

said concerning the typological value of homosexuality cannot be taken as a judgment on individual persons, who may suffer because of an unchosen disposition and may act out of weakness. We are dealing instead with a general spiritual physiognomy that informs a consciously chosen lifestyle, though its influence often reaches well beyond what individual persons are actually aware of, a "spirit" which we must resist and which manifests itself in many and varied ways.

The obligatory struggle against certain unjust discriminatory practices in society, solidarity with persons with homosexual tendencies, and the pastoral effort to aid them to live chastity must not lead us to neglect the cultural, indeed, spiritual dimensions of the struggle for the truth and the authenticity of love. It would be a profound distortion if the homosexual option were elevated to the same level as the choice of a man and a woman to contract a marriage and to form a family in which to raise children, or if such a lifestyle were woven into the cultural and legislative fabric of society. As the CDF clarified in 1992: "Sexual tendency is not a quality comparable to race, ethnic origin, etc., with respect to non-discrimination. Unlike these, homosexuality is an objective disorder and calls for moral concern."<sup>27</sup>

"This is a great mystery! I say it in reference to Christ and the Church" (Eph 4:32). The mystery of Christian marriage fulfills human sexuality as a gift of self that is open to life. It is great insofar as it finds its place in the order of the wise plan of God, who in Christ loves the Church. The issues relating to the difference between the sexes are therefore not trivial ones, but indicate epochal shifts in culture and the spiritual history of humankind. The act of recognizing and reestablishing the order willed by God's wise plan is thus the basis of the path of truth and freedom, a path that begins with the humble recognition that we are creatures before the Creator.—*Translated by Adrian Walker.* □

<sup>27</sup> CDF, *Recentemente*, which offers "some considerations concerning the response to laws regarding the non-discrimination of homosexual persons," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 July 1992, p. 4, 10.

## Ascension, Parousia, and the Sacred Heart: Structural Correlations

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To see the Sacred Heart as a counterpart of the ascended Lord suggests that the humanity of Jesus is not an evanescent memory, but a trans-temporal historical reality.

### 1. The Historical Parousia

#### 1.1. *The Son-of-Man*

There is a special solidarity that bonds together people of the same generation, whether they personally know each other or not. To Christians of his generation, the humanity of Jesus was dramatically "contemporary" in a dual sense. They knew him as a man who had lived and died. But they also knew him risen, physically present, and still their contemporary in some more real sense than through the power of memory. He still shared their

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space and time, even if no longer corporeally accessible to their daily experience.

The first recorded visualization of this physical presence of the risen Jesus—the first, that is, after the Ascension—is found in the account of Stephen's trial. Brought in front of the Sanhedrin to explain what were perceived to be his exaggerated claims about Jesus, Stephen embarks on a long *apologia pro fide sua* which, artfully,<sup>1</sup> says very little about Jesus and is instead centered especially on Abraham and on the evolution of Jewish faith, turning his defense into an *apologia pro fide Israel* (Acts 6:8–7:53). At this point, the members of the Sanhedrin are enraged (7:54) because what has been said is more of an embarrassment to them than a reason for condemning Stephen. But then an unexpected turn of events takes place, in total contrast with the reasoned discourse that had characterized the confrontation until then. Stephen sees the risen humanity of Jesus. This is stated twice in the text, to emphasize the suddenness of the change. First the narrative states that Stephen saw "God's Glory and Jesus standing at the right sides of God" (7:55), then Stephen is reported as saying: "Behold, I see the heavens open and the son-of-man standing at the right sides of God" (7:56). God's Glory as the opened heavens, Jesus as the son-of-man, the ineffable and the fully "effable" are joined in one and the same vision.

The boldness of the Christian claim, which coincides with the horror of a Jewish blasphemy, is that the risen humanity of Jesus is still human. Stephen does not aim for a wash-out of the claim—such as saying that God had validated the "message" of Jesus, causing the person of Jesus to recede in the background in favor of his spiritual or social doctrine. This reasonable approach would have saved him, and would also possibly have convinced more Jews to accept what was after all a captivating restatement of Jewish doctrine. No: what haunts Stephen with joy, and the members of the Sanhedrin with horror, is the risen humanity of a very concrete Jesus. Jesus, their immediate contemporary, is still perceived as sharing, physically, in the unimaginable glory of the Ineffable. A claim, a blasphemy.

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note how often Christian martyrs are shown as going to great lengths to avoid a confrontation short of compromising on principles—from Jesus himself to such consummate diplomats as Thomas Becket and Thomas More.

It was Jesus himself who had chosen this image. In a confrontation of which that of Stephen contains so many echoes,<sup>2</sup> Jesus himself had proposed this image as the one applicable to his risen humanity. Facing an enraged, but legally deadlocked, Sanhedrin, Jesus gave them the reason to condemn him by claiming that they would as of now see "the son-of-man seated at the right sides of the power" (*ek dextiōn tēs dunameōs*, Mt 26:64). The same claim, the same blasphemy, the same sentence. The origin of the image is in Psalm 110:1, where Yahweh says "to the Lord: Sit at my right side!" Applied to Jesus, the claim could not be more explicit, or more "blasphemous."

It is difficult for us to respond emotionally to the expression "son-of-man" as Jesus' Jewish contemporaries did. What was the evocative value of Hebrew *bēn ʾādām*, or Aramaic *bar ʿenāsh*, to Jesus' contemporaries? There was an important Messianic connotation, rooted in the well known passages of Ezekiel and Daniel. But there was an even more fundamental linguistic value, which I have rendered by using dashes: "son-of-man." The expression does not refer to a specific filial relationship, nor does it refer to a specific man; rather, it stands as a whole for the adjective derived from the noun "man," an adjective which could not otherwise be expressed in Hebrew. In other words, "son-of-man" stands for "human" or "the human one." By extension, it can also stand for "mortal," for which, too, there is otherwise no direct adjective in Hebrew.<sup>3</sup>

We may try to absorb in this light the impact on the early Christians of the event which concluded the two trials. Jesus chooses to refer to himself as specifically human and mortal at the very moment that he projects himself beyond death, resurrected. And Stephen is struck with a vision of Jesus' risen humanity, i.e.,

<sup>2</sup> Some would understand these echoes as an indication of a mere literary fabrication. But in my view the coherence of so many webs and ramifications in the tradition goes immeasurably beyond any one author's fantasy. A major difference between Stephen's and Jesus' trial (besides of course the nature of the sentence and the speed with which it was carried out in the case of Stephen) is the rhetorical polish of Stephen's defense.

<sup>3</sup> The expression *ben mauet* "son-of-death" or *ʿish mauet* "man-of-death" refers to an individual who is (specifically) marked for death, not to a (generally) potential "mortal." I will not give here references to the immense literature on the title "Son of Man"; I have in preparation an article on the linguistic aspects on the idiom, based on comparative data from Akkadian and other Semitic languages, where I argue for the adjectival translation rendered here with the use of dashes as "son-of-man."

a mortal Jesus who shares in God's glory. The claim was that Jesus did not vanish upon death; that he had not been brought back to his previous earthly life; that he had not survived only historically, through his message as interpreted by his followers. Rather, the claim was that his very specific humanity, sealed by death, and then risen from it, was in some way on a par with the transcendence of the Ineffable. The personal continuity of Jesus was never in doubt. It was this contrast, this paradox, this scandal, that confronted the Sanhedrin: their contemporary Jesus, a mortal like them, was in his human specificity "at the right sides of God," i.e., physically linked with the One who is above all physical limitation. The resurrection of Jesus was not only claimed as a historical event which had brought a given dead man back to life; it was also claimed as a new state of reality, linking human physicality with divine absoluteness in the realm of the beyond. And it is of this awareness of the personal continuity of Jesus that the Christian reflection on the Trinity will be nourished.

### 1.2. The Parousia

Is it any wonder that the early Christians were so electrified by the notion that their temporal contemporary Jesus was at the same time their risen contemporary in heaven? It is difficult to distinguish Stephen's contemplation of the risen humanity of Jesus, from his expectation of a new encounter. Jesus, the son-of-man, will come again (in a future projected within our temporal frame) because the very same Jesus is with us now (now, and yet beyond now or any other temporal frame). There are two interesting linguistic observations which may help us understand the perceptual response of the early Christians.

The Greek term *parousia* is generally understood in the sense of the "second coming" of Jesus. But another major connotation of the term is "presence" and manifestation of that presence; the semantic thrust of the word is as much on the state or condition (the presence) as it is on the event (the coming). Certainly, Jesus' "presence" is so overwhelming that it is at the same time a "coming," almost an invasion. Stephen's vision of the son-of-man echoes this theme with a term which, though slightly different, is pregnant with the same meaning: he sees Jesus, the son-of-man, *hestōta* at the right sides of god (Acts 7:55f). The participle *hestōs* comes from a verb (*histēmi*) which means both "to

stand in position" and "to stand in front of, to come forth."<sup>4</sup> Stephen's vision is, in other words, a form of *parousia*, the "coming presence," a presence which corresponds physically to the risen Jesus, and which continuously invades our space and time.

Another important passage which may help explain to us the impact of the concept on early Christian perception is found in the episode of the resurrection of Lazarus. As Jesus arrives, Martha hastens to meet him, then calls Mary, who had remained behind, and tells her: "The teacher is here and calls you"—*magister adest et vocat te*, in the lapidary version of the Vulgate (Jn 11:28). The Greek word translated with "is here" is a verbal form (*parestin*) which derives from the same root as *parousia*, and means both "arrival" and "presence," so that we hear Martha say in effect: Jesus "has arrived" and "is here." This historical encounter, too, is a form of *parousia*, like the trans-historical encounter of Stephen.

Interestingly, the modern, standard Aramaic version, which is presumably close to the original Aramaic as spoken during the encounter, renders "the teacher is here" with *rabbān ʔethā*.<sup>5</sup> This formulation is practically identical to what became a frozen formula, taken over into Greek without translation, namely *maran atha* (1 Cor 16:22). It is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic sentence *māran ʔethā* "the lord has come,"<sup>6</sup> which could be interpreted alternatively as *māranā thā* "come, our lord." I like to think of the composite writing *maranatha* as an intended ambiguity, expressing both the achieved *parousia* in the present ("the lord has come and is here") and the expected *parousia* in the future ("come again!"). If so, the inclusion of the frozen formula would convey an intentional (linguistic) merging of dynamic and static dimensions, apt to reflect the perceived merging of dynamic and static dimensions in the *parousia*.<sup>7</sup> The linguistic correlations may be summed up diagrammatically as follows: *parousia* ~ *parestin* ~ *rabbān ʔethā* ~ *māran ʔethā*.

<sup>4</sup> Note the lexical correlation between *anastasis/anestē* ("resurrection/he is risen") and *estōs* ("standing"): in this perspective, the Resurrection is the "coming into a standing position (at the side of the Father)."

<sup>5</sup> I quote from *The New Covenant Commonly Called the New Testament*, Peshitta Aramaic Text (Jerusalem: The Bible Society, 1986), 137.

<sup>6</sup> Note the close similarity to Martha's *rabbān ʔethā* just quoted.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the Aramaic word for *parousia* is the noun formation *methitla* which derives from the same root *ʔethā* as in *māran ʔethā*.

In a substantive sense, the ambiguity or tension between static and dynamic dimensions goes back to the experience of the Transfiguration. This episode is, in effect, an anticipation of the Ascension and therefore of the parousia. Just as in the Ascension, here, too, the person of Jesus is present both within time and beyond time, with a body and beyond a body. Let us imagine what the perceptual impact would have been on Peter, John, and James during the formative period of the Gospels, as they recollected both the Transfiguration and the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension. Was not the parousia for them a constantly coming presence, the profound assurance that the humanity of Jesus was still within reach, even if somehow meta-corporeally? The transfigured Jesus was not just an anecdote they happened to remember, it was rather a reality that pervaded their daily perception of the world—as Peter, for instance, stresses in addressing the Sanhedrin: it is very specifically in “Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:10) that there is salvation. The risen Crucified! In this sense, the parousia was the continuing presence of the human Jesus, a presence that was so uniquely physical to his contemporaries.

It is significant to note that this was an important Trinitarian locus, in the sense that the acknowledgment of the unique personal continuity between the physical Jesus on earth and the ascended Jesus would have developed the perceptual apprehension of Trinitarian reality. Neither Jesus nor the apostles used the abstract term “Trinity” or any equivalent. Rather, the apostles, the first Christians, confronted dynamically the reality of the divine persons in their interaction. Their contemporary Jesus, the human-mortal (son-of-man) who was now present and coming in divine glory (the parousia), was “sitting at the right sides of the Power”: this was their insight into the Trinity. Our insight can be dimmed by the very clarity of the rational articulations that have been provided, including the use of a specific term which may, unwittingly, trivialize the mystery. Correct as this procedure and terminology undoubtedly are, it is nevertheless helpful for us to regain, where lost, the sense of freshness which Jesus’ contemporaries had as they were facing, historically, the revelation of Trinitarian life without having, yet, such a term for it. The risen and ascended humanity of Jesus is the essential point of reference in this revelation.

In this respect, the Emmaus episode is emblematic. A remarkable aspect is that Jesus is presented as seeking human companionship. His is not the overwhelming presence as that of

the angel at the Resurrection scene, a presence which rumbles like an earthquake, dazzles with an overpowering light, frightens into a death-like stupor (Mt 28:2–3 | Mk 16:5 | Lk 3–5). By contrast, Jesus on the way to Emmaus is so human that he is not recognized as different when he approaches the two and keeps walking alongside them on a country road (Lk 24:14; similarly with Mary after the Resurrection, who takes the risen Jesus to be the gardener, Jn 20:9). Through his presence he elicits a desire, the desire for further company. A reason why that is so, is that he feels the same desire to spend time with them. Yet, when he “became invisible” (Lk 24:31), at the very moment that he was recognized, he did not induce any sense of loss.<sup>8</sup> The risen presence, the parousia, once experienced, was to remain. The invitation *meion meth’hēmōn* “Remain with us” (Lk 24:29) is conceptually equivalent to the *paresti* of Martha and the *maranatha* of the early Christian formula. Jesus remained with them not so much because he dwelt at the table until the breaking of the bread, but because his risen presence was to prove greater than the intervening element of invisibility. And in another respect, too, the Emmaus episode is emblematic. Just as the appearance to the apostle Thomas stressed the physical continuity of the risen Jesus, so the encounter with Cleopas and his friend on the way to Emmaus stressed the cultural continuity of his behavior. Jesus listens, argues, sits down to share a meal. Ever the son-of-man, the human-mortal! And that, at the very moment that he elicits an understanding for his newly acquired glory: “was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer and (thus) proceed to his glory?” (*eiselthein eis tēn doxan autou*, Lk 24:26). The human, walking alongside humans on a country road, is at the same time the risen one who is glorified. The doctrine of the parousia presents us with the incredible tension that results from the Incarnation claiming, and proclaiming, the Trinity.

### 1.3. The Ascension as Event

The specific locus where this claim is laid down is the Ascension. With varying degrees of explicitness, there is today a general trend to de-emphasize the nature of the event, or even to

<sup>8</sup> The theme of absence/presence is developed with great depth in the article by J.-L. Marion, “Le don glorieux d’une présence,” *Communio: Revue catholique internationale* 8 (1983): 35–51.

deny its factuality. Even in the past, it has never been a particularly fruitful topos for theological analysis or spiritual reflection.<sup>9</sup> In common as well as in theological parlance, there is no such idiom as "the ascended Christ," whereas one speaks readily of "the risen Christ." We shall look briefly below at this history of the doctrine and of the spiritual sensitivity for it. Here, I would like to propose a few exegetical and theological considerations which argue in favor of a more explicit acceptance of the Ascension as an event. Briefly, the relevant data are as follows.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The major work on the subject is J. G. Davies, *He Ascended into Heaven: A Study in the History of Doctrine* (New York: Association Press, 1958). It presents a thoughtful and well documented review of patristic sources, from what may be called a moderate theological perspective, which accepts the Ascension as a distinct event from the Resurrection, but not according to Luke's narration in *Acts*. It is a curious turn of phrase to characterize as a "principal defect" of the patristic tradition "the dominating influence of the Lucan account" (p. 146), or to say that "acceptance of (the Lucan record) has bedeviled much of the history of the doctrine" (p. 168; emphasis mine). Davies goes from expressing a "reverent agnosticism" concerning Luke's account (p. 58) to the more explicit conclusion: "we reject (Luke's) account as historically unreliable" (p. 168). A more positive, yet critically balanced position is presented in the important series of contributions in the issue of the French *Communio* entitled "'Il est monté aux cieux'" *Communio: Revue catholique internationale* vol 8, no. 3 (1983). From an exegetical point of view the major work is by G. Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu: Untersuchungen zu den Himmelfahrts- und Erhöhungstexten bei Lukas* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> But for a major exception, I follow closely an older article which I consider very balanced and convincing: P. Benoit, "L'Ascension," *Revue Biblique* 56 (1949) 161–203 (see also by the same author, the article "Ascension" in X. Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* [Boston: St. Paul Books, 1988], 33–36). He stresses the distinction between the Ascension as related in *Acts* and any kind of "apotheosis" as would have been known from the pagan world (see especially pp. 194–98). Benoit identifies the essence of the Exaltation with the Resurrection, even though the two events are staggered in time by a "slight delay" (pp. 186, 106). It is in the assessment of this "delay" that I differ from Benoit. He seems almost embarrassed at having to admit to such a fact, as the very term "delay" implies; and he basically reasons as if the delay did not in fact exist, as if Resurrection and glorification were simultaneous. In practice, he considers the time gap between Resurrection and Ascension not as a factual event, but as a pedagogical ruse, "otherwise it is hard to see where He was during the interval of these manifestations" (p. 34b of the second article; thus already on p. 197 of the first one). Now, apart from the consideration that it is not "easy" to see "where" he is even after the interval, it is the reality of an interval as such that matters, as I will try to show. In a similar vein see also

The concept of "Ascension" may be taken to mean two distinct events. The first is a departure-Ascension, and is rendered with a variety of terms: "he was taken up" (*anēlēphthē* Mk 16:19;<sup>11</sup> *anēlēphtheis* Acts 1:11), "he took distance" (*diestē*<sup>12</sup>) and "he was brought up" (*anēphēreto* Lk 24:51), "he was lifted up" (*epērhē* Acts 1:9). These "ascensions," then, are moments of departure similar to what is said at the end of the Emmaus episode: "he became invisible" (*aphantos egeneto* Lk 24:31). We may refer to this type of departure-Ascension as *anēlēpsis*.

The second is a glorification-Ascension, i.e., the process or the event through which Jesus came to "sit at the right sides of God." This event is never described as such,<sup>13</sup> not even on the occasion of what we normally regard as the Ascension, namely in the events described in Acts 1:1–11. The first time the "session" is recorded as having been observed at all is with the vision of Stephen—a consideration which adds even more weight to what I have said earlier about the great significance of this episode. What is important for the argument that I will develop here is my view that unquestionably, if inferentially, such an event must have occurred precisely as a specific event, even in face of the absence of a recorded observation of it.

An important issue is whether one is to assume a time lapse between the Resurrection and such an event, the glorification-Ascension. At least in one case (the encounter with Mary in the garden, Jn 20:17), there is a presumption that the

J. Lambrecht, "L'enlèvement au ciel," *Communio: Revue catholique internationale* 8 (1983): 14–17; M. Gitton, "Théologie des quarante jours," *Communio: Revue catholique internationale* 8 (1983): 20–26.

<sup>11</sup> This portion of the canonical Gospel is omitted in several early manuscripts, and is generally regarded as an addition to the original text of this particular Gospel.

<sup>12</sup> For a very interesting discussion of the term *diestē* see Marion, "Le don glorieux," 43, 38–41. Etymologically, this word is a converse correlate of *anestē/estōs*, see above, n.4.

<sup>13</sup> A suggestion in this sense might be seen in the second ending of Mark, where it is said that after speaking to the apostles, Jesus "was taken up" (*anēlēphthē*) into heaven, and sat down at the right sides of God" (Mk 16:19). But even without considering the doubts about the Marcan authenticity of this passage, the description is so summarily given, that it does not necessarily imply a vision on the part of the apostles of the moment when the Exaltation actually took place. In this respect, one enjoys reading the words by Benoit ("L'Ascension," 202f.) about the "discretion" of Scripture.

risen Jesus has not yet ascended (*anabainō*) to a position of glory (*pros ton patera*). If we are to assume that Jesus refers here to his *upcoming* glorification-Ascension, then we would have here both a reference to such time lapse, and a term (*anabasis*) used explicitly to refer to the event itself. It is also possible, however, that *anabasis* might simply be meant to refer to a final *analēmpsis*, such as described at the beginning of Acts. In this article, I will assume that *anabasis* refers to the glorification-Ascension, and that a time lapse is implied between Resurrection and such an *anabasis*, even though in and of itself this presupposition is not essential to the thrust of the argument I will develop. One important reason for my assumption is as follows. Just as significant as the *factuality* of the glorification-Ascension *qua* event, is the *sequentiality* of the two events, Resurrection and glorification-Ascension. Such sequentiality is central to the meaning of every statement where the two occur side by side. The point I am making, then, is that temporal sequencing is more important than the measure of the actual interval. The time factoring built into the Incarnation does not evanesce: Resurrection does not mean post-Incarnation. From this point of view it is a moot point whether or not the forty days interval (Acts 1:3) defines the time lapse we have been considering. In point of fact, it does not—first because it describes a stage rather than a count,<sup>14</sup> and second because the Ascension that follows is the final departure-Ascension, not the glorification-Ascension. But, again, it matters little whether the time lapse measures in days, hours, or seconds. The very fact of a temporal interval as such is more significant than its chronological definition. It is not so much a “delay,” as if an unexpected or undesirable postponement, but rather one more articulation or juncture in the interaction between the temporal and the eternal, as it began with creation and became supremely manifest with the Incarnation.

We may now consider some details. The physicality of the Ascension is stressed in Acts 1:9–11, where it is said that, while Jesus is speaking, he is lifted to heaven and disappears in a cloud; the apostles look up straining their eyes, as if blinded by the brightness of the cloud. They had started to become used to the new corporeal status of the risen Jesus, and it was not clear to them that this new event was going to remain unique. Their stares signified the wonder of the situation, and the expectation that it might be repeated in the course of time. Hence the angels’

message. They, too, are described in very physical terms: they are two individuals, not a generic group, and they are not called angels, but men dressed in white, standing (on the ground) next to the apostles. The message conveyed to the apostles (the “men of Galilee”) is that they should not stare in the sky, because Jesus will come back in the same way. This seems to signal a new sense of finality: what the apostles have witnessed is a special type of departure-Ascension, one which presupposes the glorification-Ascension, because the return will not be on a human, but on an eschatological dimension. One might or might not accept the report as factual, but it seems futile to argue that the intent of Luke was not to report the factuality of this last departure-Ascension as a witnessed event. It is intended to be as much of a factual account as the one relating the events of Pentecost, which are also found exclusively, and only once, in Luke.

The statements of Jesus to Mary: “I have not yet ascended (*oupō gar anabebēka*) to the Father” and “I am ascending (*anabainō*) to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (Jn 20:17), may refer to an event which still has to happen after the Resurrection. And by comparing this statement to the injunction to Thomas to touch Jesus’ wounds (Jn 20:27), it has been argued<sup>15</sup> that the Ascension had taken place in between the two episodes. But one can propose a quite different exegetical understanding. The Transfiguration has been considered as an anticipation of the Ascension.<sup>16</sup> Now, if we accept the Transfiguration as an actual event, and not as a literary topos, then we may view it as a moment when the sensitivity of the apostles is trained for the same kind of response that will be elicited after the Resurrection. Peter’s “offer” to build three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elija (Mt 17:4) is the equivalent of Mary’s reaching out for Jesus: they both want to cling to Jesus, and, though articulated differently, the response is the same for both—*Noli me tangere*, “do not hold on to me.”<sup>17</sup> The transfigured, as well as the risen, Jesus is to retain a freedom that is properly celebrated in the Ascension. It is not as if Jesus told Mary to wait until *after* he has ascended, as if *then* she could hold on to him. Rather, Mary is asked to display the same

<sup>15</sup> Davies, *He Ascended into Heaven*, 50 f.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, 39–42.

<sup>17</sup> The link between Peter’s “offer” and the *Noli me tangere* does not seem to have been pointed out in the literature. See the extensive commentary by R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii–xxi)* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 1008–17.

<sup>14</sup> See Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt*, 176, with earlier literature.

detachment that will be inevitable after the Ascension, when Jesus will be removed altogether from any normal social intercourse. Thomas, on the other hand, is not invited to hold on to Jesus, but to verify the factuality of his corporeality, which Mary was far from questioning in the first place.

The freedom that is celebrated in the Ascension is underscored by another element that is present in the Transfiguration. In the episode on the mountain, Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about "his departure, which he was going to bring about in Jerusalem" (Lk 9:31). There is, in other words, an articulate discourse which the three apostles witness, and which pertains to their training, as it were. The bright cloud that overshadows them and brings to an end the whole episode is the proper anticipation of the Ascension: it puts an end to any theologically articulate discourse in which Jesus has a direct input. The apostles are being trained to remain, indeed, "orphans"—for so they are, unquestionably, with respect to Jesus after the Ascension, and his claim to the contrary (Jn 16:7) only means that they will not be so with respect to somebody else, the Spirit. In other words, the Transfiguration trains the apostles for what will happen after the Resurrection: a temporally limited exposure to an articulate interaction with the risen Jesus. Such temporal limit has to be understood as a specific span of time.<sup>18</sup> We need not attribute chronometric precision to the forty day count, but I would certainly attribute a perceptual validity to the memory of a set span of time: Jesus terminated any articulate and somewhat predictable social intercourse with his apostles a few days before the event of Pentecost took place. Such termination must have struck quite explicitly the consciousness of the apostles: and it makes more sense to accept, in Luke's report, the evidence of the memory of an event that gave them a full realization of the finality of a last departure-Ascension. Were we to imagine instead an imperceptible receding of Jesus' presence into the background, we would have a greater difficulty: why did the apostles accept without regrets the absence of Jesus who had claimed to still be present? Why did they not search him out to resolve their doctrinal queries and disputes as they began to arise? They did, after all, ask him such questions until the very moment before the Ascension (Acts 1:6). That there is no more

<sup>18</sup> Even though within a different context, the emphasis on the "authentic temporality of the hour" is applicable here (H. U. von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 94).

questioning, and no more uncertainty, after the Ascension, can certainly be best explained by assuming the very kind of explicit event that is portrayed in Luke's narration.

The same conclusion can be reached by an analysis of the early historiographic reflection that is embodied in the record of the first apostolic preaching. In Peter's words as reported in Acts 1:21–22 the replacement for Judas is to be found among "the men who consorted with us for the entire period during which the lord Jesus came to us and went away from us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which he was lifted up away from us (*anelēmphthē aph'hēmōn*)."<sup>19</sup> And what is presumably an early Christian hymn related by Paul in 1 Tim 3:16 describes the "core of worship" (*to tēs eusebeias mustērion*) as a sequence which begins when Christ "was shown in the flesh" and ends when he "was taken up in glory (*anelēmphthē en doxē*)"—two single events which frame four other lasting or repetitive events: justification in the spirit, epiphany to the angels, announcement to the people, belief in the cosmos. Both contexts stress the specificity of the event, since it is described in Peter's words as occurring on a particular day and correlated to the Baptism of John—another very specific event—and analogously presented in the hymn related by Paul as a terminal point correlated to the specificity of the Incarnation.

It is also, finally, a simple fact that the appearances of Jesus between Resurrection and Ascension are perceived as different from those following the Ascension. There is a regularity of occurrence, as shown by the sequences of connected appearances (to the women and the men on their way to Emmaus, who tell the apostles who then see Jesus in turn; to the apostles without Thomas and then with him). Similarly, there is a dependence on the part of the apostles who do not take any initiative and

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that this statement corresponds exactly to the frame of the Gospel of Mark, which begins precisely with the preaching of the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus, and ends with the Ascension. It appears that the preaching of Peter in Acts reflects an early *prise de conscience* on the part of the apostles as they were reflecting on what had happened in barely more than two years of their personal acquaintance with Jesus, and that the same *prise de conscience*, or crystallization of awareness, eventually found its earliest scribal embodiment in Mark's Gospel (if we accept its scribal priority). A scribal perspective on the process of Gospel formation is an area where the study of ancient Syro-Mesopotamian culture may contribute something new.



are waiting for the Lord to appear—an attitude of which the angels disabuse them precisely at the moment of the Ascension.

#### 1.4. *The Cultural Impact of the Ascension*

An important theological element in the doctrine of the Ascension lies in the termination of the Jewish epiphany of the risen Jesus. The structure of culture and the full consequentiality of the Incarnation are such that the son of Mary (biologically) and the son of Joseph/son of David (culturally) remains himself beyond the grave, even in his risen status. The Pantocrator is still Jesus, the son of Mary, the son of the carpenter. His respect for individual human freedom is respect for human freedom in culture. Hence the risen Jew's ascension allows universal human culture to unfold through its inner dynamism. He is gone, ascended, yet he is with us, risen. We do not have the bond of his contemporaries, yet we have the bond of humans. The son-of-man, the son-of-culture is, yes, with us still. The Christian urge is to find him, still very much the son of Mary, the son of Joseph, because his personal identity is inextricably identified with his biological and cultural heritage. But not suffocated by it. It is precisely in affirming a friend's distinctiveness that we find the bond that links us beyond distinction. We seek as Christians the person Jesus. The *risen and ascended* son of Mary, son of Joseph who is the incarnate son of the Father.

Let us go back for a moment to an exegetical consideration. The last exchange between Jesus and his apostles, as recorded in Acts 1:6, shows the apostles posing to Jesus a question of doctrine; more specifically, a question pertaining directly to Jewish sensitivity: "Will you now restore the kingdom to Israel?" Note the contrast with the attitude after the Ascension: there will then be no waiting for Jesus to resolve questions of doctrine, not even an expectation that such an intervention might be possible. The first such question that arises is again one of Jewish sensitivity, namely that pertaining to the admission of the gentiles to Christianity (Acts 9:31–11:18). Had Jesus been available for consultation, as was the case before the Ascension, what would the decisional process have been? Could Peter and the apostles have bypassed, much less ignored, an explicit "opinion" of Jesus? It may seem crude to raise the issue in these terms, but the fact of the matter is that such was precisely the attitude of the apostles before the Ascension. Of course, their newly found independence of judgment is to be attributed to the presence of the Spirit

following Pentecost. But that is precisely the issue at stake. Before the Ascension, Jesus did still coach the apostles. It was, we might say, certainly his choice as to whether he wanted or not to continue his explicit supervision—and how truly effective and "infallible" that would have been!<sup>20</sup> Why opt for a vicar (Peter and his successors) if Jesus himself was no longer in a state of death, but was rather available himself to lead his Church? Why not stretch the forty days to forty centuries, forty millennia, till the end of the world?

The "obedience," the self-effacing attitude of the Crucified remains with the Risen One still. Of another, we might say that he had, precisely at the moment when he had the choice to remain involved, the courage to place instead the future of his work in the hands of others. But if we would say that of another man, why not say it of this man, too? He did have a choice. It was, after all, the choice proposed to him some three years earlier by the tempter on another mountain peak: "I will give *you* . . . all of the power (of the kingdoms of the world) and their glory" (Lk 4:5–6 | Mt 4:8–9). A loud message coming from the Ascension is that Jesus did not opt for this choice. He accepted for his brief association with the apostles, which had unfolded during the few weeks following his Resurrection, to come to an end. The Ascension marks an essential change in the pattern of such an association, for it proclaims loudly, perhaps even more loudly than the acceptance of the cross, the trust in the action of the Spirit and in the human freedom required to accept him. The Ascension is as critical to the birth of the church as Pentecost; it is, in a way, the model of all apostolate and missionary involvement. For it proclaims the need to allow human culture and sensitivity the freedom necessary to develop our own response to God's call, in the Spirit. It is not insignificant that Stephen characterizes Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father as the son-of-man, not as the son-of-David. The son-of-man, *ben 'adam*, beckons all human cultures, the cultures of all the other sons-of-man. And the cultures of the brief span of human history since the Ascension, these bare two millennia of Christian history, have striven to rise to the challenge.

<sup>20</sup> A reflection on this point helps to shed any mechanical conception of papal infallibility which crudely implies suspension of critical judgment. A recent example of high level popularization of such an attitude is the article by J. Carroll, "The Silence," in *The New Yorker* 73, no. 7 (1997): 52–68, which is astonishingly crude as to argument, if extremely polished as to style.



## 2. The Trans-Historical Parousia

## 2.1. The Ascension as State

Thus, the Ascension is not only a conclusion. It is also the proclamation of a new beginning. On the one hand, we have the bewilderment of the apostles who see Jesus, in his new corporeal reality, disappear from *their* corporeal reality: in this light, the Ascension provides a *terminus ad quem*, a non-local location, as it were, for a dead man who is risen. This is the conclusion. On the other hand—and this is the beginning—we have the bewilderment of Stephen who sees this risen man absorbed within the *shekina*. Stephen added, in the eyes of the Sanhedrin, a second to Jesus' first "blasphemy." Jesus had claimed divinity as a man on earth; Stephen claims divinity for Jesus as a man in the heavens. Alternatively—Jesus had proclaimed the Trinity through his Incarnation; Stephen proclaims the Incarnation through the Trinity. The Ascension does not just provide a location in the mental landscape of the apostles, once they find themselves deprived of earthly encounters; it proclaims that the humanity of Jesus is within the Trinity. In this light, and with analogous terms, we may see a reason why Resurrection and Ascension are two different moments of the glorification of Jesus. We may say that in the Resurrection the son-of-man claims the Trinity: he rises from death as a glorified body, and affirms his divinity. Conversely, if we may say so, in the Ascension the Trinity claims the son-of-man:<sup>21</sup> as it was not in fact possible *before*. There are

<sup>21</sup> Even though they are more specifically referred to the Crucifixion, I would like to mention here two artistic documents of great relevance for my argument. The first is the well known drawing of Jesus on the Cross done by St. John of the Cross and reproduced on the frontispiece of the general edition of his works (K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, eds., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* [Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979]). The reproduction, inexplicably, omits the oval frame within which the drawing was contained, a frame that explains the otherwise curious truncations at the edges. The cross and the Crucified are seen, here, from above—clearly, it would seem—from the "point of view" of the Father. It is a sort of spatial orientation of the Trinitarian relation between Father and Son, not from the point of view of the Son at the edge of despair, but from the point of the view of the Father who hears the cry. While, on the one hand, there is no "point of view" for the Absolute who is beyond space/time limitations, he is drawn here, on the other hand, within those very limits, he is brought within the limits of a sense of perspective, as if the incarnate Son drew the Father within his own

extraordinary consequences which seem to derive from this view of the Ascension, which we should consider in some detail.

The Incarnation is a single event when viewed as the specific moment at which the Logos is conceived in Mary's womb as a human being. But it is also a long term process when viewed as the interaction between eternity and time. Incarnation is a different interaction between the same two terms, in that the eternal and the temporal are, and remain, joined in the person of Jesus. Thus Incarnation is the *moment* of conception and the *state* of interaction: Incarnation as a state begins when Incarnation happens as a moment. Analogously, creation, too, is both an act and a state, a type of interaction whereby the eternal posits the temporal, both at its extreme points (beginning and end) and through its unfolding. In a similar vein, we must look at the Ascension not only as a transition within a process, a "dramatic" moment, where the "drama" is, true to etymology, a sequence of actions. More than just that, the resolution of a dramatic plot, the Ascension is also a state which declares a new modality of being. This is referred to as "Session," but both this term and the adjective "seated" are remote from common parlance. If we do not use currently the idiom "ascended Jesus," we are even less likely to use "seated Jesus." I will take up later the question of a

incarnation at the moment of his death. If this is the way we can interpret the Spanish mystic's foray into art, the reverse is true of a more or less contemporary artistic theme which developed at the Eastern end of the Christian world. In the German speaking area, especially in the regions of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the counterpart to the Italian *pietà* is the so-called *Vesperbild*, which often shows the Father, instead of the Virgin Mother, holding the dead Christ on his knees. But the most stunning artistic parallel to the crucifix of John of the Cross is the majestic Trinitarian Crucifixion by Fischer von Erlach in the Austrian sanctuary of Mariazell: the Father swoops down from above to hold Jesus as he dies on the cross, while the Spirit hovers above in the form of a dove. This is, in my view, one of the most poignant renderings of the Crucifixion, and of the Trinity, in Christian art. And I wonder if the extraordinary thematic significance of its iconography (the Trinitarian perspective at the crucifixion) has been sufficiently appreciated. Thus, it is curious that it seems to have escaped the attention of such eloquent a writer as Moltmann, for instance where he says that "the cross is at the centre of the Trinity" (J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 83, or idem, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 241). To the extent that prayer and art reflect doctrine, the Mariazell crucifixion is one of the most impressive earlier statements about the very core of Moltmann's thesis.

structural correlation between the notion of Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father and the notion of the Sacred Heart. We will consider, for now, the meaning of the Ascension (1) in terms of the interaction between eternity and time, and then (2) as a dimension of Trinitarian life.

A first element for our consideration is the relevance of the concept of "glory" (*kabōd, doxa*). We just saw how the first scandal of Stephen's vision is his claim that he, a mere man, can see with his human eyes the "glory of God" (*doxan theou*). But this could have been interpreted in a benign way, merely as a pretense for which some good Biblical antecedents could be found (Isaiah had boasted of a similar vision, Is 6). The second scandal of Stephen's vision is incomparably bolder and, from a narrow point of view, nothing short of blasphemy, since Stephen claims to see "Jesus standing to the right sides of God" (*Iēsoun estōta ex dexiōn tou theou*, Acts 7:55). Not only does he say that he has seen the transcendent glory, but that within it dwells the human immanence of the ascended Jesus. One may understand *doxa* as equivalent to *shekina*, a term which developed only in post-biblical Judaism, at a time, precisely, when the term *kabōd/doxa* had been preempted, as it were, by Christian theological language.

We may thus appreciate how the term "lord of glory" (*ton kurion tēs doxēs*, 1 Cor 2:8) may be taken in a technical sense that goes beyond that of a mere qualification as "glorious lord" (the impact of the term may be felt more fully if we consider its Hebrew equivalent, *ʿadōn hakkabōd*<sup>22</sup> with the resonance between *ʿadōn* and *ʿadōnay*). We may compare "lord of glory" with "lord of the Sabbath",<sup>23</sup> as forcefully argued by Neusner,<sup>24</sup> this self-definition by Jesus entails the far-reaching claim that Jesus is the sabbath; when Jesus says, in the same context, that *he* is the rest (Mt 11:27–30), he claims, in a precise technical sense, to offer the rest which is otherwise a prerogative of the divine day of rest, the

Sabbath. Analogously, "lord of glory" implies a fuller relationship between the two terms than we might otherwise imagine. It is the Trinitarian correlative of "father of glory" (Eph 1:17), a correlation that is somehow elaborated by the other term "brilliancy (*apaugasma*) of his glory" (Heb 1:3).

The second element is the new status of the ascended Jesus. Mark's epilog (Mk 16:19) says that Jesus "came to sit at the right sides of God," a theme which had been anticipated by Jesus himself, and which is taken up by many of the faith symbols of the early Church, e.g., the creed of Constantinople of the year 381, which says that "he went up to the heavens, and is seated at the right hand of the Father."<sup>25</sup> More explicit, and especially interesting for us, is the formulation given by the Council of Rome of the following year (382): "he sits *in the flesh* at the right hand of the Father."<sup>26</sup> This emphasis on the corporeality of the ascended Jesus may be considered as a very telling anticipation of the doctrine of the Sacred Heart, to which we will return later.

Finally, the third element is the expectation that Jesus will return. This was the promise of the angels to the men of Galilee in Acts, where the time of the return is not stated, but is implied to be eschatological in nature. Perhaps the first explicit statement to this effect dates to about 215, when the earliest version of the Apostolic creed<sup>27</sup> states that Jesus "will come to judge the living and the dead." The Council of Rome of 382 stresses, in the same context just mentioned,<sup>28</sup> that the Son "sits *in the flesh* at the right hand of the Father, in which (flesh) he will come to judge the living and the dead."

If now we look at the Ascension in structural terms, we may think of it as a Trinitarian event, i.e., we can look at it from the point of view—as if it were possible—of the Trinity. Like the Incarnation, the Ascension is a moment and a state (ushered in by that moment). With the crude limitations of our language and thought, we might say that, as with the Incarnation the eternal

<sup>22</sup> Admittedly, the term does not occur in the Hebrew Bible, and Paul was writing in Greek for Greek readers, rather than Hebrew (or Aramaic, for that matter, in which language the term would have been yet again different). Still, the resonance of Hebrew semantics would have had an impact on anyone knowledgeable with the Hebrew Bible. Note the parallelism with "father of glory" (which would be *ʿabī hakkabōd* in Hebrew), for which see presently. On the *shekina* see below, n. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Mt 12:8 | Mk 2:28 | Lk 6:5; in Hebrew this would be *ʿadōn hasshabbāt*.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus: An Intermillennial Interfaith Exchange* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 66–74.

<sup>25</sup> "anelthonta eis tous ouranous kai kathezomenos en dexia tou patros" (H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* [Rome: Herder, 1976<sup>36</sup>], 150). Hereafter cited as DS.

<sup>26</sup> "in carne sedet in [!] dextera Patris" (DS 167). See also below, section 3.1.

<sup>27</sup> A text known as the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, (DS 10): "ascendit in caelis et sedit ad dexteram Patris, venturus iudicare vivos et mortuos."

<sup>28</sup> "in carne sedet in dextera Patris, in qua venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos" (DS 167).

joined the temporal, so with the Ascension the temporal joined the eternal. A human being, in the flesh, is *now* in the *shekina*<sup>29</sup>—i.e., is now “seated at the right hand of the Father.”<sup>30</sup> It is “now” that the blessed human “intrusion” within the Trinity happens in human terms, at a given point in time. It seems appropriate to say that, before the Ascension, Jesus was not seated, in the flesh, at the right hand of the Father. If so, it is at the moment of the Ascension that time impossibly (i.e., mysteriously) intruded into the eternal, just as in Mary, at Nazareth, eternity had impossibly intruded into the temporal. This is then a way to consider the Ascension as a state.

It is this state which Stephen proclaims, and which his accusers decry as blasphemy. By accepting the good faith of the accusers we are in a better position to appreciate the fuller impact of Stephen’s proclamation. During Jesus’ lifetime, faith in him entailed the recognition that, in him, God was man. After the

<sup>29</sup> Even though the term *shekina* refers primarily to God’s presence, hence almost his immanence, within his people, and even though it is not a Biblical term, but is rather derived from early post-Biblical Judaism, it seems appropriate in other respects. It is the only abstract term which describes not a quality of God’s essence (e.g., wisdom, *sophia*, *hokmā* in Hebrew) nor a manifestation of his dynamism (e.g., spirit, *pneuma*, *rūah*), but rather the essence of his distinctiveness. See M.E. Lodhal, *Shekinah/Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), esp. pp. 51–58. (The blurb on the back-cover of this book, published by Paulist Press, must win the prize for editorial camouflaging. The editorial extols the “exciting implications [the book’s] directions will have for the doctrine of the Trinity among Christians.” “Exciting,” indeed, but hardly “implications”: the author argues quite explicitly for a “de-hypostasizing of the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit” (p. 70) and against “the same old triumphalism in new dress” (p. 72), i.e., a “Logos Christology” or “Jesusology” which “succumb[s] to the substance metaphysic underlying Nicean and Chalcedonian Christologies” (p. 190). It would be like claiming that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had “exciting implications” for world peace.)

<sup>30</sup> Note the distinction between Jesus’ claim in Jn 14:10 that he “is in the Father” as the Father is in him, and that the Father is “dwelling” (*menōn*) in him. One wonders whether in the notion of *menein* there might not be an echo of the same perception that will emerge in the later term *shekina*, though obviously in opposite directions: the *shekina* is meant explicitly to exclude a participation in the *shakan* of God, whereas the *menein* of the Father in Jesus entails precisely such (Trinitarian) sharing. Note, in any case, the difference between the concept of *menein* before the Ascension, and of *hestanai/kathizein* “standing/sitting (at the right of the Father)” afterwards. See also above, n. 4, and below, n. 46.

Ascension, faith in him entailed the recognition that, in him, man was within the Trinity. To his contemporaries, the terms of the “scandal” had become clear; a scandal which was all the more “scandalous” as it claimed legitimacy within, not against, the absolute monotheism of the revelation to Israel. John the Baptist had articulated the spiritual framework within which acceptance of this “scandal” was theologically possible and thus, after all, not scandalous<sup>31</sup>—hence the central significance of the Baptist within the development of early Christian self-awareness. Stephen emerges as the second John: he is the first to witness the incarnate presence within the Trinity, hence the first to proclaim the structural congruence of the Incarnation with monotheism.

## 2.2. The Assumption of Mary

I have stressed the coherence and the continuity. But this is not to deny change. Indeed, the Ascension truly beckons a trans-historical parousia. With the “good robber” dying by the side of the Crucified, we also repeat that most beautiful of prayers: “Remember me when you go to your kingdom!”

It seems almost ironic, on the face of it, that while the Ascension has remained in the background as an element for theological and spiritual reflection, the converse should have been true for the belief in the Assumption of Mary, which came to be defined as dogma only in 1950. As an expression of the sentiments which were voiced in the years of consultation leading up to the formal definition, I would like to quote an eloquent passage of Lonergan:

Can one say that [Mary] was freed from the empire of Satan, inasmuch as that empire was sin, but not inasmuch as that empire was death? Can one say that she adores in heaven the body to which she gave birth, yet is without the body that gave it birth? Can one invent some metaphysical law or some principle of divine justice that overrules the best of sons’ love for the best of mothers, that permits the Sacred Heart to be a living heart but forces the Immaculate Heart to be a dead heart?<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Through his stressing of the creative ethos as developed within Israel’s perception of God; I have briefly discussed this in “A Rabbinic Disputation with Jesus,” *New Oxford Review* 61, no. 7 (1994): 24–26.

<sup>32</sup> F.E. Crowe and R.M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Collection* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1988), 73. For a correlation between the theology of the Hearts and the Assumption, see

Without going into any of the details which pertain to the question of the coherence of belief and its profound compatibility with the "development" in the sense of Newman, I wish here to call attention to one particular aspect of this dynamics. I refer to the need for a structural, as opposed to nominalist, analysis. It has already been mentioned, and I will further argue this point below (3.3), that the devotion to the Sacred Heart is in structural correlation with that of the Pantocrator and of Christ the King, and that together these components of a single line of belief ought to be understood as the spiritual counterpart of the Ascension as a point of doctrine—the parousia providing, as it were, the common ground between the two dimensions of spirituality and doctrine. Now, it is remarkable to note how coherent Christian sentiment has been in linking in a universal way the figure of Mary with that of her son—coherent through the diversity of perceptions, and coherent in the way in which the two were opposed to any other human figure. Of no one else it is said that he is the Pantocrator and she is the Theotokos; of no one else that he is the king and she is the queen; of no one else that he is the Sacred Heart and she the Immaculate Heart; of no one else that he has ascended and that she has been assumed into heaven. The coherence is striking, in its correlations and its exclusiveness, especially because it reflects not a planned design to propose appropriate formulas, imposed as it were by a theological or hierarchical decree from above. These different perceptions emerge as parallel modes of awareness for an underlying reality which is operative of its own accord.

The Assumption of Mary underscores what the full impact of the Ascension has been. The corporeality of the Son was not to be lost, shed or cast away because he had once assumed it; rather, his time-space dimension, however transfigured, was to brand, as it were, the Trinity, because the Incarnation had so branded, irrevocably, the non-time and non-space of God. Analogously, the corporeality of the Mother was not to be dimmed because she had been the instrument for such a branding: rather, her own time-space dimension was to punctuate ever more fully the perennial reality and seriousness of the Incarnation. Her Assumption is thus a pledge of our own call to a transfigured space-time dimension in paradise. But essential to this pledge is the quality that is predicated of her when we call her the Immaculate Heart. For our

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C. Pozo, "The Heart of Mary, Heart of the New Eve," in *Towards a Civilization of Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 180–82.

part, we are, indeed, "maculate," soiled, and to that extent we can never match her. Yet she stands as the sign of what God intends for us. Through the immense toil of the Redemption, the Triune God recreates our humanity to a state that, once "maculate," is restored to an ontological state of grace—not just each of us individually (through Baptism and our personal sanctification), but as members of the body of Christ, as branches on his vine. The link between a resurrection of the bodies and the end of the world implies that the full implementation of our sanctity depends on the achievement of sanctity by all; that the resurrection will not just be of us individuals, but of us as sharers in common human culture. In this light, the Assumption is not an elegant act of kindness on the part of God for his mother; it is an ontological implication of her having been outside our culture of sin, and a proclamation of what the redemption of our culture will mean for us once restored to the same status.

### 2.3. The Fullness of Time

The "fullness of time" may be viewed as the moment when eternity "enters" time, and time eternity. The Incarnation and the Ascension are these privileged moments, those events that impossibly punctuate, temporally, the atemporal. The notion of fullness (*plērōma* in Greek, *melō* in Hebrew, *shûlameh* in Aramaic) may thus be seen to refer to fulfillment not so much in the sense of culmination in a vectorial sense, or even of perfection in a qualitative sense, but rather as the transfiguration onto a new dimension of reality—as if time could reach its apex by entering the Trinity. The moment when such fulfillment takes place is in fact the span of time between the Incarnation (Gal 4:4) and the "recapitulation" of everything in Christ (Eph 1:10). This "in-heading" (*anakephalaiōsasthai*) describes the "economy of the fullness of times" (*tōn kairōn*): the temporal fulfillment ("fullness of times") is matched by the corporeal fulfillment (Jesus as the "head" of the social human body, the Church), whereby both time and space are assumed within the Trinity.

There is, in this particular Biblical notion, an explicit contrast with the polytheistic notion of time that properly recognizes no beginning and no end, hence cannot properly admit of fullness or fulfillment. Practically all Mesopotamian myths begin with a reference to a mythical past which provides a temporal framework within which other events take place. The perspective that is so adumbrated remains fully temporal, even

though it is not chronologically dimensioned, i.e., it is not anchored to specific moments. In other words, the mythical past is a blur out of which comes greater temporal differentiation, and not a wholly different mode of being which transcends time and can properly be called eternity. Even the great creation epic (*Enūma Eliš*) begins not with the positing of time, but with a primordial unfolding, hence a primordial temporal sequence to which the prime actors themselves, the embryonic divine beings, are subjected. This is why in the polytheistic view there can be no fullness of time, just as there is neither a beginning nor an end. Within polytheism, time is an essential coordinate of being, and terms which are translated as "eternity" refer properly only to long duration. Not so in the Biblical conception: time is posited out of non-time, hence it has a beginning, and is going to be terminated. Time collides with non-time at those two end points, the creation and the end of the world, which are therefore the mirror image of each other. The end is not the destruction of creation, but rather its completion; history can properly be understood from the perspective of a non-perspective, i.e., from the a-temporal dimension of eternity. Time is whole when seen from outside time. And this, in a way, would already be fullness: the fullness of total history.<sup>33</sup>

But there is another collision which is as unexpected as it is freely given. It is the double, and doubly reciprocal, collision of the Incarnation and the Ascension. Neither is perceived as mythical, because they are both anchored in specific events. Historical as they are, these events have receded into the past for us, the later generations, but their contemporaries touched them by hand. Historical, therefore, and yet trans-historical at the same time: for, rather than the blurring of a time span, the claim is made that the eternal is particular enough to be grafted onto the temporal (the Incarnation), and that the temporal becomes so soaked with eternity that it can no longer be separate from it (the Ascension), yet without tainting it. Admittedly, the claim bears all the marks of the impossibility of the mystery, but is emphatically not mythical. It is not a descriptive image, a metaphor, a rhetorical statement. It is the reality of a person both eternal and

<sup>33</sup> For a different, but complementary, discussion of this subject see D.L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 221–36. Note how different are the philosophical presuppositions of G. Lohfink, (*Die Himmelfahrt*, 280–82) and how they have colored his basic interpretation of Luke's account.

temporal. What more fullness, in truth, than this, where time is grafted onto eternity?

The distinctiveness of the Ascension, for which I have argued, underscores the full respect for the temporal. Eternity, which knows no intervals, accepts to be so punctuated. Time is not to be annulled, as if exploded by the incompatibility of the atemporal order of being. Rather, time is transfigured, glorified, and its rhythm respected. Jesus ascends following an interval, and brings the very nature of interval with him "into" the Trinity. Hence it is that his Ascension speaks of fullness, not of abolition. Not only is the Logos not jealous of his divine status, the Trinity is not jealous either, since the son-of-man can *now* be seen within the glory. In the Ascension, man has indeed scaled heaven. This is a recurrent theme describing hybris in the ancient Near East (and captured for our sensitivity in the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel), but in Jesus the scaling is real and it comes in the wake of the real, and greater, hybris of the crucifixion.

But, if time is within eternity, then eschatology is within the present. The eschatological time is not a mythical projection, but a fully "historical" reality: the cultural dimension of the "name" of Jesus remains beyond the end of time (see below, 3.2), and so does the temporality and corporeality of our finitude. If eschatological time is, simultaneously, trans-historical time, it is because time is transfigured as much as space. The dual reality of the parousia is a key example of such a mode of thinking. The parousia, and thus heaven, is with us now and yet will be with us fully after the end of the world. The parousia is historical and trans-historical at the same time. The seriousness of the Incarnation should never cease to astonish us: the new order it establishes can never be recast and no timidity can affect any of its consequences. Such irrepressible temporal particularity of Jesus, the ascended son-of-man, is the gauge for all our individual particularities. We all are grafted onto Jesus, branches onto the vine. And through this vine we are in turn grafted onto the Trinity. The personal individuality is retained, the vine as trunk and we as branches.<sup>34</sup>

If we do not accept the distinct, factual, and temporal explicitness which Luke presupposes in his account, we would be induced to see Resurrection and Ascension within a framework

<sup>34</sup> In this respect Jesus' image of the vine seems more apt (*pace* St. Paul!) than the Pauline image of the body, for which it serves as the original locus. For the trunk is distinct from its branches in a way that the body is not distinct from its limbs.

that is more properly mythological than historical. Deny the Ascension, and you would somehow opt for the beginning of a mythical time after the last historical event affecting Jesus, the crucifixion. A mythical time is very specifically non-temporal, non-historical, non-incarnational; it is not related to concrete events, but only to abstract patterns—to which a Mesopotamian, say, could relate quite well. Within such a mythical time, the Ascension would then indeed have to be perceived as metaphorical. In contrast, the experience of the Ascension as related by Luke, as a specific event that takes place within the historical framework of space and time, proclaims the end and the reality of the Incarnation. Jesus' reality is not evanescent, but concrete: it is *he* who sits at the right of the Father, a human "he" who remains himself, who affirms the value of particularity while collapsing (though not destroying) its limits. Instead of a mythical eschatology, presented as fantastic imagery, the Ascension ushers in a sacramental eschatology, soaked in concreteness and temporality.

### 3. The Sacred Heart as Parousia *Ad Intra*

#### 3.1. Loss of Centrality of the Doctrine of the Ascension

What I have tried to show is that the Ascension is not a mere postscript to the Resurrection, as if an optional appendix within a plot that has otherwise already been resolved. Rather, it seems that the Ascension is, theologically, on a par with the Resurrection, without, however, being identical with it. To put it boldly, if the Resurrection provides a sufficient resolution for us, the Ascension provides the resolution for the Trinity. It is however a fact that, after the marked interest of early doctrinal statements contained in the *symbola*, the doctrine of the Ascension seems to have faded from a position of centrality. Such a loss of interest has continued to our own day, and this seems all the more remarkable considering how its structural correlates (the Name of Jesus and especially the Sacred Heart) have enjoyed instead a growing popularity.

A consistent proclamation of the Ascension as an event of central importance is to be found in the early creeds, the *symbola fidei*. Of thirty-four major *symbola* from the first three centuries,<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> They are reproduced in DS 1–76.

two are still, word by word, very much part of our tradition—the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The pertinent formula of the Apostles' Creed is found practically intact in each and every one of them: *Ascendit in caelis et sedit ad dexteram Patris*.<sup>36</sup> The major variants are found in some of the Oriental formulas, which add some significant qualifications. A text of the Armenian church affirms belief "in the *god-like* Ascension and in the sitting at the right of the Father" (DS 6); three others affirm that Jesus Christ "has gone to the heavens *in his own body*, sits *in glory* at the right of the Father, will come *in his own body in glory* to judge the living and the dead" (DS 44: Asia Minor; 46: Syria-Palestine; 48: Armenia); and a Coptic version says that Jesus Christ "ascended to the heavens, sits at the right of his *good* Father" (DS 62). A Latin version also adds the detail that he sits at the right of the Father "in glory" (DS 72), and the Roman Council of 382 includes the reference to Christ sitting at the right of the Father "in the flesh."<sup>37</sup> The occasional specification about the Ascension occurring in bodily form stresses the concreteness of the perception that underlies these statements. It seems hard to read these texts as implying that Resurrection and Ascension are one and the same event, and that they refer ambiguously to the glorification of Jesus.

Already in the presentation of the central points of faith by Origen in the preface to his most systematic work, the *Peri archōn*, his personal re-statement of the *symbolon* is abridged through the omission of any reference to the Ascension as a state, the sitting at the right hand of the Father.<sup>38</sup> Original thought with regard to the Ascension is rare in the Patristic tradition, and is for the most part conditioned by the place accorded to it in the liturgy as a discrete feast day. In fact, the presence of a special place for the Ascension in the liturgical calendar (even with the recent change from Thursday to Sunday), plus the attention paid

<sup>36</sup> DS 10. Originally in Greek, the text is preserved in a Latin version the oldest manuscript of which dates back to about 215 A.D.

<sup>37</sup> See above, note 28. See also Pope Leo IX (1953): "that he ascended to heaven on the fortieth day after his resurrection with the flesh with which he rose and with the soul" (DS 681); and the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215: "he ascended equally in both (soul and flesh)" (DS 801).

<sup>38</sup> "et post resurrectionem conversatus cum discipulis suis assumptus est" (H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti, *Origène. Traité des Principes*, vol. 1, Sources Chrétiennes 252 [Paris 1978], 82).

to it in art, is the only major sign of its continued relevance within Christian sensitivity.

In the tradition of official church doctrine, as well, the Ascension has had practically no impact.<sup>39</sup> Looking at recent works on Christology, one may note a similar backgrounding, ranging from an outright denial that the event of the Ascension ever even took place<sup>40</sup> to a simple silence. Such a trend to disregard the significance, and even the reality, of the Ascension and of the "session at the right hand" is particularly surprising in the light of the attention which is being paid, in contemporary Christologies, to the progression through time of the stages of the Incarnation, especially within the framework of both process theology and of what is generally known as the Christology from below or, with a term which is even more evocative for our present interest, ascending Christology.

The neglect for the doctrine of the Ascension is also remarkable in view of the significance one would expect it to have for contemporary philosophy, especially in those systems of thought which emphasize the value of the human dimension. In part, this may be due to the impact, direct and indirect, of Hegel's idealism<sup>41</sup> on modern and contemporary philosophical stances. On

<sup>39</sup> See DS, p. 879, E 5bf-g.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. H. Küng, *Credo: Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis—Zeitgenossen erklärt* (München 1995<sup>5</sup>), where it is said that "to maintain today [the notion of a physical Ascension] would be absurd." It would not, however, have been absurd in antiquity, since similar ascensions were maintained not only of Biblical figures like Elija and Enoch, but also of "Heracles, Empedocles, Romulus, Alexander the Great and Apollonius of Tiana" (p. 137). These parallels (!) are comforting to the author, because they allow him to conclude that "the Lucan story of the Ascension is no Christian invention, no unheard of, exorbitant 'miracle,' but a perceptual example proposed to the listener of that time" (ibid.). Along slightly different lines, the "session" at the right hand of the Father is explained in connection with the image of the royal enthronement, not only of ancient Israel but also of the ancient Near East in general (p. 82 f.), i.e., as a literary pretense which would be quite acceptable within an Old Testament framework. But note how, if this had truly been the claim of Stephen at his trial—the claim namely that Jesus was no more than Heracles or Apollonius of Tiana—the elders would hardly have bothered putting him to death.

<sup>41</sup> Out of the vast literature on the subject, I will refer to a very insightful book by P. Coda, *Il negativo e la Trinità. Ipotesi su Hegel* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1987). See also the valuable early book by H. Küng, *The Incarnation of God. An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a*

the one hand, it might perhaps be expected that this idealism might contain the presuppositions for an appreciation of the Ascension, since such an "event" would appear to be the climax of his whole system—for, after all, the Ascension is a most concrete example of *Aufhebung* ("lifting up" or "sublation," as it is generally translated in English). And yet it is interesting to note how Hegel, initially indeed captivated by the image, became progressively less attuned to the concreteness of the event, less attuned to the incarnational dimension of the Ascension. By 1831, the edited lecture notes lean decidedly towards a non-historical interpretation:

As for the empirical dimension of the appearance and the research into what relationship it might have with the appearing of Christ after his death, the [Protestant] church is correct in not recognizing such a research: for it starts from the presupposition that the appearance is established on the basis of historical sense perception, from the presupposition that in these narratives [of the events from Resurrection to Ascension] the certification of the spirit lays in what is historically represented according to historiographic canons."<sup>42</sup>

Even more explicit are some undated personal lecture notes: "Resurrection and Ascension; whether real, doubts as to circumstances, details; childish, pitiful"; "Death; ascension; removal of the sense related present."<sup>43</sup> Some extracts from notes taken by D.F. Strauss during the same lectures of 1831 also reduce factuality to, we might say, metaphor:

It is narrated that Christ appeared again in person to his disciples after his death, to which then was added the Ascension and the sitting at the right of God. This story is the same explanation of the very nature of God . . . The abstraction of the Father is given up in the Son—and this is his death. But the negation of this negation is the unity of Father and Son, the love, the spirit.<sup>44</sup>

*Future Christology* (New York: Crossroads, 1987 [originally published in 1970]).

<sup>42</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion. Teil 3: Die vollendete Religion*, in *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, ed. W. Jaeschke, vol. 5 (Hamburg 1984), 253. My translation is in the way of a paraphrase; for instance, the last phrase reads as follows in German: "als ob in solchen Erzählungen von einem als historisch Vorgestellten nach geschichtlicher Weise die Beglaubigung des Geistes liege."

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 292, 301.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 286. See the incisive, if brief, remarks by J.-L. Marion, "Le don glorieux d'une présence," 36–37.



3.2. *The Transfigured Culture: The Name of Jesus*

With that, we lose the heartbeat of humanity within Trinitarian life. In contrast with such a progressively sterile disembodiment of Christian reality,<sup>45</sup> the Ascension proclaims just the continuity of that human heartbeat, as if declaring that human reality has come to be grafted within the Trinity. Through the Logos as Jesus, time has ontologically entered the Trinity. The Christian objection to a disembodied "sublimation" is clearly articulated in Stephen's vision of the son-of-man within the *shekina*. The two terms (son-of-man and *shekina*) spell out the abyss between the realms—the recognition of the divine essence as a "dwelling," and the recognition of the personal reality of a human individual (the son-of-man) actually "inhabiting"<sup>46</sup> this dwelling.

Emblematic of this contrast is the way in which great significance came to be attached to the name of Jesus. Israelite sensitivity had developed to a point where it had become necessary to isolate the perception of God from all cultural implications, including the cage of language as represented, in the case of YHWH, by onomastics. In this light, the lyrical exaltation of the name of Jesus in Philippians (2:9–11) acquires a special resonance. It is not so much that the name "Jesus" in itself has a power which can be bestowed on someone. Rather, the Father has glorified, in the Son, human culture as represented by his name: when Paul says that "Jesus Christ is lord into the glory of God the Father"<sup>47</sup> he means that he is present in the Trinity (in the "glory") with his full personal, hence also cultural, reality. This is particularly meaningful vis-à-vis the "onomoclasm" of Judaism, i.e., the abhorrence of pronouncing the name of Yahweh

<sup>45</sup> See the extensive and explicit critique of Hegel's intuition and "betrayal" by Coda, *Il negativo*, 348–422.

<sup>46</sup> As already intimated above, n. 30, one wonders whether the description given by Jesus in John's account of the last supper, where Jesus describes the reciprocal indwelling of Father and Son using the term "abiding" (*menōn* Jn 14:10), does not present a conscious echo of the emerging Jewish doctrine of the *shekina*. If so, this would afford an awe-inspiring insight into the dynamics of Trinitarian self-revelation in and through Jesus.

<sup>47</sup> The passage is generally understood in the sense that the recognition of Jesus being lord brings glory to the Father. I prefer to understand, and it seems to me linguistically legitimate to so understand, *eis doxan* as a qualification of *kurios* rather than of *exomologēsetai*. If so, *kurios eis doxan* "he is lord unto glory" would then be a sentence equivalent of the noun phrase *kurios tēs doxēs* "lord of the glory," for which see above, n. 22.

(much as later iconoclasm will proclaim abhorrence towards cultic images). Going to the opposite extreme, Paul says that a human name, Jesus, is now within the "glory," that human culture has entered the Trinity.

Thus, while the Ascension is on the one hand a witness to Jesus' respect for our cultural freedom (as argued above, 1.4), it provides, at the same time, the means for a true Christian culture to develop from within, ontologically. Negative theology ought to be tempered by the contemplation of the ascended Jesus, the Logos who is as particularly present within the Trinity as he is known to us *qua* member of our culture. Are we really unable to say anything about God if we can say the name Jesus? While it is of course true that the Incarnation remains unfathomable as a mystery, it is also true that he has chosen to make himself truly "effable," inescapably encapsulated by language. The irreversibility of his Incarnation in our physical and cultural reality means that we address him just as (impossibly though it may seem) the Father does; it means that with Jesus our very culture has entered, as it were, the dynamism of Trinitarian processions, and that therefore through this culture we can, somehow, relate truly to God. While the *noun* "Son" is analogical, the *name* Jesus is not. In this light, it is as if the simple utterance of his name could suffice to give epistemology its ontological coherence. In this light, too, the Ascension is the most daring positive answer not only to negative theology,<sup>48</sup> but also to all religions like Buddhism, which erode particularity. The particularity of the Absolute is one of the great messages of the Old Testament, and it reaches its highest expression in the Incarnation. The permanence of this particularity beyond death, with the Ascension, is the ultimate contrast with Nirvana. The Christian notion of Paradise is not the abolition of culture, but its transfiguration. In point of fact, it is with the Transfiguration and the Ascension that we see the first

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to consider Philo's notion of the human rise to God, which far from proposing a physical body's ascent and his presence in the flesh at the right hand of God, describes in fact a sort of dis-incarnation which is meant to free the spiritual from the physical, see D. Winston, *Philo of Alexandria: The contemplative Life, The Giants, and Selections*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1981), 63, 65; see also p. xii. While the Christian adaptations of Philo are more in line with the Incarnation, there remains nevertheless a certain lack of appreciation for the full impact of the doctrine of the Ascension; see, e.g., the thoughtful comments by E. Bellini, *Dionigi Aeropagita: Tutte le Opere* (Milano: Rusconi, 1981), 50–52.

evidence ever, within ancient Israelite tradition, of human culture being present in the divine beyond. It is worth emphasizing that the account of the Transfiguration does not just refer to Jesus, Moses and Elijah as men. Beyond that, it includes very concrete mentions of their cultural being, specifically their garments and their speech. Of no human being was this ever claimed in the Old Testament (with the exception of Samuel, cf. 1 Sm 28:14). Survival in the She'ol is a sort of undifferentiated existence at best, where names, garments or speech appear as irrelevant. It is in the Transfiguration that, for the first time, personality emerges as physically and culturally marked in the afterlife. The specific exaltation of Jesus and his name is that he is, *qua* Jesus, perceived from the start (i.e., with Stephen) as not only surviving but as being ("Trinitarily," we would say) within the *shekina*.

### 3.3. Ontological Dimensions of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart

What the name of Jesus means in terms of culture, the Sacred Heart means in terms of personality.<sup>49</sup> And in this respect Christian spirituality, more than theology, succeeded in training our sensitivity for real and valid alternative apprehensions of the person of Jesus ascended and sitting at the right hand of the Father. Rather than through any particular connotative value, these perceptions provided a variety of "translations," as it were, of the deeper meaning of the Ascension, a variety of articulations of its implications. The iconography of the Pantocrator and of Christ sitting in glory are an expression of this, as rendered especially in art. That of Christ the King is a devotion that is correlative to such iconography. And they all express a lively awareness of the same reality which is expressed doctrinally through the dogma of the Ascension. But the devotion to the Sacred Heart is on an altogether different level of doctrinal coherence vis-à-vis the dogma of the Ascension, as I will try to show now.

<sup>49</sup> Hence also its connection with the Sacred Heart. For an explicit reference to such possible connection in St. Ignatius, see H.D. Egan, "Ignatius of Loyola: Mystic at the Heart of the Trinity, Mystic at the Heart of Jesus Christ," in *Spiritualities of the Heart: Approaches to Personal Wholeness in Christian Tradition*, ed. A. Callahan (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1990), 105-06.

To my knowledge, studies of the devotion<sup>50</sup> have not developed this line of inquiry. In terms of exegesis and of history, a rather nominalistic attitude has often prevailed,<sup>51</sup> stressing the value of the human organ, the heart, as a symbol for a psychological and spiritual attitude, love. The work of K. Rahner, more than any other, has resulted in a sustained and profound search for a theological understanding of the devotion, and his contributions<sup>52</sup> go a long way towards integrating the devotion within the framework of contemporary sensibility. But nowhere has there been an explicit correlation with the doctrine of the Ascension. Interestingly, the closest intimations in this regard come from papal documents. The earliest dates to 1794, when Pius VI took a strong positive stand in favor of the cult of the Sacred Heart: he indicates specifically how the heart of Jesus is in fact the heart of the Logos, since there is no distinction of person between Jesus and the second person of the Trinity (*cor Jesu, cor nempe personae*

<sup>50</sup> See especially J. Stierli, ed., *Cor Salvatoris* (Freiburg 1956<sup>2</sup>; English edition: *Heart of the Savior*, New York: Herder, 1958); A. Bea, ed., *Cor Jesu. Commentationes in Litteras Encyclicas Pii PP. XII "Haurietis Aquas,"* 2 vols. (Rome: Herder, 1959); T.T. O'Donnell, *Towards a Civilization of Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985); T.T. O'Donnell, *Heart of the Redeemer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992). In a more poetic vein, and from different perspectives, see also H.U. von Balthasar, *Heart of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1979); and P. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of the Matter* (New York: Harcourt, 1979). I have not seen the volume by M. Doueihi, *A Perverse History of the Human Heart* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1997), which purportedly deals from a secular point of view with the "theology of the Sacred Heart."

<sup>51</sup> Note, however, such penetrating studies as H. Rahner, "On the Biblical Basis of the Devotion" and "The Beginnings of the Devotion in Patristic Times," in *Heart of the Saviour*, 15-58; "Mirabilis Progressio: Gedanken zur Geschichtstheologie der Herz-Jesu-Verehrung," in *Cor Jesu*, 23-58; and J. Ratzinger, "The Paschal Mystery as Core and Foundation of Devotion to the Sacred Heart," in *Civilization of Love*, 156-163 for a profound analysis of the Biblical and Patristic background, including the identification of a synthesis which utilizes the Stoic "theology and anthropology of the heart" (p. 161).

<sup>52</sup> See especially "Siehe dieses Herz." Prolegomena zu einer Theologie der Herz-Jesu-Verehrung," in *Schriften zur Theologie. III: Zur Theologie des geistlichen Lebens*. 1957<sup>2</sup> (Einsiedeln-Zürich-Köln: Benziger Verlag, 379-90; "Some Theses on the Theology of the Devotion," in *Heart of the Saviour*, 131-56; "Zur Theologie des Symbols," in *Cor Jesu*, 461-506; for a lucid and useful overview of his writings see A. Callahan, *Karl Rahner's Spirituality of the Pierced Heart* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), especially chapter 3.

*Verbi, cui inseparabiliter unitum est*).<sup>53</sup> But the most exhaustive document remains the 1956 encyclical *Haurietis aquas* by Pius XII.<sup>54</sup> A special effort is made to show how the value of the doctrine is independent from the private revelations which "brought nothing new to Catholic doctrine" (p. 340, see also p. 347). This is so because such doctrine "rests completely on the fundamental doctrine of the hypostatic union" (3925, p. 344). And this leads to a statement which, it seems to me, validates the interpretation suggested here about the Ascension as a moment when the son-of-man enters, so to speak, the Trinity: "we understand that the heart of Jesus is the *heart of a divine Person (cor Iesu esse cor personae divinae)*, that is, of the Incarnate Word, and that by it all the love with which he loved, and even now continues to love us, is represented and, so to speak, placed before our very eyes" (p. 344). It is, in a way, a coherent application of the *communicatio idiomatum*: Jesus is present qua Jesus, not only qua the Logos, in the Trinity, and while we can not speak of the "sacred heart" of the Father or of the Spirit, we can speak of the "sacred heart" of the Son inasmuch as the Son is Jesus. It is in this respect that the encyclical makes the strong statement that devotion to the Sacred Heart is not optional, but essential, inasmuch as it is equivalent to the adoration of God (p. 344). Clearly, such a pronouncement would not apply to a mere image, such as, for instance, that of the Good Shepherd.<sup>55</sup>

A full elaboration of the principles which are implied in the correlations here proposed (between Ascension and parousia on the one hand, the Name of Jesus and the Sacred Heart on the other) would open new vistas and lead us into uncharted

<sup>53</sup> DS 2663. For the background to this statement see T.T. O'Donnell, *Heart of the Redeemer*, 151–53.

<sup>54</sup> DS 3922–3926; for the passages that are not in DS, I refer to the original publication in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 48 (1956): 309–53.

<sup>55</sup> See also J. Ratzinger, "Paschal Mystery," 163: "In the Heart of Jesus ... we are face to face with the center of Christianity." For various analyses of the Encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* see the volumes *Cor Iesu* and *Civilization of Love*, cited above, n. 45, esp. C. Folch Gomez, "The Love of the Incarnate Word for His Father," 25–44. Note, on the other hand, how Paul VI (*La devozione al Sacro Cuore nei discorsi di Papa Montini*, ed. Giorgio Basadonna (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1977) speaks repeatedly of the "culto del Sacro Cuore" (e.g., pp. 18, 23, 29, 30, 34, 55, 66, 70) and the "devozione al Cuore di Gesù" (e.g., pp. 14, 25, 26, 28), but never of the "doctrine" of the Sacred Heart.

territory, which we will have to leave unexplored for now.<sup>56</sup> What seems certain is that there is merit in combining two perspectives which we have grown accustomed to consider apart. To see the Sacred Heart as a counterpart of the ascended Lord suggests that the humanity of Jesus is not an evanescent memory, but a trans-temporal historical reality. This formulation aims at articulating the terms of the mystery. From a purely human perspective, there is no trans-temporal history, since history is by virtue of its essence embedded in the temporal event as such. Yet Christians claim a trans-temporal dimension to history. They claim this when they accept time as having been posited though creation; when they accept an end to temporal cultural development through the end of the world; when they accept a trans-temporal temporal (herein the mystery) dimension of God's involvement in history; when they accept that a human being (Jesus), culturally defined (Christ), is structurally absorbed within the absolute, "seated at the right hand of the Father." It seems to me that the figure of the Sacred Heart reflects this understanding. It is a representation consonant with the sensibilities of the times when it was first so perceived, and, in fact, our own sensibilities. No less than in the eighteenth century, we, too, respond more readily to the human presence within the Trinity as that of a friend to whom we can relate heart to heart. Not as though Stephen was less touched by the human love of Jesus as a friend. The reality remains the same, but the perception is differently nuanced. With Stephen and the early Christians it was the marvel of recognizing the human they knew as being within the *shekina*. With us, it is the marvel of recognizing that within the *shekina*, within the Trinity, the Logos is the ascended Jesus, with a heart like ours. □

<sup>56</sup> For some intimations see A. M. Sicari, "Nécessité de l'Ascension," *Communio:Revue catholique internationale* 8 (1983): 7; M. Gitton, "Théologie des quarante jours," *Communio:Revue catholique internationale* 8 (1983): 27f.; J.-L. Marion, "Le don glorieux d'une présence," 46; N. Hoffmann, "Atonement and the Ontological Coherence between the Trinity and the Cross," *Civilization of Love*, 213–66.