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Revelation, Reading, and Transformation

by Thomas Schärtl

The article revolves around the question of what makes revelational events revelatory in a religiously significant sense. Based on a specific notion of 'event', on a phenomenological reflection on the peculiarities of revelation, and an aligned hermeneutics a concept of 'revelatory events' is proposed which also identifies a special place for narration and narratives and for the act of reading as such: in reading the receiving subject is constituted as the subject to whom revelation is given such that the subject becomes transformatively connected to the revelatory event and its eventfulness.

1. A Puzzling Situation

In various publications, Vienna theologian Peter Zeilinger has drawn attention to the idea that we might have to rethink, yet even revise the concept of 'revelatory event' from a theological point of view.[1] The most important impetus for Zeilinger's proposal and program is provided by a puzzling insight[2] into the – in some cases hardly decipherable – degree of historicity of those 'events' to which the Biblical writings seem to refer. This so-called reference point becomes exceedingly fragile and uncertain in the light of historical and archaeological findings, so that the question arises as to *what* exactly we are meant to refer to and to deal with within the complex semiotic cosmos of the Biblical writings. When we, for instance, take the quite complex history of the unfolding of the Torah seriously and learn to decipher its ethico-political program, then we have to admit that we are confronted with a multi-layered version of storytelling. But what exactly is the point we need to take into account? Do we have to adjust our Biblical hermeneutics to some sort of fictional

[1] Cf. esp. *Peter Zeilinger*, Offenbarung als Ereignis. Zeitgenössische Philosophie, die Rede von Gott und das Sprechen der Bibel, in: SaThZ 21 (2017) 25–101.

[2] Cf. also id., Repräsentation einer Leerstelle, oder: Auszug ins Reale. Zur politischen Bedeutung des Exodus, der historisch nicht stattgefunden hat, in: Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation 7 (2018) 212–283, esp. 228: "For a proper understanding of the political dimension of the Exodus narrative, it is of utmost importance that it *does not refer to a real migration movement from point A to point B*, i.e. does not look back on a historical migration movement from a geographically located country of Egypt to the land of Canaan/Israel. This kind of 'non-historicity' of the founding narrative of the biblical tradition is of paramount importance – not critically, but in highly productive terms. Only now, only under the premise of *this kind* of fictional narrative, does the question arise for the reader or mediator of the text as to what Exodus is actually talking about. Only now does the text become free of the ballast to present a more or less comprehensible form of the recording of a unique historical event. Rather, the reader becomes free to inquire into the historical context that underlies its development and design, and which it does *not* present *directly*, but rather represents in a way that invites attentive reading." [Translation: T.S.]

overwriting of certain historical events; do we have to become aware of a quasi-mythological conceptualizing of religious experiences? Or are we encountering the textual results of a religious-political utopia which, if we – for instance – focus on the 'Exodus event,' is in some parts projected back[3] from the 7th century B.C.E to the 13th century B.C.E.?[4] But aren't these very questions, which document a hermeneutically driven attempt to come to terms with the historicity and the fictional elements of Biblical stories and narratives, once again the product of an overly rigid form of thinking, which attaches the semiotically and storytelling-related, significant process of textual *presentation* to a certain way of *representation* –, in the sense of *referring to something* what can be identified as a *past fact and event* or (perhaps even ideally) as something present (like the causal result of an event, transferred to us by reliable sources, witnesses, an processes)?

Zeilinger, on the other hand, in his interpretation of the text and the semiotic dimensions of the 'Exodus narrative' is guided by Jacques Derrida and others when he points out that the Biblical way of 'talking' introduces a *different model of designation and reference* – in his words: a model

> "in which the view of the future takes on a positive present-changing significance for the first time in terms of cultural history. Structurally, this orientation towards the future can be expressed best with the time-index of the so-called future perfect. Israel is not 'put off' to life in the Promised Land as a future event, but all events are already aligned with this so-called future – transforming past and present – (i. e. from the Exodus of the order of the past). A careful reading, however, shows that the liberated present must indeed already be shaped by the order of the future (even if its 'completion' is still pending) to end the migration through the desert and make the entry into the Promised Land."[5]

This perspective, which for instance is supported by the ways in which Biblical writings become actualized and commented in religious life and ritual practices, in prophetic performances and political concepts, interferes with the classical paradigm of a 'history of salvation,' as inherited by 19th and 20th century theology.

At the very least, Zeilinger's view makes us aware of an allegedly incurable *reference problem*, which is particularly evident in the fact that what we might call 'revelatory events' seem to lose their specific quality of being revelatory if we want to conceive of them as plain and simple historical states of affairs, i. e. of occurrences that are defined as

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[3] A very careful defense of some elements of historicity of the so-called 'Exodus event' can be found in *Abraham Malamat*, History of Biblical Israel. Major Problems and Minor Issues, Leiden – Boston – Köln 2001, 57–67; see also *Phillip R. Davies*, The History of Ancient Israel. A Guide for the Perplexed, Lonon – New Delhi; a.o., 147–152.

[4] See, especially, for the so-called 'Exodus narrative' *Konrad Schmid*, Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments. Eine Einführung, 3., überarb. Aufl. 2021, 114–120, esp. 118: "How is the story of the Exodus and Moses to be characterized regarding the history of literature? The most basic indications arise, first of all, from the fact that the story offers an allochthonous justification of the existence of Israel – Israel is Israel from Egypt and has not always been rooted in Palestine. Then it becomes apparent that there is neither an Israelite king in that story nor does Moses have explicitly royal features. Finally, the anti-Assyrian orientation should be noted, which is particularly evident in its use in Exodus 2:1–10. This indicates that the story of the Exodus and Moses probably did not receive its oldest, still tangible, literary form until the 7th century B.C.E., which is also indicated by the archaeological findings for the political and geographical backgrounds referred to […]." [Translation: T.S.]

[5] Cf. *Zeilinger*, Leerstelle (see fn. 2), 261 [Translation: T.S.].

'having taken place in history' – in the same or in an almost univocal way as historical events do, so that they are open to the access of pure historical reasoning and also to the sober assessments of historical scrutiny and explanation. But what would such an approach teach us about Biblical stories? Would they have to be regarded as texts which contain a certain number of historical reports that, from a nowadays' point of view, would have to be measured up to the outlines of historical hypotheses? Would the interpretation of such stories have to be aligned, at the end of the day, to the findings of historical and archeological research? But wouldn't we, in such a case, be forever doomed to remain second rate witnesses of God's history of salvation who would have to trust the witnesses and that would have to fight for the metaphysical possibilities framing the allegedly supranatural presence of the divine in earthly history? And wouldn't we have to defend the probability of some astonishing historical events as originating from divine intervention in the face of more secular interpretations – interpretations that offer anti-supranatural explanations or point to more or less fictional elements in Biblical stories? Theology, in such a situation, would be destined to fight an uphill battle; and it would lose the true understanding of the many dimensions of meaning encapsulated and, so to speak, encoded in Biblical texts. It would also lose its sense for their – to allude to Zeilinger again – political and utopian message as well as their visions and imaginations of divine presence. The history of Biblical interpretation – despite the many fights for literal readings and inerrancy throughout the history of Christianity – shows clearly that Biblical narratives are prone to envision and to imagine where they seem to report, and they are disposed to report a special, second personal 'insight' into the divine where they seem to envision and to imagine.

In his treatment of the resurrection of Jesus and in his assessment of the resurrection as a 'historical' event, William Craig offers an illustrative example of the deeper layers of the above-mentioned reference problem (borrowed, to a certain extent, from Wolfhart Pannenberg's insistence on the historicity of the resurrection, but tinged with an evangelical element):

> "Early Christians believed in Jesus' (physical, bodily) resurrection.
> […] The best explanation of that belief is the hypothesis of the disciples' discovery of Jesus' empty tomb and their experience of post-mortem appearances of Jesus.
> […] The hypothesis of the disciples' discovery of Jesus' empty tomb and their experience of postmortem appearances of Jesus has the explanatory power to account for that belief.
> […] Rival hypotheses such as spontaneous generation within a Jewish context, dreams about Jesus, cognitive dissonance or a fresh experience of grace following Jesus' death, etc., lack the explanatory power to account for that belief.
> […] The best explanation for the facts of Jesus' empty tomb and postmortem appearances is the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead."[6]

As we can see, Craig's approach is wedged into the *rivalry* of alternative historical explanatory hypotheses regarding the resurrection of Jesus. Craig's proposals sound apologetic insofar as, in his view, the reference to a historical event may also include a reference to an event which has a supranatural origin – a view so-called secular historians would have

[6] *William L. Craig*, Reasonable Faith. Christian Truth and Apologetics, Wheaton [3]2008, 351 f.

problems with. Craig's hypothesis is defended against possible alternative explanations that are fraught with probabilities. Furthermore, the success of Craig's apologetic strategy is apparently the only way to stabilize the promise of a rational foundation of the so-called resurrection belief – a foundation that is ultimately bound to the weighing of historical (and metaphysical) probabilities. Unfortunately, Craig's access to the Easter narratives reads like a *New York Times* report of a spectacular event, dealing with ingenious assumptions of what might have happened while defending the Christian believer's point of view as the best possible explanation – in the face of alternative options and historical probabilities. The Easter narratives as such are presented only in an abstract and rather dire manner. Their very own 'semiotic cosmos,' their 'world of the text' and their 'meaning-providing gravity' are not even touched.

Thus, Craig does not take into account the rather graphic humor of the gospel of Mark whose storyline sends three women to an already open tomb wondering about the apparently ridiculous question who might be able to move the immovable stone for them (the not spelled out point of the joke reads: "If God will not have done it, nobody will do it.") Craig does not care about the unsurpassable element of tenderness pointed at in one important narrative scene that tells us a story about the conversation between the Risen Lord and Mary Magdalene. Craig does not show how the Easter narratives in their storytelling ways connect with our own longing for God, our own search for the Risen Lord, or how we get drawn into these stories while identifying ourselves with the mourning women or the clueless disciples.[7] Craig treats these stories as testimonies rather than 'doors' that provide an entry point *for us* to another realm (not unlike the doorways into the Kingdom of *Narnia*). And his considerations remain an example for the attempt to extract these stories and to pull the characters out of their own 'world of the text' – using known methods for the assessment of historical probabilities or a metaphysicians' bag of tricks to defend the possibility of supranatural, but hitherto unrepeated, 'events' as facts or states of affairs (while other theologians have used the methods of folk psychology or psychoanalysis to bring the Biblical characters into our world) –, although such attempts have proven themselves to be futile and even hostile towards the inner structures, layers, and semiotic cosmos of Biblical narratives.

For the burdensome fundamental theological question of *how* revelation can take place and *how* Biblical stories can be seen as 'encoding' revelation, Craig leaves us with the old-fashioned apologetic move that is bound to defend the *historical* credibility of the Biblical testimony at all costs – seeking rescue in an epistemological theory of reliability and probability to ensure that what has been recorded could have been possible (in the broadest logical sense). But there is no assessment of *how* we – in today's world – can be connected to the stories in question or how it is possible that the message becomes credible for us and touches our hearts. But even if we could warm up to Craig's view and could interpret the resurrection of Christ as a 'historical' event (in the most unequivocal sense of the word "history"), the question remains, what makes this 'supranatural' event a *revelatory event*?

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[7] Cf. *Thomas Schärtl*, Ostern und Einsicht. Bildung im Lichte der Deutung der Auferstehung Jesu, in: JBT 35 (2021), 153–168.

Is it its allegedly supranatural side *per se*? That doesn't seem to be convincing; for supranatural agents could cause certain states of affairs while remaining behind the curtains and refusing to manifest themselves. So, is it due to a certain content or message that is transported through such an event? But if that were the case, the supranatural origin of that very event would not be a necessary condition of the event to be revelatory since God could unveil and manifest himself through events that draw us into his personal presence while no historical analysis of the event in question would commit us to conceive of an occurrence that was caused by something breaking the laws of nature. Apparently, for Biblical stories to be revelatory they have to 'speak to us' – unveiling who God is but also presenting God to us in a second personal way that meets us at the specific point of the history we are part of. Thus, Biblical stories cannot fulfil their revelatory task by merely presenting past history, instead their aim is to introduce us to God's presence by actualizing what is 'encoded' as past but what, much more so, is the future to us. Presenting the past as such requires the bridging of the gap of time without the merging of past and presence. Actualizing the past and presenting it as the future needs, however, another mode of presentation and encoding: the language of the *future perfect*.

Peter Zeilinger has articulated the leading question touched upon here in an even more fundamental and general way:

> "It is therefore necessary for the understanding of revelation as God's self-communication not only to focus on the gesture of reading or '*reading*' (i. e. access to a knowledge whose content is not directly present, but *is conveyed in some form by the medium*,) and not only on the *narrative statement* of the biblical texts, but also to be aware of their historical, social and political context. What does a tradition, a culture or a religious practice 'speak' of when it produces interpretations and texts *subsequently*, at a great time interval, to which it not only has the greatest veneration, but at the same time makes them the basis of its worldview and its social and political action? What does a tradition speak of when – in contrast to mythical ideas – it refers to historical experiences and does not formulate 'reports' of historical events in its texts, but rather artfully and polyphonically designed 'interpretations'? *To what* extent are these forms of mediation 'historical' and *to what extent* can they be read as a reference to concrete historical experiences of 'revelation'? The attempt at a clear distinction or even separation of a level of content-mediation and a level of external form (e. g. genre or style) would miss the point here and misunderstand the texts as 'historical records'."[8]

If we again take the 'Exodus narrative,' for instance, historical research and the history of religious developments might teach us that the *historical* point of reference is the situation of the 7th century B.C.E. where the Northern Kingdom of Israel had already vanished and Israel's ever so new origin 'from elsewhere' became a bedrock of political and religious identity.[9] But the 'Exodus narrative' as such is, apparently, encoding this historical point

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[8] Cf. *Zeilinger*, Offenbarung als Ereignis (see fn. 1), 83 [Translation: T.S.].

[9] Cf. *Christoph Dohmen*, Exodus 1–18 (HThK AT), Freiburg i. B. u. a. 2025, 71–78. See also *Mirja Kutzer*, Die Unendliche Geschichte. Fiktionales Erzählen als Kommunikation über das ‚Wie' der Erlösung, in: MThZ 75 (2024), 401–412, esp. 406 f.

of reference into something greater that creates a semiotic chasm and difference that permits the reader of the 'Exodus narrative' to actualize its signs in the ever so arriving present that presents the future as a complement point of reference.

If such an assessment opens up a more adequate hermeneutics of Biblical narratives, historical findings and the results of historical research surrounding the origins of Biblical texts are never irrelevant, but we must not bind the meaning of Biblical narratives to an opaque point of reference in the past. So, as we have already seen, Craig's method to elucidate the reference point of the 'Easter narratives' by sorting out probabilities connected with historical credibility, therefore, misses the point: For these narratives are meant to intertwine the past and the future and invite us to 'enter into these narratives' in order to actualize them in our very own present. In a way, this is precisely why the Easter narratives picture the reader – wherever her point in history may actually be – as someone who is looking for the Risen Lord and who asks where to find him. Therefore, the Easter narratives tell us: If we learn to actualize the Easter narratives we will find the Lord in baptism, in the eucharist, in the preaching of the gospel and the effects of the kerygma, and in the loving, spirit-guided community of the church.[10]

If we can, furthermore, adapt Eleonore Stump's soteriological proposal,[11] which inspires us to think that God seeks to turn us into a *second person perspective* with himself, and expand this very idea to the notion of revelation[12] we may expect that revelation-relevant stories must, as a matter of fact, have this very quality: i. e. that they are built in such a way that they ultimately invite us into a second person perspective with God. Furthermore, it might not come as a surprise that the encoding and decoding of times as the future perfect, the overlap of past and future, is quite suitable for the ultimate reference point of the narratives in question: the eternal God. For a Greek Godhead, like Zeus, it might be appropriate to present himself at a certain point in history (while removing himself form other points in time), while for an eternal God it is only suitable to conceive of his presence as an intertwining of past and future. If God is the ultimate (not necessarily the proximate) reference point of revelation-oriented narratives it is somewhat obvious that the interpretation of these stories is bound to see the past through the lenses of the future (and the other way round).[13]

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[10] Cf. *Schärtl*, Ostern (see fn. 7), 164–167; compare also *Kutzer*, Unendliche Geschichte (see fn. 9), 409 f.

[11] Cf. *Eleonore Stump*, Wandering in Darkness. Narrative and the Problem of Suffering, Oxford 2010, 108–173; *Stump*, Atonement, Oxford 2018, 115–142. For an expanded view of the 'narratological' impact of Stump's soteriology see *Johannes Kronau*; *Johannes Grössl*, Extra narrationem nulla salus. Perspektiven eines narrativitätstheoretischen Ansatzes für die christliche Soteriologie, in: MThZ 73 (2022), 230–245, esp. 232–234, 242–244.

[12] Cf. *Thomas Schärtl*, Revelation and Insight, in: Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion 6 (2024), 135–153, esp. 145–151; see also *Thomas Schärtl*, La Rivelazione e la prospettiva dalla seconda persona. Linee fondamentali della comprensione Cristiana della Rivelazione; in: Teologia e Filosofia 36 (2022), 497–514, esp. 508–514.

[13] This very paradox of referred tenses is mirrored in our understanding of sacramental actions and rituals; cf. *Alexander Deeg*, Zwischen Anamnese, Historie und Event. Das Triduum sacrum als Brennpunkt liturgischer Fragestellungen der Gegenwart, in: *Benjamin Leven*; *Martin Stuflesser* (Hg.), Ostern feiern. Zwischen normativem Anspruch und lokaler Praxis, Regensburg 2013, 56–77.

2. Presenting an Analogy

The following considerations attempt to start a slightly different journey, which nevertheless aligns itself with some of Zeilinger's core proposals but remains friendly towards the mythological[14] as well as the historical and does not tie the content-relevant and qualitative side of revelation solely to an ethical-political or religious-utopian message – allegedly encoded in the Biblical narratives. The proposal also sticks to the central idea, stemming from Eleonore Stump, which says that Biblical narratives serve God's revelation and are God's revelation insofar as they draw us into a *second person perspective* with God and open our will and intellect to a joint attention with God – by making us aware of a new horizon of life that stems from our closeness to God. But how, we have to ask, can Biblical narratives really accomplish this very task? How can we resolve the 'reference problem' – especially when we want to keep a paradox intact that implies that Biblical narratives are neither purely mythological (meaning, for a minute, a more traditional and condescending view on 'mythology') nor matter of fact reports of historical events that are up for historical explanations or hypotheses?

At the heart of the following considerations lies a revision of the concept of *event*, which should not amount to a new (let's say: more 'Heideggerian') mystification of *the eventful* (*Das Ereignis*), but rather inserts a hermeneutical and a phenomenological element into the concept of events used in everyday or off the cuff notions of narration that could sound rather 'conventional' and remain in touch with the concept of event used, for example, in natural sciences. Furthermore, an 'updated' concept of event might help us theologically to understand better how divine revelation 'through events' could come to pass without straightforwardly advocating versions of supernaturalism, which – in turn – would make it harder for the Christian believer or the theologian to avoid a position one could call 'religious-historical exceptionalism' in the light of a purely historical hermeneutics of sacred texts and their supposed reference points. Some elements of Zeilinger's core thesis will be embedded but also contextualized in the following proposal: the capacity of Biblical narratives to refer to 'events' is not simply a given, rather it is 'generated' by an *actualization* such that the performative actualization – i. e. the reading and enactment – of Biblical texts is absolutely vital for the access to and the understanding of revelation. What has to be underlined here is that it is especially due to the mode of a performative actualization[15] of the Biblical texts that their capacity to 'refer to' truly opens up, because (if we take, for instance, the 'Exodus narrative' into account) the promised future becomes actualized *as* the future perfect, as the future *presenting itself as* the past – i. e. as the *future making itself present*.

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[14] I learned and adopted this new kindness towards mythology from the inspiring work of David Brown. For further details see *David Brown*, God and Mystery in Words. Experience through Metaphor and Drama. Oxford 2008; cf. *Schärtl*, Ostern (see fn. 7), 156–158. However, I am somewhat sympathetic with Zeilinger's opposition to the label 'mythological' if 'mythological' means a story-like encoding of some rather general views on the divine or the relationship between the divine and the mundane – such views would be entirely independent of any historical experience and of any historical particularities that could serve as an imagination of the future. However, a wider interpretation of the 'mythological' would not have to be restricted to such an understanding.

[15] See *Anthony J. Godzieba*, A Theology of the Presence and Absence of God. Collegeville 2018, chap. 5.3.2.

A prelude to the first outlines of the following proposal and a hopefully somewhat plausible starting point is a non-theological analogy. The 'event' which serves as an example for our task is the fire at the *Notre Dame de Paris* Cathedral[16] – newspapers and magazines literally burnt the images of flames and smoke into our minds. This 'event,' to which we tend to refer also as a historical fact that took place on April, 15th and 16th 2019, has been, at the same time, read, decoded, and interpreted as a 'portent of doom' or a 'sign of a turning of tides in Europe' – condensing a stream of interpretations which emerged in the context of a pandemic lasting for two years, a war raging in Europe, and a looming ecological crisis, etc., all of which raised the cultural and political question of whether a value-based and future-oriented, post-nationalistic Europe has not worn itself out. What 'really' happened in relation to the shocking fire incident at the Cathedral – if we take the above-mentioned interpretations and receptions as intrinsic ingredients of the inner structure of the eventfulness – goes *beyond* the historically re-constructible constellations of the fact of a 'church fire.' Thus, a purely factualist investigation of the causes and courses of the fire doesn't tell us much or doesn't reveal anything decisive about *how* the event *presents itself* and what kind of current or further significance has emerged.

This emerging of significance, relevance, and meaning owes itself to a semiotically already laden occurrence of a state of affairs: namely a combustion at a European landmark – which as such has always been a magnet for interpretations that turned a building of mortar and stones into a beacon of meaning. However, the emergence of meaning is not just simply caused by the occurrence of a state of affairs but is also made possible by an interpretative 'framework,' i. e. an already existing *grammar of interpretation* (with this remark the presented sketchy phenomenological approach clearly turns into a more hermeneutical one) – a disposition of interpretation, which (for the present example) could be described somewhat imprecisely as an 'apocalyptic mood of crisis.' Although it is not possible to present a satisfying phenomenological and hermeneutical analysis in our off the cuff access, even the most sketchy remarks can show us some of the peculiarities of 'the eventful:' We may very well suppose that the 'event' in question *presented itself* in a certain way – namely as the event of an ablaze of a European symbol of tradition, culture, unity, and peace – and that this presentation, so to speak, triggered an emergence of meaning within a given framework of interpretation, which is already having a 're-figurative' effect on how we, here and now, perceive the event in question and how we narrate the occurrence of 'what happened.' *Refigurations of perceiving and narrating*, however, are not externally or arbitrarily attached to the self-presentation of the event; rather, the presented and reception-related qualities of the event in question must be, so to speak, 'organically' linked to the qualities of the *refigured* process of referring to the event – a re-figuration through which the event is updated and interpreted over and over again.

[16] I owe this analogy to my colleague Stephanie Rumpza from a conversation in August 2022 during a workshop at Fürstenried Castle. She cites her conversation with Jean-Luc Marion as a source; both were eyewitnesses to the event. For a much mor subtle approach to everyday revelatory phenomena in the most fundamental tracts and origins of phenomenology see *Anthony J. Steinbock*, Limit-Phenomena and Phenomenology in Husserl, London – New York 2017.

Is the fire of the cathedral of *Notre Dame de Paris* a *revelatory* event? Perhaps such an assumption, based on an analogy, seems a bit exaggerated to begin with. But the example we used and analyzed so far follows some of the trails of contemporary phenomenology, which – despite all the peculiarities of the religious approach – understands 'revelations' in the broadest sense: *as manifestations* of something truly actual or, at least, as the quite disruptive appearance of 'the true.' Experiences of visual arts, music, socio-political incidents, experiences of being at the mercy of others, experiences of breaking and dissolving boundaries, experiences of intimacy etc. may, therefore, count as revelatory in the broader sense. But although these experiences are not yet religiously specific, they – as the above-mentioned example already tried to indicate – uncover a kind of basic grammar of so-called revelatory events (*Offenbarungsereignisse*), which *mutatis mutandis* can also be useful for a Christian understanding of revelation. Four aspects could be identified for this understanding of *revelatory events* ('revelatory' with a small 'r', so to speak):

1. We need to distinguish between the mere factors that constitute a historical fact and the actual qualities of an event. While scientific analysis or historical research is concerned with the reconstruction of the constellations and factors that are meant to constitute the fact, any phenomenology of the referring and reception-oriented qualities of the event is concerned with the emerging significance and meaning. That an event *presents* itself as an *event* and that, in addition, a new meaning arises which opens up the many layers of referring and refiguration is – according to what we have sketched so far – not the sum of the intrinsic significance of the mere factors based on which the event is constituted.[17] Therefore, a factor-based reconstruction of the event – focused, as historical sciences sometimes have to presuppose, purely on the paradigm of so-called repeatability – does not yet touch the much more important dimension which is aimed at showing how an event *presents itself* and what kind of new meaning could also arise from it.

2. The outlines and contents of such a new and emerging, disruptive meaning only become visible through the process of reception, i. e. thanks to the effects on the recipients of the emerging meaning. As a consequence, the disruptive, excessive or new meaning becomes phenomenologically more important than the slowly darkening intrinsic significances of the factors and elements that may have constituted what we are inclined to call the underlying fact whenever these factors don't present themselves continuously as core ingredients of the emerging meaning. If we take our previous example into account, the causes of the church fire – i. e. the constitutive factors of the event-originating fact – are much less important than the new dimensions of the emerging significance. It is, therefore, valid to say that these factors set the emerging meaning free while they move to the shadowy background as soon as they stop presenting themselves. We can't do justice to the 'event character' of a revelatory event if we only use those modes of explanation that behave themselves like forms of historical reduction

[17] Cf. *Alain Badiou*, Being and Event, London – New York 2005, 173–198. Compare also the discussion in *Zeilinger*, Offenbarung als Ereignis (see fn. 1), 55–62.

whenever they set aside the emergence of meaning and, instead, try to uncover the constituting factors that have stopped to present themselves (maybe long ago). A more adequate approach would be to become a witness of the significance or emerging meaning by opening up the reception of the event to the bundle of those 'events' that have given and that do give meaning to our very own life. Thus, it is the performative and transformative power of emerging and intertwining meaning which, eventually, testifies to the significance of an event.

3. Although the constellations and factors of the fact-basis are not relevant for the phenomenologically and hermeneutically significant event-character of an event, they remain still important for the *occurrence* of the event – insofar as we have to raise the following question: How can certain constellations of a specific fact contribute to, constitute, or even 'form' an event that *presents itself* in such a way that an excessive or disruptive meaning emerges from it? While these factors – keep in mind that we are alluding at those cases in which we would insist phenomenologically that the *event in question is indeed more than a mere fact* – are not presented in the self-presentation of the 'revelatory event,' for a possible *presentation of the mere fact as a mere fact* these factors and elements, however, would have to appear and present themselves as the constituents of the fact.[18] But if they do not appear any longer, we must as well concede that their significance has receded to the background and has given space to an emerging meaning which is carrying the eventfulness of the revelatory event. Now, even if such factors and elements move to the background – as soon as, for the revelatory event, a new meaning emerges –, they cannot completely be set aside or ignored. For these factors and elements mark in their effectiveness what might be called the place of the occurrence of the event (they prepare, so to speak, the 'event site'). The place of the 'event site' becomes accessible once we try to imagine the states of affairs in the world without occurrence of the event in question – a 'stage before,' so to speak, which would be devoid of any emerging meaning and significances.[19] In other words, if the elements and factors which constituted the occurrence of the event but which become dimmed out and abstracted from had not occurred (and had not 'prepared' the site of the event), the event in question would not have occurred and – subsequently – the emergence of meaning and significance would not have become originated either.

The above-mentioned example of a, so to speak, pre-religious, disruptive revelation – the fire at the *Notre Dame* Cathedral – has already proven its worth: The *significance* of what

[18] Of course, there is always validity in the purely historical approach to an event. We could easily imagine – to allude to the above-mentioned example again – that a police report is highly interested in what has caused the church fire. For the specific view of the police report the factors and elements that constituted the fact still present themselves – and have to present themselves in further narrations in order to shed light to the cause of the church fire, because any criminal investigation and any police report narration must be predominantly interested in that. But it is clearly not the case that the police report has a revelatory side in any kind of phenomenologically substantial understanding of what 'revelation' is. However, if the police report as such would start to interfere with our biographies, then a new meaning seems to emerge; and it could very well be the case that even the dire narration of a police report develops some (even some minor) revelatory qualities.

[19] Cf. *Badiou*, Being and Event (see fn. 17), 189 f.

has happened there – tangible in the interpretation of the event as the dusk of an era – goes beyond the physical factors, elements, and constellations of the cause of the fire; the constituting factors of the fire (whether the cause was a short circuit, a carelessly left cigarette, a craftsman's tool, or arson) aren't presented in the significance of the event any longer. But, of course, under a certain description of the occurrence of the event they have to be taken into account – at least insofar as, let us say, a flooding of the cathedral would not have made this peculiar emergence of meaning possible. Again, for the process of the reception of the event, i. e. for the ongoing interpretation of its complex layers of meaning, the constituting factors and elements recede into the background,[20] because a revelatory event *proves its eventfulness* by triggering a process of reception which entails a narrative course of interpretation that inscribes itself – sometimes disruptively, always transformatively – into the biographies of the witnessing or narrating persons. Theoretically, we could add a boundary of the revelatory event to our picture, as a complement to the preparation of the event site. This idea results from the (equally theoretical) requirement that revelatory events should be distinguishable from other (revelatory) events. However, what marks these boundaries cannot be drawn by connecting or reporting the constituting elements or factors and their causal effects, since these are, insofar as they do not present themselves in the emerging meaning, situated already 'before' what makes the revelatory event truly eventful; they enable the beginning of the occurrence of the event and its emerging meaning, but they are not the revelatory event itself, which actually exists only in the opening up of emerging meaning and in the further reception of emerging significance.

3. Theological Adaptation

The esteemed reader of this paper will not have missed that the grammar of an (analogously understood) 'revelatory event' as outlined in the previous paragraph and conceived of as a manifestation of something actual, excessive, or disruptive – whose reception is bound to an ongoing opening-up or reference based on narration – owes its core ideas to several impulses: the first and foremost influence has been Alain Badiou's reflection on the eventful.[21] While Badiou may not have been mainly interested in religious revelation, he developed an inspiring view on occurrences that have the revolutionary power to change an era and – therefore – influence our view of things that happened 'before' and 'after' that very event.

3.1 Disruption and Excess

But the second impulse comes from Jean-Luc Marion, who, in his reflection on so-called excess-phenomena and the 'anamorphosis' of relevance and meaning arising from them – a relevance, which goes beyond our preconceptions and categorical pre-conditions and

[20] Cf. *Badiou*, Being and Event (see fn. 17), 187 f.
[21] Cf. ibid., 185–190.

traces the path for dealing with the peculiarities of the eventful that we have defined previously as the emergence of relevance and meaning. In a first approach, Marion describes 'revelatory' phenomena as manifestations of the excessive and disruptive.[22] Elsewhere, Marion has referred even more explicitly to the concept of *saturated phenomena* he has coined, so that we can see how the idea of an emergence of meaning can be spelled out. At the same time Marion has already hinted at an understanding which should help us to distinguish once again between what revelation might be in a specifically Christian perspective ('revelation' with a capital 'R') as opposed to the more general manifestations of the actual, excessive, or disruptive. Marion underlines the core signature of (actual, excessive, and disruptive) *charity*:

> "[W]e must try to describe the counter-experience of Revelation as a paradigmatic saturated phenomenon. And in making this attempt we shall respect two already secured certainties. First: we will never leave the position and the status imposed on the *I* by the saturated phenomenon, namely that of the witness. […]
> A second certainty follows: we must always consider that that which reveals itself in the saturated phenomenon of Revelation involves, as its *alpha* and its *omega*, a single and unique excess: that of charity."[23]

But, most importantly, Marion has also taken into account the quality of *events* – while unfolding the specific characteristics and signatures of divine revelation: revelatory events have a unique quality insofar as they must be interpreted as *occurrences of being called from elsewhere*[24] and of presenting themselves as an advent[25] of being that unfolds itself as sacrifice, forgiveness, and communion.[26] While these very specific notions have originated in Marion's reflections on Trinitarian theology, they can also be understood in purely phenomenological terms. For in Marion's view the *sacrifice* crosses out the bracketing of the giver in approaching the gift such that the giver becomes visible without destroying the givenness of what is given. *Forgiveness* and *communion* can be interpreted as the transformative result of the encounter with what is given in the manifestation of the divine. Furthermore, this result can be easily paralleled with what we have noticed as the core quality of revelation: with the *excess of charity* that ultimately is the foundation of forgiveness and communion.

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[22] *Jean-Luc Marion*, Aspekte der Religionsphänomenologie. Grund, Horizont und Offenbarung, in: Alois Halder; Klaus Kienzler; Joseph Möller (Hg.), Religionsphilosophie heute. Chancen und Bedeutung in Philosophie und Theologie (Beiträge zur Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, Experiment Religionsphilosophie III), Düsseldorf 1988, 84–103, hier 102: "Die Gewalt und das Ausmaß dessen, was sich in Szene setzen läßt, kann nur so in die Grenzen des phänomenologischen Horizonts treten, daß sie ihn aufhebt: Jede Linie des Phänomens interferiert mit allen anderen, als ob sie sich kreuzten oder sich widerspiegeln würden – die eine in der anderen oder jede an den Rändern des Rahmens. Diese Auflösung des Horizonts durch die Offenbarung markiert *qua* Erfüllung die korrekte, d.h. paradoxe Relation des einen mit dem anderen: Eine Offenbarung tritt in die Phänomenalität nur in der Gestalt des Paradoxs ein – in der Gestalt erfüllter [= gesättigter, T.S.] Phänomene, die ihrerseits den ganzen Horizont der Phänomenalität ausfüllen."
[23] *Jean-Luc Marion*, Givenness and Revelation, Oxford 2016, 59 f.
[24] Cf. *Jean-Luc Marion*, Revelation Comes from Elsewhere. A Contribution to a Critical History and a Phenomenological Concept of Revelation, Standford 2024, 338–342.
[25] Cf. ibid., 338–353.
[26] Cf. ibid., 339–343.

If we take Marion's subtle reflections as characteristics of what *divine revelation* truly is, we can expand our previous suggestions and offer a much more nuanced layout of 'revelatory events' and 'narrations' as instances that invite us into a transformative encounter with divine revelation: revelatory events and narrations are such that they disrupt our horizons through sheer actuality or excess while they cross out the bracketing of the 'invisible giver' and immerse us into a so-called place-trading experience of this very excess in a transformative way that proves its authenticity as the experience of forgiveness and communion. To trade places – in this case – means that ultimately the subject of experience, all a sudden, experiences herself as the addressee of experiencing as such because of the signature of being called from elsewhere.

3.2 Pre-figuration

The third impulse for the above-sketched proposal stems from Paul Ricœur's reflections on narrative (personal) identity[27] – which means (in a nutshell) that the power of a manifestation of the 'actual' or the 'excessive' can be measured by the degree of transformation related to the narrative that is constitutive of our identity. Even our example of the church fire at the *Notre Dame* Cathedral above proves its 'revelatory' quality (in a broader sense) since this so-called 'revelatory event' ('revelatory' in a non-religious but still important way) became imprinted on the biographies of the witnesses and has contributed – albeit on a smaller scale compared to religiously relevant 'events' – to a retelling and a rewriting of the narrative reference to ourselves.[28]

But to allude to Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics is, of course, not easily combinable with a purely phenomenological approach we referred to – mentioning some important insights that have been offered by Jean-Luc Marion. For Ricœur would not only allow us, but even recommend that, in relation to what is 'meant to have occurred' in an event on the one side and to what is 'captured by our narrations' on the other side, we bring our convictions, intentions, motivations, preliminary questions, imaginations and interpretive presuppositions to the table. To Ricœur these factors should not be bracketed but should be regarded as the unavoidably legitimate *prefigurative elements* of our narrations, i. e. as those preconditions without which a *refiguration*, an influence of the 'revelatory event' on the process of identity-related narration, cannot succeed.[29]

It is the Holy Scriptures themselves that can justify Ricœur's insight – in a certain contrast to Marion: not only are Biblical narratives witnesses that indicate that the event, so to speak, 'pushes' for a narration and other forms of communication, but they also show that we find in this tendency a 'grammar' of the revelatory narration established as a prerequisite – a prerequisite, which makes the so-called *anamorphosis* (the giving of a *Gestalt* that

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[27] Cf. *Paul Ricœur*, Oneself as Another. Chicago – London 1992, 113–168.

[28] See *Samuel Underwood*, The Poetics of the Self. On the Tree Levels of Transformation in Ricœur's Account of Faith, in: Christina M. Gschwandtner (Ed.): Paul Ricœur, Philosophical Hermeneutics, and the Question of Revelation, Lanham – Boulder – New York – London 2024, 99–117.

[29] A justification of the value of preconditions and pre-figurations can be offered on the basis of a reflection on 'expectation' and 'surprise' still on a predominantly phenomenological basis cf. *Anthony J. Steinbock*, It's Not about the Gift. From Givenness to Loving, London – New York 2018, chap. 1.

makes us addressees of the 'saturated' phenomenon) possible in the first place – even when disruptive things come to pass. This is not a surprise since any *anamorphosis* originating from an emergence of meaning as a communicative design is not and cannot be the effect of a creation of a grasp of meaning *out of nothing*. In other words: the Holy Scriptures originated from an invitation to engage in a joint attention with the living God; and whatever we face as emerging meaning in this shared perspective – while *reading* the Biblical narratives – is already prefigured by the encounter with the living God.

Furthermore, the Holy Scriptures need to be assessed as *scriptural* occurrences that somehow belong to the event-side of the revelatory event in question – including all the elements of mediation, reception, temporal delay or reenactment we usually have to associate with any kind of scriptural manifestations.[30] A hermeneutical approach, therefore, seems to be unavoidable.[31] Marion's hints could, nevertheless, be used to explain why the fire at the *Notre Dame* Cathedral can be 'seen' as an epochal breaking point and *manifestation* (i. e. as a revelation of significance). But the above-mentioned prefigurative elements can also explain why we would be cautious about classifying this church fire as a religious revelation: the hermeneutical prerequisite of a narrative grammar that leads us into the encounter with the living God as well as Marion's own criterion of the excess phenomenon as love and charity could help us to explain the difference.

Nevertheless, despite the many access points we have offered so far to develop a synthesis for a better understanding of what 'revelatory events' are, our considerations have to face two major problems: Even if we try to emphasize that there is objectivity in the so-called *emerging meaning* – along the lines of a phenomenological starting point that traditionally seeks to unveil the 'truly real and actual' – it cannot be set aside that what is manifest and presented (in terms of significance) might not be seen if there wasn't a *willingness to see, be addressed and to narrate*, i. e. a prefigurative foreground of the emerging meaning. But isn't then what we call 'revelation' at the end of the day just a matter of interpretation and of an ultimately subjective access to phenomena that present themselves to one person in one way, but differently to another person so that they guide or inspire very different narratives and refigurations – depending solely on the presumed identity of the receiving, narrating, and transforming subject of experience?[32] Isn't it the goal of Marion's insistence

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[30] For an in-depth assessment of the relevance of textuality and writing, see. *Zeilinger*, Offenbarung als Ereignis (see fn. 1), 94 [Translation: T.S.]: "It is striking that in the increasing authority of the phenomenon of *writing* in the religious traditions of Israel, especially in the writing, editing and updating of the prophetic statements, the focus was not on documentary recording or the communication of a particular historical statement. This is already evident from the fact that in numerous depictions, in which a written word of God is at the center, the content of the Scripture is not clear at all while the motif of the divinely mediated Scripture refers to the present text itself. In these places, therefore, the Scriptures are not reporting in a specific manner, instead ultimate authority is identified with *writing* itself. It is not the historicity of the Scripture's representation of facts, but their form as an *expression and interpretation* of a reflected experience that leads to the perception of these scriptural texts as the basis of one's own cultural identity."

[31] For a broader approach to encourage a reconciliation of hermeneutics and phenomenology see *Stephanie Rumpza*, Measuring up to Hermeneutics. Jean-Luc Marion and Revelation in the Incarnate Christ, in: MThZ 75 (2024) 83–96.

[32] Cf. *Michael Bongart*, 'Offenbarung geschieht durch denjenigen, der sie empfängt'. Ein offenbarungstheologischer Entwurf nach Ludwig Feuerbach, in: Bernhard Nitsche; Matthias Remenyi (Ed.), Problemfall Offenbarung. Grund – Konzepte – Erkennbarkeit. Freiburg i. B. 2022, 222–248.

on what we could call the 'objectivity of the manifestation of the divine' in the form of the excess (of charity) to avoid the slippery floor of allegedly mere subjective interpretations – precisely for the case of divine revelation (especially if we take into account its normativity)? However, isn't the reference to an *excess of charity* as a criterion for a (religiously significant) divine revelation already circular or at least 'recursive' in its most basic layout since one cannot help but to uncover a deliberate 'making-it-fit' to the *Christian* notion of divine revelation? Now, is it possible to set aside any reflection on the *how* of divine intervention – that is: on the conditions of the occurrence of the revelatory event and the constitutive factors that shape this very occurrence – altogether? This admittedly complex problem might be calmed down both with Badiou and with the phenomenological tradition by pointing out that any question of how God works wants to look behind the curtain of, what we called, the boundary of the site of the event – precisely when and because it asks for constellations of factors and constituting elements that are not presented as themselves in the revelatory event itself. But if one doesn't like this answer, we could also calm down the problem thanks to the phenomenological insight which holds that the question of how something may have occurred still remains on the dire side of the so-called 'ontological difference,' which is phenomenologically supposed to be exceeded once and for all – such that in the manifestation of the disruptive the category of causality, which can only be applied to conventional phenomena, is also set aside for a more adequate relationship that might correctly decipher the connection between God and the event in question that only emerges from an 'anamorphosis' of meaning and results from the reception of the event insofar as it becomes significant to us. Still, those who remain dissatisfied with these rather negative comments[33] may be reassured by yet another insight which underlines that the analysis of causal interdependencies and connections still does not clarify why an event has a revelatory quality that – given our previous considerations are correct – results purely from its meaning and the power to induce an emergence of meaning, an experience of an excessive or of a disruptive readjustment and refiguration of identity.

To put this very last aspect differently – and maybe somewhat more clumsily: If God, in his omnipotence, were to recolor the rings of dust and rocks that may surround a planet in a distant, inanimate solar system, and if God did that against all probability-based predictions derivable from our knowledge of the laws of physics, this action would hardly have any 'eventful effects' despite God's supranatural interventions. And such an action could not – if there were nobody to witness it and to be the addressee of it, i. e. without reception and narration – be regarded as a revelation, not even in the broader sense. On the other hand, the practice of forgiveness of sins and the gesture of Jesus' meals which included the marginalized and the 'deplorables' have a (religiously significant) revelatory quality because of the 'disruptiveness' and 'excessiveness' ascribed to this practice – even if it were futile to try to uncover supranatural causes that count as factors which constituted the place

[33] Whether an ontological modelling of the revelation event is still permissible, see *Matthias Remenyi*, Staunen nur kann ich und staunend mich freu'n. Versuch über Offenbarung, in: Nitsche; Remenyi (Ed.), Problemfall Offenbarung (see fn. 32), 146–180, esp. 163–180.

of the revelatory event behind the boundary of the self-presentation of the event.[34] Rather the narration and the performative actualization of these very practices open up the possibilities for further narration and reception and prove their value by their transformative powers.

3.3 Criteria of Revelation

The first couple of the above-mentioned questions, nevertheless, refers to the age-old fundamental theological problem of identifying so-called criteria of revelation and to the problem of determining such criteria for identification of the occurrence of 'revelatory events.'[35] On the one hand, any inference of such criteria from purely philosophical or metaphysical premises could look like a trick if such criteria are already concretely spelled out in terms and laden with content that corresponds all too flawlessly to a Christologically centered understanding of divine revelation, because it would subject the pattern of identifying criteria to another circularity objection and would only serve as a self-encouraging tool for an intramural Christian theology of revelation. On the other hand, any reflection on the identification of the criteria of divine revelation must be prepared to be oriented towards the biblical tenor of presenting divine revelation and to reflect this path additionally in a more abstract way. Thus, Marion is right on track when he points to the criterion of *excessive charity*. However, Marion can only defend his view against the circularity objection (which would suggest that he borrows from Christianity the very criteria of identifying divine revelation that were, nevertheless, meant to be established on a rather neutral and, at least for Marion's approach, purely phenomenological basis), if he points out that any allegedly successful philosophical or metaphysical identification of these criteria that help us to identify divine revelation or the *possible* occurrence of revelatory events is blocked or hindered by the existentially fractured human reason which is ultimately unable to touch the realm of what is truly desired, but seems *impossible* to reach and *unthinkable* to grasp. So true revelation, for Marion, has to be touched and accessed and met – even in the most sketchy way – on its own terms, based on its own trajectories and only within its own categories.[36]

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[34] Cf. *Godzieba*, Presence and Absence of God (see fn. 15), chap. 5.4.: "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 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 hopeless one who is given a reason to go on; the destruction of a community's life overcome by that community's trust in one another and in grace; forgiveness offered when there is no reason to expect it; an overwhelming liturgical experience after a string of blandly rote attendances; one's spirit deeply moved by a piece of music one has heard a million times; a nation's trust in justice and peace over violent confrontation. The shattering of expectations 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 immanent time we can access the mystery of God's love, the transcendental horizon that is always present but never isolatable on its own."

[35] For a cross-culturally sensitive illustration of this very problem see *Gregor Maria Hoff*, Offenbarungen Gottes? Eine theologische Problemgeschichte, Regensburg 2007, 40–54.

[36] Cf. *Jean-Luc Marion*, In the Self's Place. The Approach of Saint Augustine, Stanford 2012, 96: "This chain of determinations imposes a radical reversal on the figure of the ego. For, if my happy life, for which desire constitutes me as myself without possible compromise, can be reached only in a truth that I neither know nor am, since it belongs in the end to God, then I am powerless before what I want most essentially. We even have to go so far as to say that I am not what I am if I limit myself to being only what I know and what I have power over, the

Marion can, furthermore, try to protect himself from any circularity objection by crossing out the problem of subjective interpretation and the problem of identifying criteria of revelation through 'bracketing,' i. e. by simply pointing – in a phenomenological manner – to the allegedly overwhelming objectivity of the saturated phenomenon and, thus, to the self-evidence and the self-manifestation of the 'true' and 'actual.'

Nevertheless, anyone who hermeneutically takes into account the role of interpretation and understanding for the identification of revelation, and in doing so also appreciates the relevance of the textual and narrative dimension of the so-called 'revelatory event,' is well advised to refer back to Paul Ricœur again. For Ricœur spells out a notion of revelation and of revelatory truth which is connected to the poetic power of language and narration – such that an 'everyday notion' of revelation ('revelation' with a small 'r') can be easily extended onto a more religiously significant concept of revelation and revelatory truth:

> "But why call it revelatory? Because though all the traits that it recapitulates and by what it adds, the poetic function incarnates a concept of truth that escapes the definition by adequation as well as the criteria of falsification and verification. Here truth no longer means verification, but manifestation, i. e., letting what shows itself be. What shows itself is in each instance a proposed world, a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities. It is in this sense of manifestation that language in its poetic function is a vehicle of revelation."[37]

The criteria identifying revelation and truth, as indicated by Ricœur, are still somewhat formal; they resemble blank spots that can only be filled (in a more transcendental-theological tradition) while asking what kind of *world* or *realm of possibilities* is such that human beings are preparing or hoping to inhabit it in their search for the living God.[38] Of course, our very concrete human experiences, like the awareness of doom and the longing for salvation, must be included in the determination of those criteria that help us to identify revelation and truth, if we can agree on the following core element of divine revelation: revelation is *an excessive and disruptive manifestation of what opens up the horizon of new possibilities that seem to be impossible from our perspective* – possibilities that represent new but immemorially expressed actualizations of life that exceeds our standards. It is easy to see how this notion of revelation is encoded in the Biblical Scriptures and how the 'Exodus'

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cogito, sum. Not only does the gap between what I desire (the *beata vita*) and what I am able to will as measured by what I know ('What can I hope for?') become a yawning chasm, uncrossable, but it also becomes my most evident and definitive characteristic. Not only does the (certain) desire for the (unknown) happy life condemn the fantasized attempt at self-equality (the principle of identity A = A being accomplished in the self-identity of the self to itself), but it also disqualifies the horizon within which such an equality even became thinkable – the horizon of the thinkable, the representable, the comprehensible in the sense of the noetic deploying the face-to-face of the ego subject before its object double." See also *Rumpza*, Measuring up (see fn. 31), 95 f.

[37] *Paul Ricœur*, Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation, in: Ricœur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge, Philadelphia 1980, 73–118, esp. 102. For further discussion see *Knut Wenzel*, Thinking Revelation. A Catholic Reading of Paul Ricœur's Philosophy or Revelation, in: Gschwandtner (Ed.), Paul Ricœur (see fn. 28), 63–76, esp. 67 f.

[38] Cf. *Kutzer*, Unendliche Geschichte (see fn. 9), 403–405; see also *Adam J. Graves*, The Phenomenology of Revelation in Heidegger, Marion, and Ricœur, Lanham – Boulder – New York – London 2021, 145–196.

or the 'Easter' narratives offer us a perspective to address the reference point of such possibilities of new life: as the life of 'a future presented' that is narrated as the future perfect[39] for the sake of the immersion of our identities and biographies in these very stories. Since those new possibilities[40] of life must be related to the identities of those who are seeking 'true life,' the subjective pre-figurations of such possibilities of life by means of narrative anticipation must be permitted.[41] If, moreover, the possibilities of the life in question are under the auspices that they indicate a 'world we may inhabit' which can never become possible under those conditions we can create ourselves for ourselves, these very possibilities exceed the capacity of purely subjective imaginations and endeavors and, thus, meet the (formal) criterion of *indicating something disruptive and excessive* as the mode of how such a world we are destined to inhabit presents itself.

3.4 Truth as Manifestation

Nonetheless, Ricœur's notion of 'truth' will have to deal with some objections. For whoever is attached to a more classical understanding of 'truth,' might insist that 'manifestation' adds nothing insightful to the spectrum of rivaling theories of truth, which circle around the notions of coherence, correspondence, or suitability.[42] Nevertheless, it might be worth mentioning that Ricœur's comment fits well with contemporary reflections on the 'truthfulness of revelation' that – in order to emphasize and understand its uniqueness – connects with Heidegger's interpretation of truth as 'ἀλήθεια,' meaning: *unveiling*.[43] Yet, still, some might argue that unveiling is not an explication, let alone: a definition of 'being true,' but rather (if anything) a criterion of 'appearing to be true' under certain circumstances. Thus, we could think of a report in the *New York Times* as being an unveiling, and therefore: manifesting, report; but we wouldn't ascribe any truth to that report because of its allegedly unveiling or disruptive character. Admittedly, Ricœur's hints remain troubling. But, as should have become clear by now: revelation is not primarily concerned with propositions but with an experience of excess that has a transformative impact on us.[44] Propositions come into play only at the second order level of theology as science and at the level of discourses aimed at justification.

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[39] See also *Patrick Ebert*, Offenbarung und Entzug. Eine theologische Untersuchung zur Transzendenz aus phänomenologischer Perspektive, Tübingen 2020, 487–527; for a detailled discussion of Ebert's view see *Lukas Metz*, Rez. zu 'Patrick Ebert: Offenbarung als Entzug', in: MThZ 75 (2024) 469–474.

[40] On the convergence of this cautious description of divine revelation with the understanding of revelation based on the Second Vatican Council, cf. *Michael Seewald*, Offenbarung als Manifestation der Kraft Gottes zur Rettung aller, die glauben. Über gegenwärtige Diskussionen um den Offenbarungsbegriff, den Umgang mit der Widersprüchlichkeit von Dei verbum und den Gegenstand christlichen Glaubens, in: Nitsche; Remenyi (Ed.), Problemfall Offenbarung (see fn. 32), 340–373, esp. 351–371.

[41] Bernhard Nitsche prudently borrows the concept of 'resonance' here; cf. *Bernhard Nitsche*, Offenbarung als Resonanzereignis, in: Nitsche; Remenyi (Hg.), Problemfall Offenbarung (see fn. 32), 251–288, esp. 260–277.

[42] I am very grateful to a number of substantial and highly controversial discussions with Gegrory Currie who resisted to let me off the hook in this very area. I was not able to really convince him in early June 2023 – when we both joined a workshop at Tantur/Jerusalem – but his insistence on a version of the correspondence theory of truth convinced me to phrase my proposal more carefully.

[43] Cf. *Marion*, Elsewhere (see fn. 24), 115–120; see also *Rumpza*, Measuring up (see fn. 31), 87 f.

[44] See *Sarah Rosenhauer*, Mehr als in Sätze passt. Offenbarung als performatives Ereignis, in: MThZ 75 (2024) 385–400, esp. 389–392.

At this point, phenomenology can again help us to understand that divine revelation is the peak of manifestation insofar as 'appearing to be true' and 'being true' become identical. To say that is not extravagant, because even on a rather metaphysical level, truth might be seen as the *event of becoming apparent* for what has not been apparent so far. Our whole endeavor of gaining knowledge and coming to terms with what we judge to be 'the matter' is, indeed, best described as a *process of manifestation and unveiling*. Clearly, these very notions are not equipped to stand in as specific criteria of truth for specific propositions we have to assess; rather they can be seen as the result of more general reflections on what human knowledge and will seeking their ultimate aims are about and, especially, how truth as truthfulness comes to pass. So, even for a researcher who seeks the truth about the American Civil War or about the origins of the so-called Weimar Republic in Germany, a specific monograph, some forgotten letters, or a certain number of findings in yet undetected archives can be seen as *events of unveiling or manifestation*. Nevertheless, these qualifications (i. e. 'unveiling' or 'being a manifestation') do not express a definition of 'being true' but rather a description of how it is to be acquainted with the truth. Therefore, Ricœur's remarks only provide us with a helpful and religiously inspiring description of how it is to *encounter* revelation and how the truthfulness of revelation comes to pass. Yet, Ricœur's explanations do not really offer us a *definition* of 'being true' that is univocally suitable for religious as well as scientific or everyday truths; taken in a more analogical way – as the above-mentioned example of the researcher who stumbles across surprising evidence can show – they still keep their value.

Thus, if we want to keep Ricœur's insights and still wish to stay connected to the impressive epistemological debates on the definition of 'truth,' we are best advised to seek some middle ground: presumably, a pre-theoretical, nevertheless theory-invoking concept of truth might be wrapped around the idea of 'aptness' – or, even better, 'rectitudo' as some Latin classics had underlined. Now, 'aptness' is, indeed, a multi-layered notion which describes the appearance of truth in our assessments of given states of affairs as well as our approach to a more specific knowledge of persons. Even the researcher's endeavor to find the most 'suitable' description of reality or the most 'fitting' system of concepts and categories can be appropriately circumscribed under the above-mentioned headline of 'aptness'. Additionally, for revelation – as a theological consideration of how it comes to pass that God shows himself *as* himself – the notion of 'aptness' is an equally valuable tool, because it might, theologically, help us to understand why under the guidance of 'aptness' divine revelation has to take on the form of manifestation and unveiling: for God, as the supreme Good, to manifest himself – despite the hindrances of finite and sinful existence as human beings – it would be 'most apt' to encounter God within the dimension of intimacy and joint attention. Under the premise that our access to God is seriously clouded by sin and deprivation, God's turning towards us and towards our desire to get in touch with him, must have all the characteristics of 'unveiling'. Yet, as some phenomenologists remind us, even without sin, those characteristics might still be typical for divine revelation since the metaphysical layout of finite existence is, *per se*, not capable to become open for the supreme and the infinite Good, unless the divine itself guides this process as the occur-

rence of opening-up which, again, may correctly be described as the *unveiling and manifestation of the divine*. Now, for our immediate understanding of revelatory events and excessive experiences mediated through narrations we can underline that it is the manifestation-oriented, sometimes eruptive, generally unveiling quality of certain stories that render them 'truth-apt' eventually.

3.5 God's Manifestation as Future Perfect

Our previous reflections on 'revelatory events' have been based on an analogy. Despite the dissimilarities, what we have detected and underlined so far might also be applicable to 'revelatory events' in a more specifically religious sense of the word. We have seen, for instance, that the fact-constituting factors and elements that prepare, so to speak, the occurrence of the event recede into the background, whereas the reception of the event will focus on the emerging meaning and the self-presentation of the significance of the event. Now it is precisely the task of the 'emerging significance and meaning' to fill in the so-called *reference gap*, which had been initially mentioned and pointed at by Zeilinger when he had underlined the (hermeneutically non-erasable) 'future perfect' dimension of biblical narratives: *It is not the occurrence-constitutive factors and elements that serve as the actual addressee of reference as the 'whereupon' of textual signification, rather it is the emerging meaning thanks to which the event presents itself in its eventfulness in the future perfect mode and will have (had) an effect (on us) as an event.* Thanks to this very specific hermeneutical tool – suitable for Biblical narratives – we are permitted to draw a dividing line between *mere facts* on the one hand *and self-presenting events* on the other hand as well. This does, of course, not exclude that Biblical stories cannot be scrutinized from a purely historical point of view; any historical examination of so-called revelatory events – comparable to ways of reconstructing and explaining as offered by natural sciences – is legitimately based on its very own purposes, but to build a full-blooded hermeneutics of Biblical narratives on the monopolization of a purely reconstructive (historical) approach would always come at the cost of disregarding the special *significance* of the eventfulness of the event in question.[45] For the 'revelatory event' presents itself and its significance in such a way that a *refiguration of biographies and perspectives* becomes an integral part of the event and its effects – a refiguration which, depending on the degree of excess and disruption we might experience, can lead to a biographical transformation.

However, for the sake of a *theology of revelation* the difference between everyday 'revelatory events' as manifestations of the 'actual' on the one hand and the religiously significant revelatory event as the manifestation of a new world as a horizon of new possibilities of life flowing from the intimacy with God on the other hand, still needs to be strengthened

[45] Without referring to Badiou, Protestant theologian Markus Mühling has developed a comparable view – although his approach comes close to an omni-narrational approach. Yet, in Mühling's assessment a purely naturalistic or causally reconstructed or purely historical notion of 'events' would be short-sighted and theologically always 'one dollar short.' Cf. *Markus Mühling*, Post-Systematische Theologie, Bd. 1: Denkwege – eine theologische Philosophie, Leiden 2020, 155–166; see also *Markus Mühling*, Das Erzählen der Wirklichkeit. Narrative Ontologie und Offenbarung, in: MThZ 75 (2024), 325–339.

in order to see more clearly what distinguishes events of divine revelation from rather common experiences of, let's say, the existentially deep. Therefore, with Jean-Yve Lacoste we have to ask ourselves how the possibilities of life originating from a closeness to God can manifest themselves in the experiential horizon of finite existence. We had pointed out the characteristics of being 'truly actual,' of being 'excessive' or of being 'disruptive'. But these criteria might still be too formal, whereas pointing to the experience of overflowing charity might straightforwardly touch the content of divine revelation without introducing the mode of the encounter between the finite and the divine. According to Lacoste, it would be wrong to think that God's manifestation presents itself in the same way as the manifestations of the finite. In contrast to the manifestation forms of the finite, Lacoste introduces to us the mode of the permanent *Advent*.[46] God's revelation is in becoming; the future perfect is the only suitable mode how the infinite and supreme Good can be presented to us. This proposal also leads to a more nuanced view of the so-called boundary of revelatory events, which now means a dissolution of their boundaries into the future that flows from the eternity of God. The effect of revelatory events is that it proves their revelatory quality as a transfiguration that places us into the divine future as the horizon of those possibilities that seem to be impossible (to reach) for the finite. However, God as the absolute cannot be presented as *one* limited, finite event; but perhaps he can be re-represented by a *texture of events*. If that is the case this obviously releases the dynamics of symbolic representation and its continuous interpretation, which becomes necessary when a certain void becomes visible in the intrinsic significance of an event – a void which indicates a further emergence of meaning and the possibility of further reception. Lacoste's reference to the relationship of *Parousia* in which God stands to the world, can also help us to consider how what is represented relates to the intrinsic significance of the revelatory event: if an emerging meaning is disclosed by the event – a meaning which refers to something that is actually impossible within the 'boundaries of the world' – then, encrypted as the possible impossible and the future perfect, a void opens up in the intrinsic significance of the event, through which, so to speak, God 'appears' as the future (perfect).

4. Transformation by Reading

We can complement our proposal by introducing an additional perspective on what we have considered so far. For we have hitherto focused on the problem of 'revelatory events' without really considering what revelation is for. If we raise this very question, we will slightly have to change our perspective and will have to point out the more specific role of narratives, i. e. the *textual side* of revelation. If we do so we also distance ourselves somewhat from an omni-narrational account of being – as presented by Markus Mühling.[47] Mühling is right in pointing out that one of the most impressive features of reality – namely to perceive and to be perceived – can be best captured by the notion of 'narration.'[48] But to

[46] Vgl. *Jean-Yves Lacoste*, The Appearing of God, Oxford 2018, 123–133.
[47] Cf. *Mühling*, Post-Systematische Theologie, Bd. 1 (see fn. 45), 69–121.
[48] Cf. ibid., 39–67, esp. 62–65.

Mühling a life of events within this very mode of being (namely: perceiving and being perceived) is *already* a story and, therefore, already counts as narrative. In a way, Mühling replaces the notion of 'omni-relativity' with 'narrativity' – a bold move which might be in danger to blur many lines that should be kept distinct. Because for such an omni-narrational account of being, our natural scientific endeavors, our ontologies, our discourses, and practices would eventually turn into narratives. And what we might call 'narrative' in a much more specific sense – distinguishing these textual results, for instance, from science reports or historical records – could only be conceived as second-order narrations that are distinct from their first order counterparts based, presumably, on a specific mode of reflection. Moreover, for an omni-relational approach it would be almost too easy to connect revelation and narration: a revealing God manifests himself as being relational and would enter, therefore, into a 'narrative framework' in the broadest sense of the word.[49] Although the reflection on omni-relativity can have the power to resolve some of the problems of a theology of revelation previously debated on and even fought over by Dialectical and Liberal theologians[50] – rephrased, for instance, as the question which side of the multilayered narrative dimensions of divine omni-relativity has to be focused on primarily –, we do not get an answer how specific narratives, like the Biblical narratives we are familiar with and which are entrenched in the future perfect mode of referencing, can be an integral part of the so-called 'revelatory event.'

4.1 Subject Constitution through Reading

Instead, 'narration' in the context of this paper is regarded as a very specific way of becoming interwoven with the revelatory side of the 'revelation event.' Although we can state that the emergence of significance and meaning is ideally captured by narration and that narration is the way in which the 'eventful' can unfold its transformative power, we also need to take into account what Peter Zeilinger – along the lines of Derrida's insistence on *writing* and *being written* – had pointed out: it is not just the case that the 'eventful' opens up to us as a narrative – and a whole spectrum of Biblical texts cannot simply be labeled as stories, rather they are prescriptions or indications of certain performances −, it is much more so that the 'eventfulness of the event' comes to us as *written* so that every immediacy we might wish to find in connecting to the 'eventfulness of the event' is always mediated and pulled through a temporal delay that creates a void or, at least, a variety of blank spots. In other words: in order to connect to the eventfulness of the event, the *aspect of filling in the blank spots and replacing the void by our own immersion through reading and enactment* become crucial.

Following Wolfgang Iser's theory of reading, two peculiarities of reading are particularly interesting: in the act of reading, we become entangled in the narrative 'world of the text;'[51] we are called to respond, to identify or to distance ourselves, which is accomplished by directing or re-directing our attention, at the end of which there might indeed be the result

[49] Cf. ibid., 549–575.
[50] Cf. ibid., 550–556.
[51] Cf. *Wolfgang Iser*, Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung, Paderborn [2]1984, 214–217; see also *Paul Ricœur*, Time and Narrative, Vol. 3, Chicago – London 1988, 166–179.

of joint attention. And it is the text – especially in anticipating the act of reading – that creates a *receiving subject*[52] that is already hinted at and addressed in it, but that is yet not completely actualized. Rather, in reading the receiving subject becomes immersed and so transformed by the actualization of the event which's emerging meaning is presented to the subject as the 'world of the text:'

> "If the constitution of the meaning of the text requires the participation of the reader, who must realize the structure given to her in order to bring the meaning of the text to light, one must not forget that the reader is always on the far side of the text. The text must influence this position in order to bring the reader's point of view into play in a certain way. For the constitution of meaning is not a one-sided demand of the text to the reader; rather, it gains its meaning only from the fact that something happens to the reader herself in such a process. If, therefore, texts as 'cultural objects' need the subject, it is not for their own sake, but in order to be able to have an effect on the subject. Consequently, the aspect-nature of the text implies not only a horizon of meaning, but also a reader's point of view, which must be taken up by the real reader so that the unfolded horizon of meaning can have an effect on the subject. The constitution of meaning and the constitution of the reading subject are two operations that are intensely connected with each other in the aspect-nature of the text."[53]

The transformation of the subject through the 'eventfulness of the revelatory event' is precisely actualized by *reading*, insofar as the act of reading contributes to a constitution of a subject. Although we can distinguish several modes and degrees of such a constitution, it is not hard to imagine one peculiar mode of becoming constituted as a subject which is so fundamental and far reaching that it can be called entirely transformational. The many degrees that inhabit the intermediary space between everyday revelations ('revelations' with a small 'r') and religiously significant revelations ('revelation' with a capital 'R') are mirrored by the different degrees of how a subject can be constituted in a transformative way through the performance of reading.[54]

Now, the above-described process of transformation sounds still somewhat asymmetrical and seems to advocate some manner of becoming overwhelmed by the text and the story in question. But this is, according to Iser, only one way to look at the proposed idea. For the text to become relevant and to unfold its significance, it must open up itself to the reader. To do so, the text a such needs to offer blank spots that can be occupied by the reader herself:

> "Blank spaces, however, denote not so much a gap in the determination of the intentional object or the schematized views as the occupying of a certain system position in the text by the reader's imagination. Instead of a need for completion, they indicate a need for combination. It is only when the schemata of the text are related to each other that the imaginary object begins to form; and this operation ordered by the reader has a central trigger moment in the

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[52] Cf. *Iser*, Akt des Lesens (see fn. 51), 245–251.
[53] Ibid., 246 [Translation: T.S.].
[54] Cf. *Brian Gregor*, Meaning and Persons. The Ontology of the Word as Revelation, in: Gschwandtner (Ed.), Paul Ricœur (see fn. 28), 241–264, esp. 249–243.

> empty spaces. Through them, the connectability of its segments, which is omitted in the text, is realized."[55]

But in addition to what Iser has underlined we might want to introduce a further element to the texts we consider to be the results of an emergence of meaning in the revelatory sense described in the previous paragraphs: There are, of course, those blank spaces that call for connectivity – and allow the reading subject to enter the story's 'world of the text.' But in revelatory significant texts and stories we might need to find additional blank spaces that, indeed, call for completion – a completion that again indicates the specific mode of the manifestation of the divine as 'future perfect' and points to new possibilities of life that seem to be impossible from a finite point of view.

4.2 Truth in Fictions

We started our reflections with Zeilinger's theologically mind-provoking proposal that the 'Exodus event' is nothing that happened on a factual basis in the past, but which occurs in the present as a future perfect event coming towards us from a performatively actualized future. However, in reading biblical narratives and in getting immersed into the 'world of the text' we don't need to commit ourselves to a historical zero-sum game. Rather, we can emphasize what we have outlined already: that a revelatory event unfolds its meaning by the emergence of meaning that gets us immersed in a transformative way such that we are set on a path to rewrite our biography in the light of the above-mentioned emergence of meaning. In saying this, the emergence of meaning needs a point of origin all the while the factual constituents may no longer be important insofar as they do not present themselves as the ingredients of the emerging meaning of what is presented as the event. In other words: the 'Exodus narrative' would still be effective and meaningful, revealing the advent of a surplus of possibilities even if historical evidence could prove that the 'Exodus narrative' is an encrypted story of Israel's return from exile and its spiritually broadened vision of survival against all earthly odds. Accordingly, the 'Easter narratives' would still be effective even if any chain of witnesses connecting us to an empty tomb might break down, as long as the experience of Christ's living presence is kept and made accessible through the narratives and through the performative liturgical practices that are meant to warrant the steadiness of the emergence of meaning.

But this, brings us, at last to the final question how we should deal with fictional stories – especially in relation to the eventfulness of the revelatory event. With Wolfgang Iser or Paul Ricœur we might want to underline that fictional stories still bear some truth insofar as they constitute a reading subject that is confronted with new imaginary possibilities through which it might learn to know its very own world and its place in it.[56] Or we could say that fictions confront the reading subjects with possibilities of action that uncover the many layers of their own identity. We could even expand this view and underline that fictions constitute us as receiving subjects while facing a world of grace and presenting God's ultimate character. But some problems remain, as long as we think of fictions as

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[55] *Iser*, Akt des Lesens (see fn. 51), 284 [Translation: T.S.].
[56] Cf. *Ricœur*, Time and Narrative, Vol. 3 (see fn. 51), 186–189.

being at the mercy of reports and as long as the reliability of stories is due to their accordance to facts.[57] In such a view only what one could call an 'allowance'-mode of fictional story-telling remains – a mode, which claims that narrations of reality are superior but that permits fictions to play a certain role as long as they fulfil an overall admissible purpose. Gregory Currie, for example, conceives of fictional stories as tools to change beliefs – beliefs about us and about our character.[58] While beliefs are clearly important as the background of our convictions and as the foundation of our cognitive access to the world, what epistemologically matters at the end of the day is: knowledge. But if this were the case, the contribution of fictional narratives would be only secondary to whatever factual reports can do. Slightly more charitable is Eleonore Stump's view on fictions; she allows fictional narratives to contribute to what narrative in general may accomplish: a knowledge of persons.[59] However, fictional stories get this kind of allowance based on a variety of safety regulations that circle around the reliability of the author and the sources in question. Currie's as well as Stump's approach leave us with a dilemma: either we treat the differences between the gospels and their Easter stories, taken as an example we have already referred to frequently, as colorful exemptions that are based on specific perspectives and rhetorical underlining of the evangelists and leave the main message of the gospels at the mercy of historical accuracy. Or we turn to the rather broad-brush approach which takes Biblical narratives as such to be instruments to get us closer to God, i. e. to help us to be drawn in to a second person perspective with God; but this would not at all help us to explain differences between the gospel narratives. And it would not resolve the problem we may have with larger parts of so-called fictional story telling we encounter in the Bible. It is again Paul Ricœur who reminds us of a much more intrinsic connection between so-called historical and so-called fictional stories:

> "If this hypothesis stands up, we can say that fiction is quasi-historical, just as much as history is quasi-fictive. History is quasi-fictive once the quasi-presence of events placed 'before the eyes of' the reader by a lively narrative supplement through its intuitiveness, its vividness, the elusive character of the pastness of the past, which is illustrated by the paradoxes of standing-for. Fictional narrative is quasi-historical to the extent that the unreal events that it relates are past facts for the narrative voice that addresses itself to the reader."[60]

But even Ricœur seems to stick to some kind of double standard of 'being real' versus 'being unreal' – although 'quasi-realness' can be achieved by fictional narratives through their power of immersion and their force to open up our horizons of action and in relation to our own past; fictional narratives could reveal what could have been the case or will be the case and how these counterfactual possibilities may alter the narrative versions of our own selves.[61] But that might just not be enough to explain what fictions can do for us and why we encounter something like a 'fictional past' in the Bible. One powerful tool to shed

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[57] For further discussions see *Gergory Currie*, Narratives and Narrators. A Philosophy of Stories, Oxford 2010, 27–64.
[58] Cf. *Gregory Currie*, Imagining and Knowing. The Shape of Fiction, Oxford 2020, 150–181.
[59] Cf. *Eleonore Stump*, Zur Wahrhaftigkeit von Erzählungen, in: MThZ 75 (2024), 355–369, esp. 363–368.
[60] *Ricœur*, Time and Narrative, Vol. 3 (see fn. 51), 190.
[61] Cf. *Ricœur*, Time and Narrative, Vol. 3 (see fn. 51), 191 f.

some light on this aspect of fictional narratives is offered by Mark Currie; he points to the important aspect of self-distancing that is one important aspect of storytelling. Given that fictional stories explore hitherto unseen new possibilities – and thus 'reveal' the realm of the impossible to us by confronting it with the possible – the mode of self-distancing becomes important to engage in reading, to start the immersion, and to rewrite one's own biography in the light of what the story reveals and how the story draws us into the presence of a future perfect:

> "The general argument […] has returned repeatedly to the proposition that presence requires a kind of self-distance, and particularly that the present is predominantly apprehended as the object of a future memory. […] I would suggest […] that a tensed view of fiction cannot operate with a notion of undivided presence as its guiding concept. […] In fiction we do not see events, and therefore they are not present […]. Moreover, to have a tensed view of events, we are 'to think of them as present', and yet in the majority of cases the verb structure of narrative fiction invites us to think of them as in the past. There are, as Derrida has reminded us, obvious ways in which the referents – the events of fiction, for example – are absent in writing."[62]

Fictional stories use the past tense to show their distance and to open us to expect new possibilities. But they can also, as Mark Currie has underlined, do even more than that: They can move beyond the well-known notions of tensed time, they can present something as almost timeless.[63] Thus, the many layers of tensed states of affairs in Biblical narratives, the fictional imagination of a future perfect as the past, the self-presentation of the past as the present need the hands of fictional storytelling to move beyond the boundaries of dire reports of tensed states of affairs and their bygone times in order to lead us to the modes of divine appearance. The truth of these stories consists of their 'aptness' to fulfill this very task.

Der vorliegende Artikel kreist um die Frage, was Offenbarungsereignisse zu Offenbarungsereignissen macht; mit der Hilfe eines spezifischen Ereignisbegriffes, einer phänomenologischen Reflexion auf die Eigentümlichkeit von Offenbarung und einer Hermeneutik des Offenbarungsgeschehens wird ein Konzept von Offenbarungsereignissen entwickelt, das auch einen speziellen Ort für den Modus der Erzählens und den Akt des Lesens ausweist: Im Lesen wird das empfangende Subjekt als Subjekt konstituiert und mit dem Offenbarungsereignis und seiner Ereignishaftigkeit verbunden.

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[62] *Mark Currie,* About Time. Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time, Edinburgh 2007, 150.

[63] Cf. *Currie*, About Time (see fn. 62), 29–72; see also *Mark Currie*, The Unexpected. Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise, Edinburgh 2013, 113: "What I am suggesting here is that a different account of focalisation, and therefore of the *moving now* of narrative and fiction, is required for the description of narrative temporality. It seems necessary, in particular, that the question of *now* is restored to an account of the distribution of knowledge, actuality and certainty that structures a narrative, and so to understand the perspectival structures of focalisation in terms of temporal position: of what is certain, what is expected and what is unexpected. A different account of *now*, of the narrative present, is not one that seeks to conflate the semiotic notion of now with that of lived experience, or to deny that a discrepancy exists between fictional and real time, but one that aims to describe that relation as an interaction, or a hermeneutic circle […] between narrative and life, whereby the temporality of narrative and the temporality of life constantly modify each other."