

VATICAN II'S CATHOLICITY: A CHRISTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON TRUTH, HISTORY, AND THE HUMAN PERSON¹

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“Christ embraces everyone (Col 3:11)
because he is the truth of God and man
in person, the destiny of man’s history.”

When Balthasar turned seventy in 1975 he wrote *Katholisch*, a short book that was a response to all the friends of different philosophical and theological backgrounds he had made during his fruitful life.² The book, an expression of friendship, is a simple elucidation of the meaning of the term “catholic,” which aims at presenting what is central about the mystery of the Triune God and the divine economy. At the beginning, Balthasar writes something that will set us on the right direction to ponder what it means that the novelty

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²Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

of the Second Vatican Council resides in offering a re-reading of the Church's Tradition in light of its catholic form. "Jesus," Balthasar contends, "must be catholic, otherwise his Church, which follows him and is promised his fullness could not be called Catholic. Being catholic means embracing everything, leaving nothing out."³ The present essay therefore wishes to ponder the meaning of the christological dimension of catholicity.

Our reflection does not turn to Vatican II as an inspiration for saying something that the council did not claim. It is well known that the council dealt explicitly with ecclesiological and anthropological matters. Yet it is also the case that for the council the reflection on divine revelation (the mysteries of the Church, man, and their relation in the contemporary world) is inseparable from the mystery of Christ and of the Triune God.⁴ Vatican II indicates very clearly that the Church was not interested in speaking to her members about internal problems. Rather, in a position of listening to the Word (*DV*, 1), the Church wished to speak of Jesus Christ, of whom she is the sacramental presence (*LG*, 1; *DV*, 2–4).⁵ She wished to show anew that Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's revelation (*DV*, 4) and the ground and form of the Church herself

³Ibid., 27.

⁴Vatican II was not therefore a "pastoral" council, if by this term we mean "pragmatic." It is "pastoral" in the sense indicated by Joseph Ratzinger: "Pastoral should not mean 'nebulous, without substance, merely 'edifying'. Rather what was meant was positive care for the man of today who is not helped by condemnations and who has been told for too long what is false and what he may not do. . . . [It] should not mean something vague and imprecise, but rather something free from wrangling, and free also from entanglement in questions that concern scholars alone Pastoral should mean finally, speaking in the language of scripture, of the early Church Fathers, and of contemporary man. Technical theological language has its purpose and is indeed necessary, but it does not belong in the kerygma and in our confession of faith" (Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. Henry Traub, Gerard C. Thormann, and Wener Barzel [New York: Paulist Press, 2009], 45). See also Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, trans. P. S. Falla (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 15–18.

⁵See Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology. Fundamentals of Ecclesiology and Living Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 1–2. The translation of the conciliar documents is taken from *Vatican Council II: the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Pub. Co., 1975).

(*LG*, 1). He is the origin and content of the Church's liturgy (*SC*, 5–8) and the One in whom the mystery of human existence finds its archetypal and enlightening form (*GS*, 22–24). Lest we think that Vatican II promulgated a stale christomonism, we cannot forget that the council's Christology is trinitarian.⁶ The council did not wish to talk about Jesus Christ without explicit and constant mention of the Triune Mystery: Christ's mission is to bring about the Father's plan, the fulfillment of which is communicated through the gift of the Holy Spirit (*LG*, 2–4). It is thus little wonder that Catholic theology after the council, without neglecting the main themes that Vatican II addressed directly, deepened the christological and trinitarian reflections. Moreover, the flourishing of these disciplines was such that Vatican II has been characterized both as “the fundamental christological event of the last century” and the return to the “trinitarian homeland.”⁷

To perceive the contours of the christological meaning of catholicity, we need to be aware of a difficulty and then the context that directs the council's thinking. The difficulty is the fruit of our assumed scientific worldview, which tends to perceive phenomena as objects whose intelligibility is given by ever more simple laws that do not need to take into account the origin, destiny, or interiority of what the sciences examine. While it has brought much fruit, this worldview leads us to think that “totality” or “embracing the whole” has to do with a measurable plurality, rather than with a quality pertaining to Jesus Christ or the Church. Obviously, there is also a sense in which “catholic” means a plurality of members and

⁶For a balanced judgment on Christocentrism see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 326–63; Angelo Scola, Gilfredo Marengo, and Javier Prades López, *La persona umana: antropologia teologica* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2000), 50–67.

⁷The first expression is from Olegario González de Cardedal, *Cristología* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2001), 346. The second is from Bruno Forte, cited in Javier Prades López, “‘From the Economic to the Immanent Trinity’: Remarks on a Principle of Renewal in Trinitarian Theology (part 1),” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 27, no. 2 (2000): 244. Prades summarizes the trinitarian contribution of the council in four points: The priority of the trinitarian aspect over the divine unity; the “ascent” from the economic Trinity to the immanent Trinity; the development of pneumatology; and the anthropological relevance of reflection on God as it sheds light on the humanum.

a geographical extension.⁸ Yet the quantitative connotation presupposes the “qualitative.”⁹ It is because Christ’s singular being is “the whole” that he can embrace every place and all of history. Listening carefully to how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, one of the best fruits of Vatican Council II, describes the first of the two meanings of “catholic” can help free us from reading quality in quantitative terms: “The Church is catholic because Christ is present in her.”¹⁰ Catholicity, “to be according to the totality,” therefore, regards the presence of one person, Jesus Christ, in the Church rather than the universality of a proposition. In this regard, to ponder the meaning of the catholicity of Jesus Christ in light of Vatican II requires seeing that the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Logos, fleshes out all of God with whom he is eternally one, and that he embraces every person and every time. In doing so Jesus Christ also allows concrete singular beings to be themselves through their gratuitous indwelling in the fullness of life proper to the Triune God.

Second, I wish to indicate just one aspect of the historical context of the council that points to the significance of Christ’s catholicity. Unlike other councils, at Vatican II the Church sought

⁸As Origen said “the breadth of the Church is spread throughout the whole earth.” Quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 50.

⁹The category of “quantity” has both a logical and a metaphysical connotation. For Aristotelian logic, “quantity” refers to the extension of a given subject in a judgment indicated by the predicate (all men are mortal). Modernity considers quantity metaphysically as an extension and hence as material individuality (Descartes) or as a property of the spirit (Kant, Hegel). When we indicate that quality is a property of a singular being we do seek to bring our sight away from a positivistic and technological understanding of our contemporary scientific view but we do not intend to interpret it as a property of the human spirit as idealism has done. Cf. Aristotle, *Cat.* 4b 20–21; id., *Met.* 1020a 7–33; René Descartes, *Principia Philosophiae* II, 9. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Boston: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), A 434/B62 and B 203–06; Georg W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1969), *Doctrine of Being*, Section II, Chapter 1.

¹⁰*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1994), n. 830. The Catechism continues, “Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church. In her subsists the fullness of Christ’s body united with its head.” For the Catechism, the Church is Catholic in this threefold sense: (1) in her Christ indwells; (2) she is sent to everyone; (3) she addresses the whole of each man.

to announce the newness of Christ's resurrection through a dialogue with the "spirit of the times."¹¹ The council perceived this spirit as marked by the positive drive toward unity (GS, 24:2), and determined by economic and scientific progress (GS, 64–72). It also considered it marred by an atheistic understanding of existence (GS, 19–21), among other things. The council was well aware that atheism is not a univocal category. For the council, however, the radical and manifold negation of God stems from an existentialist anthropology (GS, 19:3) that seeks to promote man's integrity apart from its intrinsic relation with the Triune God. Without addressing philosophical positions directly, Vatican II indicates that atheism seems to be governed by a common denominator, though each version understands it differently: the privileging of a logic of power (GS, 20:1) that, rather than yielding a unity in which the person is properly respected, imposes a monadic, totalitarian (dis)order that leaves no room for the human person to be.¹² The council sees no other response (*remedium*) than letting the catholicity of the Christian mystery be seen (LG, 21). The Church felt strongly the need to let the presence of the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ be perceived anew through the living witness to the unity proper to love (GS, 21:5). In the humble confession of her own responsibility in the rise of atheism (GS, 19:3) and painfully aware of the cost of the separation from the Oriental and Protestant Churches (UR, 1; LG, 8), the council re-proposes the unity with the Triune God to which she has been entrusted and within which

¹¹This is how Ratzinger interprets the desire to dialogue with the world. See his commentary on *Gaudium et spes* in Joseph Ratzinger, "Part I, Chapter I," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II: Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (Herder and Herder, 1969), 115–63.

¹²For the most part, this attempt ends up absorbing man into God (Hegel), God into the Übermensch (Nietzsche), or encapsulating existence in a finitude that dilutes transcendence in history (Heidegger, Marx). The council seems to have in mind, above all, the then significant presence of Marxism and of French and German existentialism. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter Crafts Hodgson, 3 vols., vol. III: *The Consummate Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984–1987), 326; Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*; with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann, [1st] ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 108, 25, and 343; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

the human being can be himself. Given our atheistic cultural context and its need to see anew the centrality of God and the meaning of the human person, I wish to indicate a fundamental aspect of the council's christological catholicity: Christ embraces everyone (Col 3:11) because he is the truth of God and man in person, the destiny of man's history.¹³ To elucidate the meaning of Vatican II's contention that Jesus Christ is the truth in person (section 1), we need to ponder what truth (section 2) and person mean (sections 3–4). This will enable us to see that he discloses the truth of God (section 5) and man (section 6) and, in so doing, he enables man to live history authentically (section 7).

1. Jesus Christ, truth in person

The conciliar constitution *Dei Verbum* indicates that “the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation (Mt 11:27; Jn 1:14)” (*DV*, 2). For the council, however, Jesus Christ reveals the truth of man's salvation because in him the truth of what man is has been disclosed: “Christ, the new Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling (*vocationem*) clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the truths presented here find their root and attain their crown” (*GS*, 22:1). With these famous statements, Vatican II echoes without repeating what Jesus Christ revealed and said about himself: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6). Yet there is also something new: the council perceives truth as coincident with the person of Christ. In attending to the person of Jesus Christ, Vatican II proposes an understanding of revelation that overcomes the well-established modern dichotomy between truth and history with its presupposed separation between reason and faith, time and eternity; and

¹³It is the relation between truth, history, and person that ensures that when John Paul II, one of the greatest exponents and advocates of Vatican II, claimed that “The redeemer of man, Jesus Christ is the center of the universe and of history,” he was not offering another spurious proclamation of a romantic religiosity. John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 1 (*AAS* 71 [1979]: 257).

with its consequent dialectics between the natural and the supernatural.¹⁴ Deepening Vatican I's *Dei Filius* and the ensuing reflection on divine revelation offered by both Catholic and Protestant theologians, Vatican II relinquishes that way of thinking still burdened by a conceptualistic and abstract perception of reason.¹⁵

The council's perception of truth as person, as de Lubac elucidated, contests any separation between a revelation that grants knowledge and one that simply regards Christ as a historical event.¹⁶ By speaking of Jesus Christ as truth in person, Vatican II, while guarding against a relativistic or anti-intellectualistic understanding of truth, retrieves truth's identity as "historical event."¹⁷ The universal truth that Christ re-presents and his historical singular existence—encompassing his kenotic descent, historical existence, and return as the Crucified Risen Lord to the right hand of the Father with whom he sends the Spirit—are inseparable. The words of Christ illumine the meaning of the event of his own presence, and his presence clarifies his words. He is the Word. Jesus Christ, says *Dei Verbum*, "perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself (*tota Sui ipsius praesentia ac manifestatione*): through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the

¹⁴For the development in the understanding of revelation see, e.g., Benedict XVI, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989); Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Offenbarung und Überlieferung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965).

¹⁵As is well known, Vatican I's dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* approaches the meaning of revelation within the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Whereas reason's natural light can know God with certainty starting from created realities it is thanks to the "supernatural path" of his Incarnate Son that God reveals himself and his decrees to man (*DH*, 3004). *Dei Verbum* deals with the natural knowledge of God only after examining the christological and theological sense of revelation and man's response to it (*DV*, 6).

¹⁶Henri de Lubac, *La révélation divine* (Paris: Du Cerf, 1983), 42.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 39–43. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Inquiry*, vol. 1: *Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000); Antonio López, "Eternal Event: God as an Event of Love," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32 (2005): 214–45.

dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth" (*DV*, 4:1). For the council, in the event of Jesus Christ we perceive that truth inseparably regards both the self-presentation of being (God, man, and the cosmos) and man's total engagement with it (*DV*, 5).¹⁸

We will have the opportunity later to deepen our reflection on the unity between truth and time (history). To grasp the significance of the disclosure of truth in the person of Christ it is important to indicate now what we mean by "event." Event has an ontological and a historical connotation. Ontologically speaking, event regards the phenomenon of the self-presentation of being in the form of a concrete singular. The concrete singular is, in this view, the complex unity of *esse* and essence (*ousia*) that participates in the "to be" proper of all that is (*esse commune*), which remains other although *esse commune* as such does not subsist in itself. The form of the concrete singular thus regards the complex unity that gives itself to be known for what it is without losing its mystery. This mystery has to do with both the concrete singular and the ultimate ground (*ipsum esse subsistens*) that accounts for the ontological difference that constitutes it and that remains other from it.¹⁹

¹⁸For Vatican II, man's response allows him to participate in God's glory. In, for example, *Ad Gentes divinitus*, the council states: "This decree (*LG*, 2), however, flows from the 'fount-like love' or charity of God the Father who, being the 'principle without principle' from whom the Son is begotten and Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, freely creating us on account of His surpassing and merciful kindness and graciously calling us moreover to share with Him His life and His cry, has generously poured out, and does not cease to pour out still, His divine goodness. Thus He who created all things may at last be 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28) (*ut qui conditor est omnium, tandem fiat 'omnia in omnibus'*), bringing about at one and the same time His own glory and our happiness. But it pleased God to call men to share His life, not just singly, apart from any mutual bond, but rather to mold them into a people in which His sons, once scattered abroad might be gathered together (cf. John 11:52)" (*AG*, 2).

¹⁹An explanation of why I indicate self-standing beings with the term "concrete singularity" and not with the more common terms ("objects," "phenomena," or *entia*) is in order. By "concrete" I refer to the physical or spiritual self-standingness of a singular being that always carries within itself the ontological memory of its belonging to the whole (*concretere*). "Singularity" does not just have a quantitative meaning, as is the case in Aristotle for whom the "singular" is the "individual" member of a species. It does not have a qualitative sense either, as in Hegel, for whom the singular refers to a subject, which is just one moment in the constitution of the individual, not an actual self-standing being. The concrete singular is not the empirical particular, always susceptible to

Historically speaking, event indicates that the manifestation of the ground through the concrete singular's ontological difference is temporal. "Temporal" does not mean here that the existence of a concrete singular happens in time, but rather that time is the unfolding of being. In this regard, "event" does not indicate sheer novelty, a newness ultimately disconnected from past and hence without future, but rather the presencing of a being that both contains the memory of its past and tends to the future. History is of fundamental importance since it signals concrete, irreducible otherness. "Events" remain historical but—since as created they are intrinsically open to the source and their *telos*—they are freed from a perception of time as progress that knows no transcendence. The ontological and historical characteristics are not *a priori* closed to the existence of an event, like Christ's resurrection, which, though historical, also transcends history.²⁰

When Vatican II speaks of God's and man's truth being revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, a twofold reduction is avoided: on the one hand, seeing the event of Christ as another event in history whose truth lacks absoluteness, and, on the other hand, interpreting the truth of the person of Jesus Christ abstractly,

technological manipulation. The concrete singular, as K. Schmitz indicates, "is that which takes the commonality of the universal and the determinacy of the particular" (Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Postmodernism and the Catholic Tradition," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 73, no. 2 [1999]: 247). Concrete singularity wishes to indicate the ontological gifted complexity of created beings in their irreducible uniqueness. It thus reflects the gifted difference from and similarity with God. Concrete singularity indicates the "dynamic" sense of being without diluting its whatness in a Heraclitean river of a becoming deprived of both source (*arche*) and destiny (*logos*). Lastly, "singularity" also includes a reference to the specificity of the human spirit (not to be interpreted as *animus* or *Geist*), but without for all that calling for totalizing systems or exaltations of subjectivity. The term "concrete singularity" opens up the possibility of perceiving created realities without getting lost in the justification of knowledge or in a static ontology which would always need to be supplemented by a theory of action unable to see how it flourishes from its own being.

²⁰Cf. also J. Bergmann-H. Lutzmann-W. H. Schmidt, "dabar," in TWAT II, pp. 89–133; O. Procksch, "légo ktl," in TWNT IV, pp. 91–97. This understanding of event proves O'Malley's perception of Vatican II as an "event" to be romantic. See John W. O'Malley, Joseph A. Komonchak, Stephen Schloesser, and Neil J. Ormerod, *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

ignoring his historical singularity (or considering his historicity as just another instance in the flow of history). The light shining from the event of Jesus Christ is not one wave among many in the ever-flowing river of history because he is both the exegete of the Father and of the human being, the Word of God and Adam's archetype (GS, 45).

The primordial sense of "event," then, is not a historical occurrence that is simply unable to transcend the flow of time. The council does not consider the event of Christ a historical occurrence that is no longer present. God remains present (DV, 4:1). Furthermore, contrary to what Bultmann and Dibelius contended, Vatican II opposes the view according to which "event" is nothing but a pointer to a "word" to which it (the historical event itself) would remain indifferent. In the event of Christ, the Logos made flesh, we are given the final justification of what we all experience without being able to account fully for it: historical events are not wordless. They mediate meaning because they are informed by the word whose ultimate depth is revealed in Christ. "God," says *Dei Verbum*, "creates all things (John 1:3) and keeps them in existence through his Word and gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (Rom 1:19–20)" (DV, 3).

2. Truth: unconcealment and faithfulness

What does the unity of truth and person in Christ unfold about the nature of truth and of the catholicity of his person? Certainly, the council does not contend that Jesus Christ's catholicity is that of a concrete singular which, although finite, can be elevated to the measure of the whole. If that were the case, rather than catholic, the only unity that he would generate would be a self-destructive ideology and not a catholic totality in which the other can be itself. Jesus Christ, instead, "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb 1:3). He is, as Nicholas of Cusa stated, the "concrete universal."²¹ We could give this preliminary, synthetic

²¹See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 9–27; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological*

answer to our question: Truth is the faithful and inexhaustible unveiling of being (the disclosure of what is), which, rather than a mechanical phenomenon, regards the free self-disclosure of someone, a person, and the relation this disclosure establishes with the one to whom being appears. That Christ is the truth in person means, therefore, that in him we find both the grounds for the sheer

revelatory existence of being and truth, and their unexpected, over-abundant fulfillment.²² We will look now at the meaning of truth and, in the sections that follow, the meaning of person. With this in mind, we will be able to offer at the end a more complete answer to the question just raised.²³

The council's association of truth with revelation invites us to return to the original Greek term, *aletheia* (un-concealment). This has a twofold advantage. On the one hand, it brings our gaze back to the recognition that truth is a property of being and not just a logical or epistemological category. On the other hand, it allows us to see that *aletheia*, as the unfolding of being, grounds the common epistemological meaning of truth as cor-respondence or coming-together (*con-venientia*) of being and a person.

"Truth," as Augustine wrote, "is what shows (*ostenditur*) what is." Because truth shows what is, there can be an *adequatio* between intellect and being.²⁴ The encounter between what gives itself to be seen and the one who is called to hear the word of what

Aesthetics, trans. Oliver Davies (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), vol. 5: *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 205–46.

²²It is in this sense that, as Balthasar suggests, Christ is the analogy of being. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. III: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992). For the relation between religion and truth, see Massimo Serretti, *The Uniqueness and the Universality of Jesus Christ in Dialogue with Other Religions*, trans. Teresa Talavera and David C. Schindler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

²³The following, therefore, is a deepening of Vatican II's understanding of divine revelation that is at the service of elucidating further the meaning of the catholicity of the event of Christ, truth in person.

²⁴Augustine, *De vera relig.*, 36.66. See Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 1.16a6; Aquinas, *De ver.* I, 1. In addition to Augustine and Aquinas see also Hilary, *De trinitate* (PL 10:131): *verum est manifestativum et declarativum esse*.

reveals itself, brings the person to see, through language, what beings speak of (*legein*). The encounter between what unveils itself and the person who is called to hear wins over (*evidentia*) the hearer and lets him rest, that is, respond to the totality that gives itself to be embraced. *Aletheia* grounds truth as correspondence (*adequatio, convenientia*) because being's permanent disclosure of itself calls into existence the noetic and affective participation in the revelation of the nature of what is. Truth as *adequatio* is the responding together of being and the person, a response that presupposes the epiphanic nature of truth. Just as being calls the person to listen to itself and the ultimate ground of both, so the person, in responding to this call, calls being to flourish in the unity with the person and their ultimate source.

If we give way to the temptation to read the unfolding of truth in terms of our epistemological capacity to grasp, we would stay in the realm of the understanding of truth that the council wishes to correct, that is, one oblivious to the inseparable unity between unveiling and concealment, and, hence, between truth and time and freedom. Revealing and veiling belong together.²⁵ This paradoxical unity indicates more than the fact that the human eye cannot see a concrete singular in its entirety all at once, or that one cannot hear a whole symphony in one instant. More deeply, the unity of veiling and unveiling indicates that the concrete singular that lets itself be seen remains other, remains a mystery, and calls the person to respond.

Looking at the scriptural understanding of *aletheia* allows us to perceive another crucial dimension of truth, one that is not opposed to the philosophical sense just presented but that grounds it. Truth is that on which one can rely.²⁶ *Aletheia*, translating the Hebrew *emeth*, indicates a reality that is solid, binding. *Emeth* (truth) indicates a reality upon which one can rest, just as a child rests in

²⁵In this respect, Heidegger (e.g., *Principle of Reason*, among many other texts), has seen more deeply than Hegel, for whom *Geist* reveals itself completely. In *Being and Time*, § 44, Heidegger accounts for the relation between these two senses of truth in a compelling way. Yet, as we can see in his *Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Studies in Continental Thought* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005], §30), he still shows a reductive understanding of the thomistic conception of truth.

²⁶Kittel, TDNT, vol. 1, p. 242.

his mother's arms (Ps 131), Moses' outstretched arms rest on Aaron and Hur while he prays for Joshua's victory over the Amalekites (Ex 17:12), and the Hebrew people rests on God's faithfulness to his promise.²⁷ This second sense of truth has, of course, a moral connotation. This indicates two important aspects: first, the very act of truth's revelation cannot be severed from the freedom of the one to whom it unfolds itself. Second, the moral connotation presupposes that the disclosure of the truth promises permanence—not "static identity" but "more of itself"—in the future. While "promise" is indeed a scriptural category, it also belongs to the realm of truth as such. We tend to think that the permanence of truth belongs exclusively to logical necessity. While there is a sense in which this is obviously the case, ontologically speaking we can say that truth "remains" because being unfailingly gives itself overabundantly. To confine truth's permanence to logical necessity—and thus to move it away from the realm of faithful fulfillment of the promise—entails forgetting the revelatory nature of truth that unveils and veils by means of giving itself to be seen. This reduction also betrays a forgetfulness that truth, a transcendental property of being, can never be exhausted, that is, that it will always have more of itself to reveal. In light of this second sense of truth, the unfolding of being is discovered as certain (it gives more) and purposeful. It is not sporadic or random. The promise of "more" unfolds without exhausting the mystery of what is. The evidence proper to truth, in this regard, is not empirical (scientific) or logical evidence, but that of the reliable person of a witness, that is, one who lets the ground be seen through itself. Jesus Christ is the whole truth because he reveals the face of the Father, the permanent source of all that is given to be. He does so in such a way that, through the Holy Spirit, one can rest in his glory, that is, in the divine power that can make those who dwell in God become like him without ceasing to be themselves.

3. Person: gift and language

²⁷Jean Daniélou, *God and Us*, trans. Walter Roberts (London: Mowbray, 1957), 89. This is why for Scripture the preferred image for truth is "rock" and not "light" as it was for the Greeks.

The foregoing suggests that re-vealing is a showing itself that is coincident with a giving of itself. By revealing itself, the concrete singular being gives itself to be known to the one who is called to listen. This giving of oneself is neither a mechanical nor a simply spontaneous activity; it is free. The relation between the free giving of oneself and the showing (*aletheia-emeth*) of oneself can be more easily understood if, rather than looking at the lower level of created beings—e.g., the mineral or the vegetal realm—we turn to the higher: the person. God's creative act in fact aims primordially at the constitution of the human person, that level of being in which the singular is allowed to act of itself.²⁸ The human being is that being called both to recognize the *logos* of being and to possess freely its own origin. It is the person who is spoken to, who is enabled to see and to embrace, and who is asked to respond. The wonderful unveiling-veiling of the concrete sub-human beings is a pale echo of what takes place on the spiritual realm. Where there is revelation there is spirit and freedom.

That the person is a perfection of being, as the laborious christological and trinitarian reflection on the concept of person shows, is not obvious. Two reasons normally lead us to believe that the person is a contingent limitation of being. First, to be a person is to be a concrete historical singular (a self-standingness whose participation in being is shared with other singular beings). Person and totality (catholicity) are, in this view, incompatible. Second, freedom seems to bring indetermination and arbitrariness with itself. Indetermination is indeed incompatible with perfection. Because of these limitations, many have restricted the concept of person to some individuals and most do not use it in reference to God. Singularity and the exercise of freedom, however, need not be interpreted negatively.

²⁸Aquinas, ST I, q. 29, a.1. It is our view that there cannot be a "finite revelation" if there is no God. Revelation is not simply of "finitude" but, precisely through the revelation of the finite itself, of the whole of being (*esse commune*). This commonality of being would not be perceived unless the ultimate ground (*ipsum esse subsistens*) (1) were other from the concrete singular being and (2) did not offer an analogical knowledge of himself through it. The first reduction (transcendence within the subject) is Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the second (existentialist understanding of transcendence) is Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

First, singularity indicates that the person is irreducible and is non-deducible—either from another concrete singular or from itself. It is a common human experience that the person of the other remains impenetrable in his ultimate depth. One does not have access to the mystery of the other person unless he opens up. In this sense, a human person possesses himself to a far greater degree than a stone, a flower, or a horse, which place at our disposal what they are spontaneously but not freely.²⁹ Of course, man's bodiliness also indicates that the human person is always already in the world, is approached by other singular beings and seen prior to his own decision. Yet, differently from sub-human beings, as Daniélou writes, "the property of persons, as Scheler well said, is silence. They can only be known if they reveal themselves."³⁰ The singularity of the person does indicate limitation at the created level, but in a sense of higher participation in being and irreplaceable dignity.³¹

Second, to conceive of freedom as indetermination seeks to preserve the integrity of the self's personal participation in being. Yet this conception of freedom gives too much weight to the anthropological determination of being created from nothing, and it does not take its bearings from the fact that the singular is given to be. To interpret freedom as indetermination is to think of freedom abstractly, that is, detached from being's self-revelation and the very structure of the human person. When one bears in mind freedom's origin, *telos*, and concrete exercise, it is possible to see that freedom regards the capacity to receive and to give oneself, to communicate. Rather than identifying freedom with choice—a move that, again, overlooks the revelatory dimension of being—it is truer to see it as the capacity to welcome what manifests itself,

²⁹This claim does not presuppose that subhuman natural beings can be fully known or that the unveiling-veiling takes place only at the human level. Subhuman beings, too, participate in the inexhaustibility of being (*esse*) and hence always cause wonder. See Aquinas, *De potentia Dei*, 1, 1.

³⁰Daniélou, *God and Us*, 91.

³¹That the human person cannot be fully accounted for conceptually, or that the knowledge of the person lacks precision, is considered diminishing only for a type of knowledge that considers true only what is known universally. Conceiving person and its relation to being in the sense indicated here requires approaching the issue of the nature of thinking and of wisdom. This issue, unfortunately, exceeds the scope and limits of this paper.

which is coincident with the giving of oneself to it. In this giving of oneself when welcoming, one also possesses, in a certain sense, what reveals itself. Here we have the second reversal: what seemed arbitrariness is fundamentally the gift of self, a communication that lets the person be seen as such. To communicate oneself (to let oneself be seen) is to respond to being's revelation by giving of oneself, that is, by speaking. To speak is to participate through language in the revelatory dimension of being. Going back to Daniélou's quote, we could say that "words" (in their multiple sense: somatic, written, spoken, eidetic, or communal word) are the property of the person just as silence is. It is essentially the task of the *logos* (*logoi*) to reveal and indicate (*aletheia*), to let being be seen and heard, just as silence indicates the presence of the person's concrete singularity.³²

If communicability is a letting oneself be seen coincident with the gift (word) of self, to speak (participate in language) is an act of love and has love as its form and content. If access to the other is granted only inasmuch as the other communicates himself, as Daniélou says, love is the measure of knowledge.³³ Of course, at the human level, communication can also be deceitful, geared not to giving but to holding oneself back or to manipulating the other. Love can also be absent.³⁴ Yet all these shortcomings also point in

³²It is important not to miss the relation between *aletheia* and *logoi* that constitutes language. We already alluded to this when we indicated the relationship between word and the event of Jesus Christ. Words, in this view, are not simply tools used to express a meaning that is independent from what reveals itself. In this sense, we can say that the word is the luminous presence that reveals the intelligible form of the singular and that binds the person in being. *Logos*, in fact, regards both the coming to presence and the ground of being. Language, therefore, is a way of being. Whoever has learned to speak another language has discovered that, beyond semantic translations and different syntactic rules, to appropriate a different language fully means to enter into a new way of being, of speaking, revealing, and concealing. Language is the "house of being," not in the sense that the latter is contained in the former but in the sense that, through language, being (God) allows the person to see and to be seen. See, for example, *Being and Time*, 96. This is obviously not the sense intended by Heidegger.

³³Id., *Myth and Mystery*, trans. P. J. Hepburne-Scott (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1968), 100.

³⁴When love is absent we cannot speak about communication or gift, since it is love that distinguishes gift from a mere transaction.

the direction of the essence of communication: the gratuitous gift of self. If the irreducible singularity of the person fills us with wonder, this awe is ever intensified with the actual gift of self through language that discloses while veiling the mystery of the person. Person, therefore, regards the incommunicable mystery of a concrete singular that is coextensive with the communication of oneself, that is, with the disclosure of oneself through language. To be a person thus means to dwell in the relation inaugurated by the permanent fact that persons are first spoken to and called to respond. The unity of communication and the singularity of the person requires us to see that the person exists in constitutive reference to others.³⁵ This is infinitely more so for Christ, truth in person, who pronounces without exhausting the mystery of the Father's bottomless glory.

4. Called to seeing

Attending to the unfolding and the speaking of the singular person entails acknowledging that revelation has, as internal to itself, the capacity to be seen. Since there is no revelation until it is seen, we need to spend a few words indicating how this seeing is internal to the act of revelation itself.³⁶ God grants finite beings the capacity to recognize and to welcome the *logos* that gives itself to be known. There is, in fact, no greater affirmation of the finite other—of the human being—than to grant it the possibility to recognize and to possess freely its own origin. The event of the truth, because it presents itself as a promise by revealing itself as greater than itself, solicits the embrace of reason and freedom in a co-originary fashion. The exercise of language—and by this I mean

³⁵Although at the beginning we used “person” and “man” indistinctly, it now becomes clear that the latter is a theological term that clarifies what is intended by the first. More on this on vol. III of Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

³⁶As Scola explains, this is one of the main weaknesses of Barth's otherwise decisive understanding of revelation. See Angelo Scola, Gilfredo Marengo, and Javier Prades López, *La persona umana. Antropologia teologica*, vol. 15, *Manuali di teologia cattolica* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2000), 40–43.

not simply “speaking” in the literal sense of the term, but the affective and noetic participation in being that we see in events like “prayer,” “work,” and “art”—shows that one cannot see what gives itself to be known until it is embraced.

Philosophically speaking, to acknowledge what is gratuitously unfolded without being exhausted is the task of a reason bound, without being confused, with human freedom. To recognize the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, however, is a matter of faith. Rather than pitting one against the other, it is important to perceive that knowing and believing are internal to the event of revelation, and that between them there is a continuity and a discontinuity. The type of knowledge that the self-manifestation of being grants has, from the beginning, the form of faith, that is, of knowledge through a witness.³⁷ A threefold reason can be offered to justify this claim. First, being gives itself through the eventful manifestation of being (*aletheia-emeth*), which witnesses to the depth that constitutes the concrete singular—that is, to the ultimate ground of being that accounts for the ontological difference of *esse* and *essence*. Second, the character of mediation that marks every historical event requires, too, the participation of finite freedom for all the elements to be grasped. This causes being not to be seen until it is welcomed. The perception of a being as a whole takes place only when, in wonder, one acknowledges its relationship with its constitutive source and lets it be.³⁸ Lastly, since being, in

³⁷Faith in this sense cannot be confused with the theological virtue. See, e.g., Augustine, *De fide rerum quae non videntur* (PL 46).

³⁸In this regard, the unity of freedom and seeing is not sequential. Although we cannot deal with the question regarding the relationship between reason and freedom here, we still like to indicate that the fact that freedom plays such a role in the event of truth neither lessens its noetic integrity nor transforms knowing into believing. Up to the theology of the manuals, the knowledge of faith was not considered to have equal status with that of science because the *quies* obtained in the latter was absent in the former. Faith's knowledge was also deemed different from the type of knowledge we have in doubt or opinion. Doubt is unable to rest in the presence of a being. Opinion rests in the presence of a being but remains uncertain; truth could lie somewhere else. Faith is not an opinion or a doubtful knowledge, but it still seems to be deprived of the epistemological evidence proper of science. Nevertheless, it was claimed that, due to its divine origin, the degree of certainty of faith is greater than that of science. The reason for this peculiar epistemological status of faith is the role of the will. Aquinas put it very

revealing itself, also veils itself, that is, retains its own origin, the origin remains an inexhaustible mystery. The constitutive origin of the gift of the concrete singular remains unknown, although it makes itself visible in and through the concrete singular.

Reason by itself cannot unravel the mystery of finite being: the difference from and relationship with the origin that both grounds the constitutive ontological difference, and that, through the singular, communicates itself to the human being. It can see, but it cannot offer an adequate account of the existence of the singular being before God's totality and of the justification for his social nature. Only the historical event of Jesus Christ grants access to the original meaning of being: the relation between the Father and the Son in the Spirit that can posit what God is not and call it to be part of his triune life. To see this, of course, goes beyond the human capacity to embrace and to see. Yet faith—now considered as a theological virtue—is “beyond” reason in the sense that this seeing fulfills, by means of grace, reason's encounter with the ontological and epistemological structure of being's self-presentation. This is why faith for Christianity is not first of all the assent to certain propositions—which, again, would be giving an undue priority to the first sense of truth (*adequatio*) over the second

clearly: “*assensus hic accipitur pro actu intellectus secundum quod a voluntate determinatur ad unum*” (ST II-II, q. 2, a. 1, ad 3; SCG III, 40; *De ver.*, q. 14, a. 2, ad 10). In this regard, the evidence proper to science would be “stronger” than that of “faith”—although faith is “more certain.” If truth is *aletheia-emeth*, then, rather than speaking about a logical evidence (knowing) and an experiential (faith), it would be better, as Bertuletti suggests, to talk about “symbolic evidence.” This type evidence is able to integrate knowing and freedom because it refers to that way of knowing the truth in which truth presents itself through the ontological difference giving beforehand the meaning that the intellect seeks and calling for freedom's embrace. This entails both that being be perceived in a mediated way and that no person is able to comprehend being exhaustively. Consequently, there is the need (1) to think of a reflective way that manifests the unity of the relationship between the identity and difference with regards to both intellection and volition and (2) to discover that freedom and wisdom are co-originary. In this view, there are three elements that come together: the intuitive symbolic anticipation of the concrete singular, the reflexive conceptual mediation, and the historic-temporal and free decision that is constitutive of the originary structure of the human person who finds himself always already in the world approached by it and open to it. It is this type of symbolic evidence that can help justify the continuity and discontinuity of faith and reason. Cf. G. Angelini et al., *L'evidenza e la fede* (Milan: Glossa, 1988).

(*aletheia*).³⁹ As *Dei Verbum* indicates, faith is the personal encounter with Christ, an encounter that engages all of the human being and makes him become fully a person (*DV*, 5).⁴⁰ The event of Jesus Christ incarnates, therefore, the will of God who wanted “to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (Eph 2:18; 2 Pt 1:4)” (*DV*, 2). Having elucidated the meaning of truth (*aletheia-emeth*) and that of person (singular pro-existence), we can now ponder the theological meaning of Christ’s catholicity. Jesus Christ is catholic because his person reveals that the truth of being (of God and, analogically, of man) is to subsist in a relation of love with the other, a relation in which everything is revealed, given, said, and confirmed overabundantly (*GS*, 24).

5. Divine truth

The cultural context by which the council was surrounded—an atheistic context, as we have explained—frequently reacted to a wrong conception of God, one that did not correspond either to what God had revealed of himself in history or to the very structure of being. Nevertheless, it did pose a question that the council needed to address and which could not simply be silenced with arguments of authority: how is it possible for man to be if God

³⁹Newman, Rousselot, and Balthasar offered major contributions toward overcoming this intellectualistic understanding of faith. See John H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Pierre Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990); Balthasar, *Glory*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*.

⁴⁰“Faith,” clarifies Benedict XVI, “by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God—an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason. But it is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God’s standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly” (Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 28). In this sense, Benedict states at the beginning of the encyclical that “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (1).

is everything? The council looked at this question seriously and witnessed anew to the fact that, in history, God has revealed himself as a Triune God. With this, the council did not reiterate a dogma radically incomprehensible to human inquiry. It humbly indicated that the mystery of the unity and difference between God, who is everything, and man finds its proper luminosity and ground in God's catholicity. In the event of Jesus Christ, God reveals that he is everything as a tri-personal unity. God's unthinkably rich unity gives and communicates all of himself to himself without losing himself in the process. In Christ, the person-truth, we are brought to see that God is a mystery of love (1 Jn 4:8) in which the Father eternally says himself in the Word with whom he is one in the eternal Spirit (Jn 14:9). The other in God is let be and allowed to participate fully in the fullness of being. It is because God's totality is a tri-personal one that man's singularity finds its *raison d'être*. Moreover, as the council says, in Christ, God calls man to be himself by sharing in Christ and through the Spirit in the unity whose permanent source is the Father. The "unity of God's children in truth and charity suggests a certain similarity with the union of the divine persons (*aliquam similitudinem innuit*)" (GS, 24:3).

If, as we mentioned earlier, "catholicity" has to do with the presence of one person in another, then rather than accounting for divine unity as a communion of persons—a task that far exceeds the limits of this essay—it suffices here to elucidate that "truth" in God regards the mystery of the triune relations in which one person is himself in the other. The eternal pro-existence of the divine persons (being for, with, and from the other) is coincident with the perichoretic indwelling of one in the other (Jn 14:28; 10:30; 17:21)—in that ineffable way that respects the personal properties and the *taxis* of the processions. Christ's luminous mystery of being the truth-in-person leads us further into God's personal truth that is an eternal triune indwelling of one person in the other.

It is Christ's relation with the Father and the Holy Spirit that discloses God's communion to be this perichoretic indwelling of one person in the other. Communion is reciprocal indwelling and this reciprocal indwelling (*perichoresis*) is the highest union there

can be.⁴¹ When Christ presents himself as truth, he refers to this perichoretic indwelling (Mt 11:27; Jn 6:56; 10:28ff.; 14:10–11; 15:1–9; 17:21–22; 1 Jn 1:1–4). To consider what this indwelling means, we do not need to establish any boundaries between the unity of the divine *esse* and the three persons who dwell and are themselves in each other. The *perichoresis* of the hypostases indicates that God's eternal love has both a dynamic and a static dimension.⁴² According to the dynamic aspect of love, *perichoresis* indicates the mutual asymmetrical revelation, gift, and com-penetration of the divine persons. The hypostases are themselves in the asymmetrical gift of all of self to the other. According to the more static dimension of love's ecstasy, *perichoresis* indicates the presence of one in the other, or, since God is eternal life, the indwelling of one in the other. God's personal, essential love is the eternal revelation and gift of one to the other and with the other in which one always already rests (is) in the other.⁴³

⁴¹The noun *perichoresis* is taken from the verbs: *peri-choreîn* (to dance around) and *peri-choréo* (to walk around). It was probably first used by the philosopher Anaxagoras in order to express the co-presence and relation of the natural elements operated by the *nous*. Anaxagoras, *The Fragments of Anaxagoras*, 2nd rev. ed., vol. v. 4 (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2005), B59, fr. 12. Synthesizing the works of Hilary of Poitiers and Augustine, John Damascene was the first one to use the term *perichoresis* in a systematic way to explain the union without confusion of the divine and human nature in Christ and the mutual in-existence of the divine persons. This term was thus also helpful for trinitarian theology. See Hilary, *De Trinitate*, III.1–4.22–25. (PL 10:76–78.90–95); Augustine, DT, VI, 10, 12 and IX, 5, 8 (PL 42: 932 and 965); and John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 14 (PG 94: 859–62).

⁴²These two senses are used in the Latin appropriation of the term with two different words: *circuminsessio* (*circum*=around, *insidere*=to seat, to be above, inside) and *circumincessio* (*circum*=around, and *incedere*=to go forward). The former emphasizes the unity of the essence and the latter begins with the persons. Bonaventure uses the latter. See, e.g., *In Sent.*, I, d. 19, q. 4. Aquinas does not use the term *circumincessio/circuminsessio*, but does deal with the topic. See, e.g., ST I, a. 42, a 5.

⁴³The Fathers of the Church avoided both a modalistic account of the Godhead—according to which donation would never be a real one since the hypostases would only be a manifestation of the One and never really other persons—and a tri-theistic explanation—according to which the gift would not be a complete one, that is, of all of the divine *esse*—through the elucidation of God's unity of communion as perichoretic. The Church adopted this explanation at the council of Florence (DS 1330–1331).

Perichoresis therefore indicates the dynamic proper to essential love. It is not something God “does”; it is what God is. In God there can be found no difference between *esse* and essence, so there is no distinction between his acting and his being (which is not the case, obviously, with his action *ad extra*). The “dancing” of one around the other does not express, then, an external, spatial movement of pre-existent dancers. Rather, it indicates the internal, eventful, and spiritual relation in which each one is constituted by the eternal relations of origin—an originating that can be accounted for in terms of revelation—in which the being posited by the Father is coincident with the participation in one’s being given to oneself and with the over-fulfilling reciprocation of the super-abundant original gift.

It is true that there are certain created analogies that could point us in the direction of what this “being-in-another” means. Turning to the spiritual images, which are the most perfect ones, one might be tempted to imagine this reciprocal indwelling of the divine hypostases similar to the presence of the known in the knower, of the beloved in the lover, of friends in each other, or the sacramental union of the spouses. These, however, fall short of the reciprocal indwelling of the divine hypostases spoken of by Jesus Christ.

Perichoretic divine unity is one in which there is perfect communication of all of being (gift)—the three persons are *homoousios*—coincident with perfect personhood. What the spatial preposition “in” indicates is the perfect and absolute love of God (1 Jn 4:8, 16) that is itself in the threefold letting another be in oneself, in whom one is always already let be.

Bringing to light three connotations of the preposition “in” (Jn 17:21) can help us see better the extent to which God’s truth, and hence his catholicity, is a perichoretic communion of three persons. First, he who loves reveals himself and gives himself to the other, wishing that the other might let him be in himself. Second, and simultaneously with the first, he who loves wants to be like the one whom he loves. Third, since divine perichoretic union does not indicate a relation that is yet to happen but rather a communication that is always taking place and that has always already taken place, to be in another also indicates the ineffable fruition of being oneself in the other. Divine perichoretic indwelling unfolds as a relation of

love, an eternal communication of oneself, in which each person enjoys being himself with the other while remaining himself in a third. If, once deprived of their anthropological tonality, the second connotation of *perichoresis* indicates the total unity in God according to which each of the divine persons is God, and the first refers to the divine difference between the three hypostases, the third discloses the fruition that is possible only because the union is always already in a third. This fruition is the union of knowledge, freedom, and love indicated in the previous section. One not only knows and is known by the other, nor does one simply love or be loved by the other. Divine tri-personal communion, God's truth, is a delightful, reciprocal, never-ending knowing and an ever-new sapiential loving and being loved by the other.

6. Christ, the new man

Jesus Christ is catholic, we stated at the beginning, because in his person the truth about God, man, and the world is disclosed. Through the event of Jesus Christ, the person-truth that remains contemporaneous to every man through the Church, the human being can become himself. It is all of man that is brought into God's catholic wholeness, and, sharing in Christ's body, man's being is opened to and brought to embrace all that is. Looking at the council, we can now elucidate what it means to say that, being introduced into God's truth, man becomes himself. We will thus have a glimpse at Vatican II's perception of the circularity of Christology and anthropology.

The first, but not most obvious aspect, of becoming oneself is the discovery of who one is. The council did not answer this question with the classical conception of man. The Church, instead, affirmed very strongly that the human being is fundamentally a religious creature. In many instances Vatican II acknowledges that the various scientific, technological, economic, and sociological accomplishments of modern world are driven by a deeper longing (*apetitio*): men thirst (*sitiunt*) for a full and free life (GS, 9:3). Man, albeit limited in many different ways, still knows no bounds in his desires (*in desideriis suis illimitatum*) and, although he is a finite creature, he feels called to a superior life (GS, 10:1). These desires, for the council, do not seek to obtain "things." They seek true life,

that is, “heaven,” man’s only destiny. For the council, these just desires are not only “inescapably lodged in man’s heart” (GS, 18:1; 21:7); they are the desires of every civilization and all of history (GS, 45:2). The council perceives that more than in previous decades, contemporary man tackles with greater penetration the “fundamental questions” that those desires, provoked by life’s minor or major events, yield: “what is man? What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress?” (GS, 10:1). Man’s accomplishments heighten the questions “about the place and role of man in the universe, about the meaning of its individual and collective strivings, and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity” (GS, 3:1). To the mind of the Church, these desires and questions constitute the human person. They remain the inextricable defining element despite all his sinfulness. Speaking about his desires and questions, Vatican II shows a non-naïve, yet great confidence in the human person. At the same time, the Church is aware that these questions place the human being in an uncomfortable, dramatic existential condition. Man, rich in desires and questions, cannot find a satisfactory response in himself, in his work, or in human life: “every man remains to himself an unsolved puzzle (*quaestio insoluta*), however obscurely he may perceive it” (GS, 21:4). Man is this question.

The Church believes that the crucified and risen Lord is the light that “illuminates the mystery of man” (GS, 10:2). As John Paul II said, Jesus Christ is “the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his ‘heart’” (RH, 8). The council, therefore, does not respond to the atheistic and humanistic cultural context by repeating dogmatic pronouncements. Just as Christ did, the Church walks with every man, believers and non-believers (GS, 22:5), through the path of human life.⁴⁴ She thus points to man’s eternal origin in God (GS, 22:1),

⁴⁴GS, 22’s reference to “men of good will,” as Ratzinger says, signals the Church’s positive approach to the world by refusing to describe those who do not belong to the Church as non-believers. Yet it leaves the door open to the semipelagian belief that men, out of their own good will can obtain salvation. Ratzinger indicates that the conciliar document corrects this reading in GS, 22:5 when it indicates that it is God who, in a mysterious way, associates man to himself (*consocietur*). Man does not take the initiative. Ratzinger, *Commentary on*

and shows that human existence is associated from within with the life of Christ (GS, 22:2), the innocent Lamb who gives himself on the cross (GS, 22:3) so that the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead may also give life to man (GS, 22:4) and teach him to pray and to contemplate his merciful Father (GS, 22:6).

To the council's mind, Christ illumines the mystery of man, his truth, by accompanying him. His historical, eventful company brings forth the consoling mercy of the Father (GS, 22:3) which represents being welcomed into the Logos of all that is. Yet as the council's christocentric account of creation indicates, the company that Christ brings does not begin at the Incarnation. The event of the Incarnation that took place in a precise moment in history was planned from all eternity. Adam, the first man, "was type of him who was meant to come" (GS, 22:1).⁴⁵ The old Adam was born of virgin earth and was given Eve as his spouse after she was taken from his side. When Adam saw Eve, bone of his bones, as Bonaventure said, he foresaw what was to happen. Christ was born from the Virgin Mary so that through perfect obedience he could offer himself on the Cross and let the Church be born immaculate and eternal from his pierced side.⁴⁶ When he came to fulfill God's revelation (DV, 4), however, Christ did not simply carry through God's plan mechanically. He had to redeem man through perfect obedience. His human freedom had to embrace both the Father's wrath and his mercy if man was going to taste anew the unfathomable richness of God's triune love. When at last

Gaudium et Spes, 162.

⁴⁵Vatican II cites Tertullian, *De carnis resurr.*, 6 (PL 2: 282). One could also recall Irenaeus' work here (See Daniélou and Orbe on this).

⁴⁶Bonaventure, *Commentaria in Libros Sententiarum*, l. IV, d. XVIII, art. unicus, q. 2; d. XXVI, a. 2, q. 1 ad 1, 2, et 3. Balthasar clarified that "So we arrive at the final conclusion: it is not only the Logos but Christ who is the mediator of creation. It means nothing less that his: all things could only be created with a view to their being perfected in the Second Adam—something that only truly comes to light in the being and consciousness of the Son as he carries out his mission of bringing everything to perfection. Again, he has not been given the role of Perfecter by any other authority but the Creator; otherwise he could not carry it out from within but would have to stamp his definitive mark from without on things created by someone else" (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison, vol. 3: *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992], 257).

he came, as Irenaeus said, Christ “brought all newness with himself, by bringing himself who had been announced. For this very thing was proclaimed beforehand, that a newness should come to renew and quicken mankind.”⁴⁷ Christ fulfilled the Father’s promise by making all things new (Rev 21:5).

The new Adam enters history as the “perfect man” (GS, 22:2, 38:1, 45:2).⁴⁸ With this expression, Vatican II appropriates the tradition of the Church that painstakingly defended that Christ’s humanity lacks nothing. Christ could not accompany us, show us who we are and who God is, if he were not one like us, both in his being and in his existing. Vatican II, uniting a Christology of the Incarnation with that of the Cross, beautifully points out that God, in Christ, walked man’s path to the end: “He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice, and loved with a human heart” (GS, 22:2).

The council, however, also indicates that, by assuming human nature, every human existence is touched by Christ’s person from within. Christ “has united himself, in some fashion (*quodammodo*), with every man” (GS, 22:2).⁴⁹ The seeming vagueness of the adverb *quodammodo* serves a twofold purpose: it seeks to preserve the distinction between the hypostatic union in the person of the Logos and Christ’s union with every man, while indicating the change that the belonging to Christ effects in man. Christ’s gift of himself for us—which we see in his Incarnation, life, and paschal mystery—reaches us through the Spirit and changes us in baptism.⁵⁰ Additionally, we can say that the distinction between Christ’s hypostatic union and his union with man serves to highlight the personal nature of this relationship. To be a human

⁴⁷Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, IV, 34, 1.

⁴⁸The expression “perfect man” can also be found in Irenaeus, *Demonst.*, 32; id., *Adv. haer.*, III, 22, 3; Tertullian, *Adv. Praxean*, XII, 3–4.

⁴⁹See Cyril of Alexandria, *In Johannis evangelium* (PG 73:161–164); Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, III, 22.

⁵⁰The council’s reference to Gal 2:20 may also be seen as an allusion to baptism. See Karl J. Becker, “L’enseignement sur le baptême au concile Vatican II. Un stimulant pour la théologie,” in *Vatican II. Bilan et perspectives vingt-cinq ans après* (1962–1987), ed. René Latourelle (Paris: Du Cerf, 1988), 53–101.

person means to enter into the relation with Christ who reaches every one through the Church and the sacraments.⁵¹

The council rightly contends that, although “perfect,” Christ’s humanity is not simply like ours. It would not be sufficient for him to accompany us if he were just like us. He needed to be able to accompany us all the way to the Father through the realm of utter solitude that Christians call “hell.” He needed to change us, that is, make us be born to a life that knows no death, if we are to share in the truth of God. Christ’s humanity, unlike ours, has the capacity to make each of us human. Christ’s revelation of man to man, for the mind of the council, means that Christ reveals to man that his being a person—hence his dignity and greatness—consists in being sons in the Son (*GS*, 22:6), that is, in the relation with the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit. Christ, therefore, not only tells man what and who he is, he also enables him to embrace this truth and grow in the restored likeness (*GS*, 22:1). The growth in likeness is an education to receive the Spirit with whom we can exclaim “Abba, Father!” (*Rm* 8:15; *GS*, 22:6).

The council accounts for Christ’s “perfection” in terms of newness. Newness here needs to be taken in its strongest, ontological sense, and not simply in the sense of novelty. Newness means definitive. Christ became man, died on the Cross, was risen, and remains present in the Church to prove to us through his perfect obedience that the Father is true, that is, always faithful (*emeth*). God brings to fulfillment the revelation (*aletheia*) of himself that we see in Christ by making us participate through the Spirit in his glory. For this reason, Vatican II wished to show that the newness that Christ brings is a path through which whoever follows him

⁵¹For the council, the emphasis on the personal relationship between God and man is clearly seen in its understanding of the sacraments. Christ comes to man through the Church, who, in Christ is a type of sacrament of the intimate union with God and the unity of all human genre (*LG*, 1). He comes to us himself. Grace is Christ, the Son of the Father, who, through the Holy Spirit comes to meet and dwell in the believer. An example of this account of grace, lost in the theology of the manuals, can be found in the council’s account of marriage’s sacramental grace. “Christ comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them thereafter By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity” (*GS*, 48:2).

who is “the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man” (GS, 41:1).⁵² Responding to his high call (*vocationem*) in the concrete form God chooses for each one, in Christ every person is made new, more human, that is, a son in the Son, and hence able to participate—to the degree determined by God—in God’s holiness (LG, 39–42). Christ’s catholicity is thus seen in all its (anthropological) depth: Jesus Christ is fully human and efficaciously reveals to man the truth of his existence through his own sacrifice on the Cross and his resurrection.

It is crucial to understand, however, that Christ does not simply “answer” the deep questions that constitute the human being, if by “answering” we mean resolving and closing. Christ addresses the drama of each person and radicalizes it. The following three elements can help us grasp this crucial anthropological perception of Vatican II. First, in the encounter with Christ the human being comes to learn that his desires and questions do not have their ultimate root in himself but in God. His desires and questions—ultimately the question regarding God and the possibility of unending life with him—define him. Yet when one encounters Christ, the questions are discovered to be the way God draws man

to him and begins to establish a relation with him. Paul VI wrote before the council that all those desires and questions—a “synthesis of the spirit” that he called the “religious sense”—are given to man so that “the divine word be not only received passively, but received in such a way that it (=the divine word) effects in the one who receives it an act of life (or, more literally, a ‘warm act of life’).”⁵³ The human being has his origin in Christ, not in himself. His deep questions continuously remind him of this truth.

Second, just as Christ proved God’s truth through his own perfect obedience, the human being is not made new (perfect)

⁵²As Ladaria indicates, Vatican II echoes here Leo’s expression “*humana augs*”: “Adsumpsit formam servi sine sorde peccati, humana augs, divina non minuens, quia exinanitio illa, qua se invisibilis visibilem praebuit . . . , inclinatio fuit miserationis, non defectio potestatis” (DH 293). See Luis Ladaria, *Jesus Christ Salvation of All*, trans. María Cristina Herrera and María Isabel Reyna (Miami: Convivium Press, 2008), 27.

⁵³Giovanni B. Montini and Luigi Giussani, *Sul Senso Religioso* (Milan: BUR, 2009), 55.

automatically. Of course, Christ's salvific deed was accomplished once and for all and was the fruit of God's initiative. Yet the participation of man's freedom, after Christ has risen, is ever more required. With the sending of the Holy Spirit, the one who is to bring mankind to the fullness of truth, the human person is persuaded from within to let himself be seen and to embrace God's love. His actual showing and giving himself, in letting himself be embraced by the Father's mercy, is not preempted. On the contrary, now that Christ has overcome the distance that man's ingratitude introduced between the Triune God of Love and man, God's predilection reaches every man where he thought he could not be found and asks him through the lips of the Church: "What can you give in exchange of your life?" Christ breathed the Spirit from the Cross and sent him with the Father at Pentecost so that everyone could hear this question and so, aware that Christ had embraced every opposition and rejection, all might know that there is no reason against God that can shelter us any longer.⁵⁴ Just as the Hebrew people was brought to see that there is only one God and that the other gods are not, so after Christ's resurrection the human person is placed before this radical challenge: to embrace God's company, permitting himself to be introduced in his friendship (*DV*, 2), or to pursue the mirage of a holiness without God.

Third, Christ's catholicity, his capacity to embrace everything and everyone, is communicated to those who desire and ask to

be perfect as the Father is perfect (Mt 5:48). Entering into the truth that Christ fleshes out for us means to enter into an eternal movement of love in which one is always for the other. The council stated clearly that belonging to Christ entails responsibility for the world's destiny. "He Himself revealed to us that 'God is love' (1 Jn 4:8) and at the same time taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the transformation of the world. To those, therefore, who believe in divine love, He gives the certainty that to open the way of love to men and to toil to establish a universal fraternity is not hopeless" (*GS*, 38:1). The Church's task, says the council, thus is not to resolve man's

⁵⁴John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005).

problems (GS, 10:2) but to witness to the catholic unity that constitutes her and to let Christ's love give form to the different activities (culture, work, scientific research) with which men are constantly engaged. Informed by charity, work will not only acquire a fuller integrity, it will also help men and women to recognize that God is everything and to worship him (GS, 58:5) in the midst of history.

7. Christ is the key, center, and end of all of human history

Remaining with the approach proper to fundamental theology, I would like to conclude by offering a few brief remarks to elucidate the historical dimension of the event of Jesus Christ, truth in person. Christ's historicity, the archetypal intersection of time and eternity, opens up the way to discover the meaning of time and history in their relation with the eternal. Accompanied by the incarnate Logos from history's very center (GS, 10:2), man is thus given to learn anew what it means to exist in history under the light of his beginning and his end (GS, 45).

It is not of secondary importance to be aware that for our contemporary culture, time is almost exclusively read in terms of a history that is no longer a context larger than the individual. History is not that "collective life of man," as George Grant said, that totality in light of which one's own existence and works are seen as an indispensable but small contribution to a larger whole. History has become, as Grant wrote, "the orientation to the future together with the will to mastery. Indeed the relation between mastery and concentration on the future is apparent in our language. The word

'will' is used as an auxiliary for the future tense, and also as the word that expresses our determination to do."⁵⁵ Within this perception of time as history, the "present" counts only inasmuch as it is history in the making; that is, as it is potentiality for a better

⁵⁵George Parkin Grant, "Time as History," in *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (1970–1988), ed. Arthur Davis and Henry Roper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 21.

future.⁵⁶ The past is that which has been overcome, conquered. The present, because it reminds us that we are an unresolved question and that we receive all we are and have, is constantly neglected. The contemporary world, accustomed to constant change, tends to account for time from the point of view of a future that is seen not as a present that is yet to come but a further possibility to unfold. What counts is movement, progress, to press on by making. The primacy of the “will”—that is, future and power—in a technocratic culture makes the human being believe that the future will bring a greater enjoyment of the fruits of self-mastery, either by manipulating his very nature (as biotechnology claims to accomplish in ever-new and always more effective ways) or by creating his own rights and values. This view of time as history is consistent with the idea of eternal progress because for both history and progress there is no longer an objective order of the good into which one enters. The perception of order and good is the one built by the few and embraced by the rest through democratic consensus—which most of the time reveals itself to be the submission of the majority to an anonymous oligarchy. For the spirit of our times, eternity is thus reduced to historical progress that, *per se*, remains insurmountably finite.

Vatican II was well aware of the significance and importance of scientific, technological, and economic progress.⁵⁷ It also knew that history “speeds along on so rapid a course that an individual person can scarcely keep abreast of it. The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own. Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one” (GS, 5:3). At the same time, the council did not have a naïve understanding of progress. It indicates

⁵⁶“We, North Americans,” writes Grant, “whose ancestors crossed the ocean were, because of our religious traditions and because this continent was experienced as pure potentiality (*tabula rasa*), the people most exclusively enfolded in the conception of time as progress and the exaltation of doing that went with it. We were to be the people who, after dominating two European wars, would become the chief leaders in establishing the reign of technique throughout all the planet and perhaps beyond it” (“Time as History,” 24).

⁵⁷See, for example, GS, 6–7, 9, 15, 20, 25, 35, 44, 46, 52–54, 56, 62–64, 84, 86, 90.

that, when governed by an exclusive affirmation of the self, progress yields a “magnified power” through which humanity “threatens to destroy itself” (GS, 37:1). Hence, Vatican II presses “not to conform oneself to the scheme of this world (Rom 12:2)—that is, the spirit of vanity and malice which transforms into an instrument of sin human activity (*humanam navitatem*) intended for the service of God and man” (GS, 37:3). To the mind of the Church, therefore, progress is not to be confused with the growth of Christ’s kingdom, albeit “to the extent that progress can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God” (GS, 39:2). At the same time, by indicating that in the event of Christ the eternal enters into history (DV, 4:1), it also offers a radical critique to the atheistic understanding of existence that thinks of history as progress without a transcendent *telos*. Presenting Christ as the “event” of the truth in person, Vatican II restores the present its value and shows its unity with the eternal.

The birth of Jesus Christ took place in a concrete moment of history. Its beginning was a “present” that very few noticed. Once his mission was fulfilled and the significance of its universal salvation perceived, the author of the letter to the Hebrews described his entrance into the “Holy Place” as an event that took place “once and for all (*hapax*)” (Heb 9:12). The event of Christ, containing the truth of all that is and enabling man to participate in it, changes everything. Nothing has been or will be the same after the Logos took flesh from the Virgin Mary, because, thanks to the salvific event of Christ, nothing can represent a final objection to the fulfillment of God’s will “to invite man to communion with him” (DV, 2). Unlike every other major religious figure, Jesus Christ presents himself as the fulfillment of all of history because in himself he brings the truth of God’s love to man’s present. In so doing he allows every man to be and live in the truth. It is the unrepeatability of this event that frees history from the chain of the eternal return of the same and from an ever-continuing albeit finite progress. If all truth is contained in Christ, historical progression rather than the actualization

of ever-new finite possibilities is a deepening into the truth that embraces all. The uniqueness of the event of Christ brings to light another factor that modern and postmodern culture rejects: it is the present, not the past or the future, that is the divine and human category par excellence. In a sense, the present is the only “place”

where one always already is. To think of oneself from either the past or the future means to want not to be. The Logos is eternally generated in God's ever new present and speaks in history, asking man to respond. Yet, since the one who embraces time at the Incarnation is the eternal Logos, the historical present is revealed to be informed by the eternal. The eternal Son gathers the present into unity and hence gives it its form. The present is thus no longer a transient instant but the faithful communication of the truth of being that asks to be received gratuitously.

Christ represents a new beginning, in the sense of newness indicated earlier, not because he denies what took place before him, the past history, but because his presence in time brings the fulfillment of what was revealed before him. In this regard, the "present" of Christ's event has rightly been described as *kairós*, that is, as the appropriate time destined from all eternity to bring man to his destiny, his *telos*. Because in him all the prophecies are fulfilled, he is recognized as the alpha, the *arché*, that is, the source that informs all that is, the living, personal principle for which everything exists (Rev 22:12:13, GS, 45:3). In this sense, that the unrepeatable (*hapax*) event of Jesus Christ fulfills the past (*kairós*) does not mean that he constitutes time's finishing point (*péras*). Just as Christ's luminous mystery does not represent the "closure" of man's question, so the revelation of God's and man's truth in Christ's person does not stop history. On the contrary, fulfilling time, he also unfolds his person to be history's destiny, the *telos* of all that is. It is in him (*telos*) in whom man can finally enjoy adopted sonship and enter into the house of the Father. "Destiny," to repeat, is not a finish line. It indicates the Love that, accompanying man from within, makes man walk with him toward him who has revealed himself as the Triune God of Love. As Vatican II states: "Enlivened and united in His Spirit, we journey toward the consummation of human history, one which fully accords with the counsel of God's love: 'To reestablish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on the earth' (Eph. 11:10)" (GS, 45:2).

The relation between *arché* (source), *kairós* (propitious moment), and present, definitive event (*hapax*) indicates that time, rather than progress with no transcendent horizon, is a path in which God educates man to receive his Son and to receive the

Spirit. For Christianity there is a progress in the truth of what it means to be. Following Christ one is permanently growing, from one beginning to another beginning. Yet Christianity is not only a part of a larger progress, it is the goal of progress itself.⁵⁸ Christ's presence is the *eschaton* (the future end) that has already taken place—the Holy Spirit will bring mankind to the fullness of truth contained in Christ to which there is nothing left to “add”—but that it also not yet is. The force of evil has been definitively defeated, “cast out but not yet powerless.”⁵⁹ The transfiguration of history still needs to be fulfilled. The Christian, living in time, is called to embrace in the present the love of Christ that reaches everyone through the Church. Following him, the Christian continues to build in charity the Church, his body and bride. In that way, every man is given to see in his time and place that wholeness, that catholic unity, in which everyone and everything is finally allowed to be itself.

The Church at the council renewed the awareness that for the human being to exist in time means to live the present in the memory of the event of Christ's presence, expecting the one who is to come. Moreover, he comes to confirm to everyone the infinite mercy of the Father who abandons no one. The human being finds in Christ that his truth, his being in Christ, is to be a *homo adorans*. Historically speaking, to indwell Christ means to worship in thanksgiving, which is both a participation in the divine liturgy but also letting love give form to human work. For Vatican II, adoration does not take man away from history and the cosmos. On the contrary, it brings him deep into the midst of it. It is by participating in the divine liturgy and by letting Christ's love give form to the work of his hands that the exclamation “Come, Lord Jesus” guides history to the home in which everything and everyone will find its

⁵⁸World history, with all its many different cultures and religions, does not coincide with salvation history. Christianity has expressed itself through different cultures (Semitic, Greek, Roman, German) without identifying itself with any of them. Yet it is also true that the history of civilizations is open to and seeks its truth in the history of salvation.

⁵⁹Jean Daniélou, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History*, trans. Nigel Abercrombie (Chicago: Longmans/H. Regnery, 1958), 196. Much of our reflection here on history and truth is indebted to Daniélou's profound work.

ever-renewing truth (GS, 22:6). At the end (*telos, eschaton*) of history, it will become clear to everyone what those who have been given the gift of faith begin to see now as in a dawn: everything is held together in Christ to enjoy both eternal existence and the love of the Father (GS, 45), God's glory and the catholicity of the heavenly Church consummated.

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