated in the previous section, so consider the fourth case. For, given the metaphysics of that fourth case, the metaphysics of the Last Supper will be explored as that which dispositionally instituted what became manifest in the fourth case, all the while assuming the numerical identity between the contingent act of instituting the dispositional structure, and its necessary manifestation.

For a start, Christ's saying to Nicodemus that he had to be born again (John 3,3) can be seen as being fulfilled by John becoming Mary's child. This would then require a spousal infinity mirror between Christ and Mary on the cross, establishing a spiritual and institutional – and hence metaphysically, dispositional – unity not of the flesh but of the hearts as the organ with which one values and loves another person. Out of that very unity, at the moment of the mutual piercing of their hearts (cf. Luke 2,35 and John 19,35) as their total reciprocal self-gift or infinity mirror, John is reborn as the son of Mary.

Moreover, at the Last Supper, John was closest to Jesus (cf. John 13,23), whereby Christ's extension of his life to John and the other disciples was mediated through the offered bread and wine. Christ only fully manifested the reality of what had happened there on Calvary, John only became fully reborn as a new person and child at Calvary. Hence, the missing link would then be Mary as the point at Calvary that is structurally like the offering of bread and wine at the Last Supper.

The *traditional* offertory of the Roman rite easily offers such a 'Marian' reading of the offertory – it is Mary who totally and perfectly offers herself to God in order to receive the divine life and extend it to her children through the established infinity mirror¹⁴. It starts

¹⁴ As of the 1970 Roman Missal, the offertory as a distinct part has become the presentation and preparation of the gifts, which speaks of the bread as "fruit of the earth and work of human hands" and the wine as "fruit of the vine and work of human hands". Unlike the 'immaculate host' and the 'chalice of salvation' in the traditional offertory prayers, it is harder to read this in a distinctly spousal-Marian way – the work of one's hands can be

with the “*Súscipe, sancte Pater, omnipotens aetérne Deus, hanc immaculátam hóstiam*” – accept this immaculate host; but before the words of consecration. Of course, it can be taken to refer to Christ Himself, abstracting from the temporal difference, but in the above reading, the point is precisely the unity reached by Christ’s and Mary’s mutual total self-gift. The next paragraph indeed refers to the water and the wine, which can be read as the water and blood pouring out of Christ’s heart. The next paragraph speaks about the chalice of salvation, the receptacle of Christ’s blood and water, after which God, the Sanctifier, is invoked to “bless this Sacrifice, prepared for the glory of Thy holy Name.” The subsequent “*Lavabo*” verses then speak of innocence which can also be read in a Marian mode.

Reading the Last Supper through the double lenses of the Annunciation and Calvary also enables a comparison between the Spirit overshadowing Mary and Christ’s “this is my body”. This is then not read as a unilateral action but as the achievement of interpersonal unity and the new kind of life and substance it brings about. In the case of the Annunciation, it brought about the hypostatic life of Christ. In the case of the consecration and the cross, it brought about the life of John or any other believer accepting the offer. Christ extends his life to the bread and wine which thereby (dispositional) become His body and blood but receiving it does not end one’s own life but is rather a strengthening of one’s own life.

Just as the priest’s words of consecration were dispositional and institutionally enabled by Christ’s institution and fulfillment of them, the above approach suggests that a perfect offering of the offertory was dispositional and institutionally enabled by Mary’s *Fiat* and presence beneath the cross. Pythagoras’s theorem is only related to his name, as the discoverer of an independently existing theorem. But Christ’s very existence was contingent upon her *Fiat*. Mary’s contingent decision has now drastically altered the dispositional structure of all created reality – heaven is accessible again, through her *Fiat* and the cross.

The result of the words of consecration is that the host now acquires the dispositional properties of the body and blood of Christ, through the establishment of an infinity mirror, mediated by the (Marian) offertory, although the properties of the body and blood of Christ are in most cases not manifest in any way accessible to our senses.

5. Conclusion

To briefly retrace the outlines of this proposal, which was already exploratory, it is helpful to use the traditional metaphor of light in connection with this article’s central proposal of the infinity mirror. The starting point of this interpersonal metaphysics is the metaphysics of the Trinity, with the human family as the creaturely reality most closely resembling it. It is therefore through the spousal character of the metaphysics of the family that the Eucharist as an interpersonal and ultimately trinitarian mystery can be approached. The core of this proposal is that this interpersonal and ultimately trinitarian spousal character is fractal-wise reiterated at the Annunciation and Calvary, serving as the historical reference

given to anybody, from customers to tax collectors. Moreover, these traditional wordings were often seen as somewhat strange because they occur before the moment of consecration, which would however precisely enable this Marian reading as her distinct and personal active participation in Christ’s sacrificial self-gift.

points for what happened metaphysically at the Last Supper and what happens metaphysically at every mass. The creative divine light and life are then mirrored through these concatenating infinity mirrors, reaching down through the bread and wine and ultimately into the body and soul of the believer (cf. John 6,50–58).

In comparison to the divine light, Mary's role has been compared (e. g. by de Montfort) to that of the moon – merely reflecting the divine light, but doing so without spot, immaculately. In contrast to a solar eclipse where the moon blocks the light of the sun, Mary's perfect offering of herself at the Annunciation allowed the divine light to shine through the dark clouds of original sin, as an inverse eclipse. Her perfect unity with the Holy Spirit brought forth the divine Son within creation, through the infinity mirror between Creator and creature. Christ offering Himself to the Father on the cross repeats the original trinitarian structure, within creation, but the focus here was on the infinity mirror between Christ, Mary, and John, at Calvary, extending the creative light through the infinity mirror of the institutional family set up there, metaphysically understood in dispositional terms. What happened at the Last Supper and what happens at every mass is then, metaphysically, an extension of this same creative light through the same infinity mirror. This implies a specific Marian role for the offertory as the perfect creaturely, spousal offering enabling an inverse solar eclipse, through the same kind of infinity mirror.

This paper explores the prospects of interpersonal metaphysics of persons, powers, and contingency for conceiving the real presence. A generic sketch of such a metaphysical framework is presented whereby persons and their decisions are the irreducible source of contingency, akin to divine creative freedom. An infinity mirror whereby two persons reciprocally and value each other opens the possibility of new or extended life. This model is then used to make a metaphysical sketch of the Incarnation, and based upon that, the Last Supper and Calvary.