YAHWEH, THE TRINITY: THE OLD TESTAMENT CATECHUMENATE (PART 2)*

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"Waiting for God means that we, as the subjects of the action, wait for a finite moment, while knowing that he, as the object of the desire, never will be such a finite moment."

3. Advent as a state

3.1 Messianism: in praise of waiting

But we should now retrace our steps to the time before the great divide; we should look at the major moments through which the catechumenate passed in time. This will help us more adequately to recapture the impact of the Annunciation as the series of moments that led from Mary and the angel to Pentecost; it will help us to recapture the long advent that prepared the protagonists, and to bend back in time and consider the stages that defined the pre-trinitarian perception of the trinitarian reality.

Waiting is a fundamental religious attitude that sets the ancient Israelite perception quite apart from that of Mesopotamia and of polytheism in general. Waiting for a faithful God is indeed one of the attitudes most strikingly wanting in Mesopotamian and

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polytheistic spirituality. It is, by contrast, an essential dimension of monotheistic spirituality, where one is called to let God's operation unfold through time, whether through the long wait of the Old Testament or the short wait of the *triduum*. To put it in Jessica Powers' words:

> Come is the love song of our race and Come
> our basic word of individual wooing
> …
> It is the shaft of the flame-hungry Church
> in Paschal spring, or the heart's javelin tossed
> privately at the clouds to pierce them through
> and drown one in the flood of some amazing
> personal Pentecost.[16]

In this perspective, Messianism emerges as a spiritual attitude. The monotheistic perspective, from the Old Testament to us, proclaims a wait that is an intrinsic component of the earthly relationship to God. Even when a given phase in the process has reached its culmination, most of all in the Incarnation, we must still live the implications of that particular wait, we must wait in turn as our personal history unfolds. The past advents are to be re-lived as we discover how our own advent can and should be lived as a state.

The trinitarian implications of waiting may not be immediately apparent, but they are real and significant. They tell us in a most concrete way about the internal dynamics of the absolute—who also waits. The promise of the Messiah, this supreme object of the waiting, declares God's total and yet unsoiled involvement with time.[17] The absolute remains such, yet not as a sort of parallax conditioned only by the perspective of the viewer—ultimately, an illusion. The absolute remains such, while being wholly incarnate in his dealing with creation. The Old Testament incarnation of the word is as real as the New Testament Incarnation of the Word. And it is in this detaching of the undetachable, in this articulation within time of what cannot be articulated, in this waiting where there can

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[16]From the poem "Come Is the Love Song," in *The Selected Poetry of Jessica Powers* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1999), 49.

[17]On the seriousness of God's involvement with time, see the eloquent and profound pages of Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (1959) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

be no wait, that humans first perceived, in history, the revelation of the trinitarian absolute.

In other words, waiting is the form taken by the perception of a dynamics within the absolute—and it is a non-vectorial perception of what appears at first to be an exclusively vectorial dimension. Waiting in time implies a direction from one finite point to another. When waiting, we look to a point in time, a finite moment when an event might happen. Waiting for God means that we, as the subjects of the action, wait for a finite moment, while knowing that he, as the object of the desire, never will be such a finite moment. In some ways we expect God to share in our deferring while remaining beyond it. We perceive God to be involved in our directional, vectorial being because of a real, if non-vectorial, dynamism in his inner life—because of the trinitarian essence of the divine absolute. Messianism is, in this light, the other face of creation. The creation ethos of the Old Testament underscores the involvement of the absolute with the relative, as the latter is posited by the former: a vectorial movement is set in motion that tends toward a target from a given starting point, while neither the start nor the end are, properly speaking, "points" at all.

In this recognition of a dynamic dimension within the absolute we are aided by the yearnings, perhaps more than by the insights, of contemporary deconstructionist thought.[18] Deconstruction may be viewed as the philosophy of advent, one that opens the door to a deeper apprehension of trinitarian reality. For deconstruction senses a dynamics that is, and is not, within the absolute, proposing that the already and the not yet are one, that the one who is to come has come already. In this light, its paradoxical stance, which is so uncomfortable in one respect, provides the comfort of a frame of mind within which to think of the absolute in what is effectively a trinitarian mode: advent as a motion toward and as a state within. And this uncomfortableness serves at the same time as a warning against a dangerous presumption, one that unwittingly assumes we "own" the term "Trinity," and thereby also the reality for which it stands. A trinitarian mode of thinking emerges, thereby, as the one that most closely suits the contemporary restless search for a deeper rest, for that higher plane where dynamics and stasis are one.

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[18]This I will develop more fully in a forthcoming article entitled "Trinity *spermatiké*: The Veiled Perception of a Pagan World."

3.2 The Old Testament catechumenate

At the basis of my current effort is a description of what I would like to call the Old Testament catechumenate, the search for an explicitly trinitarian dimension of the Old Testament—after we have seen, in the preceding section, how this catechumenate shaped the perception of those who first came in contact with the disclosure of the Trinity in and through their human counterpart, Jesus. God has no perception, because he is infinite. Only we have perceptions, and our perception of the Trinity is through the Son. The beatific vision entails a sharing in a non-perceptual vision of Yahweh, sanctified as we are through the sacraments which in-Christ us to him as he in-fleshed himself to us.

It is not just a matter of re-reading the Old Testament in trinitarian terms.[19] Rather, Yahweh is active in the Old Testament *qua* the Logos: *to en autois pneuma Xristou promarturomenon*, "the spirit of Christ who was in them testifying ahead of time" (1 Pt 1:11). Conversely, Jesus speaks as Yahweh in the New: *Hē petra de en ho Xristós* "The rock (from which our fathers drank in the desert) in fact was the Christ" (1 Cor 10:4). The Old Testament *is intrinsically* trinitarian, not just as a foreshadowing, much less as a locus for pious retrospection or retrojection of later theory and doctrine.

Reviewing the moments in history when specific traits of such a pre-trinitarian trinitarian mode of thinking seem to take shape would entail writing a history of ancient Israelite spirituality. And a proper historiographic validation of such a proposed history would entail going well beyond the biblical narrative as such. The best I can do here is the least—to point at some specific modes of perception. I will leave aside an articulation of the reasons as to why and where

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[19]Of the authors who have seriously looked at the Old Testament as a locus of trinitarian experience, I have found Bruno Forte particularly significant: *Trinità come storia. Saggio sul Dio cristiano* (Milan: San Paolo, 1997) (1st edition 1985; Eng. trans. *The Trinity as History. Saga of the Christian God* [New York: Alba House, 1989]), esp. ch. 2.2.a. For a recent review of various Old Testament themes pertaining to the Trinity, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity. Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), esp. 4–7, 8–10. None of these themes, however, is in line with the emphasis I am placing here on the psychological impact of a perceived reality. At the opposite end, one can find a singularly obtuse reading of Christian trinitarian spirituality in Harold Bloom, *Jesus and Yahweh: the Names Divine* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005).

these apprehensions can be understood as facts, can be located on a temporal sequence, can be, in other words, seen as properly historical—and not because I feel it cannot be done.[20] I will only briefly describe the varying perceptual ranges of the way in which the *particularity* of God is apprehended (see above, 1.5), through varying manifestations that emerge in time as alternative modes of a single, coherent attitude of waiting. Whether such a typological seriation[21] does in fact correspond to a chronological sequence is not important for our present purpose, which is simply to focus on the typology of the pertinent attitudes.

3.3 The God of Abraham: the particularity of the call

The first aspect to consider is the *particularity of the call* as attributed to Abraham. The singling out of a particular individual is marked with great significance through a number of relevant details. The call is late in time: Abraham is seen as arising out of a well-established civilization, which has run a long developmental course and which he is called to leave behind. The call is unexpected: there is no preparation for its reception, no cultural humus from which it might be expected to grow of its own accord. The call is asymmetrical: Abraham is low on any scale of greatness, precariously uprooted and on the move. The call is suffered: the profound contradiction inherent in the expected sacrifice of the first in a promised long line of descendents sheds a tragic light on the rapport between the caller and the called. In all respects, the call stands outside normal patterns. Abraham is not, by any means, a typical figure. Far from being a *topos*, he is the most specific representation of the particular. God relates to him as he would to no one else. God depends on Abraham's answer. God waits for him.

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[20]With regard to the patriarchal tradition, for example, I have argued in a number of articles, written primarily from a Mesopotamian point of view, for an essential historical kernel that underlies not only events and individuals, but also, I believe, the ideological innovation embodied in that tradition. The latest of these articles, entitled "Il secondo millennio a.C. nella memoria epica di Giuda e Israele," was published in *Rivista Teologica di Lugano* 3 (2004): 521–544.

[21]"Seriation" is a technical term specific to archaeology: it refers to a procedure whereby the typological arrangement of objects is presumed to reflect a given chronological sequence.

This reciprocal waiting is closely linked with the notion of particularity. Abraham does not wait idly for something generic to happen. He faces a specific promise that he thinks he understands, but which nevertheless has to take shape in its progressive modalities. No sooner does he arrive at a promised destination than the destination itself is called into doubt, the potential loss of his first-born being the most tragic. God is shown as waiting, too: "because *now* I know that you fear God" (Gn 22:12). It is not a question of a generic passing of time. Each waits for something very specific. The particularity of the call expects the particularity of the response. It is the very reciprocal confrontation that proclaims particularity, one that is wholly foreign to the polytheistic mindset where, ironically, the very multitude of "particular" deities betrays an undercurrent of pantheistic amorphousness. They are in fact but generic icons, without the dynamics of personal and truly particular interaction, one which entails waiting with all the attendant connotations of risk and faith.

Beyond the emblematic figure of Abraham, the notion of a particular call emerges as central to the whole biblical ethos. It applies to countless individuals (Moses, David, Jeremiah, and so on), with the coherence of difference. It develops to include the whole social group—uniquely "chosen." It proclaims a tensional interaction that excludes being taken for granted, and rests instead on the risk of waiting for each other's response. Abraham's ascent to the mountain of Moriah (Gn 22:2) tells this in the most dramatic way. It speaks against all staticity: no manifestation of divine grace should ever be seen as something to be owned. Abraham must consider even his son, Isaac, as a dynamic gift, not as a static given. It is against the static Isaacs of his own days that Jesus takes a strong position. Even stones, he claims, can receive a call to sonship (Mt 3:9). Conversely, when biological descent is viewed as mere automatic sonship that lifts the responsibility of consequent dynamic action, then these biological descendants are effectively turned into stones ("If you are children of Abraham, then do the works of Abraham," Jn 8:39). Everyone, in other words, must be alert to the particularity of his or her call, must be dynamically alive, not passively inert.

3.4 The face of God: the particularity of the confrontation

The call is particular in the specific sense that it addresses a multitude of diverseness, while retaining the profound coherence of

oneness. And it evokes responses that are just as particular, all the more so as they often emerge out of unexpected dimensions of harshness and suffering. Emblematic in this respect is Jacob's fight, at Peni'el, with an unknown man who in the end is obliquely identified as God (Gn 32:24–32, see Hos 12:3–4). It is the nature of the confrontation that is of interest in our context. Within Jacob's loneliness a human figure appears who, without a stated cause or argument, wrestles with him. It is a protracted struggle, in which Jacob's endurance ("until daybreak" and "I will not let you go") emerges as a signal virtue. He remains himself, without yielding (the unknown man "cannot prevail"), yet, it seems, without arrogance ("unless you bless me"). There is no glorious epiphany. It is as if the "adversary" were long since known—and yet perennially unknown, to be rediscovered each time. The episode as related leads to the specificity of a greater definition: Jacob's disjointed hip results in a permanent limp; his name is changed to embody the merit of confrontation as if for its own sake ("Israel, for you have striven with God and humans"); the confronter's face emerges as the supreme referent ("for I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved"); but his name remains unsaid ("Why such a question—that you should ask my name!").

The contrast between revealing the face and hiding the name is significant. The stress is on the priority of confrontation over representation. The face can be seen only in real time, while the interlocutors are present to each other. It cannot be appropriated, except through memory. Its primary reality lives in the direct encounter. A name, on the other hand, is intrinsically a referential representation. It is based on a one-to-one correspondence. It is, in other words, a univocal signpost, wherein a segment of reality is grafted onto a segment of expression that retains its referential consistency whether or not the referent is physically in view. (Hence the great importance of onomastics in both the biblical and the Syro-Mesopotamian world.) In the Peni'el episode, confrontation is privileged to the exclusion of referentiality. The significance is underscored by the fact that the unnamed presence not only clings to the mystery of his own unreferentiality, but also alters the referential dimension of Jacob—whose name is changed. An unexpected depth of insight can be seen in this stark contrast of the unnamed[22] claiming

[22]Note the contrast with Mesopotamia. As a result partly of syncretism, and partly

to impose a new name. Far from being denied, the value of the name is heightened. It is rooted in the actual presence.

In that it signals the primacy of presence, without devaluing referentiality, the episode signals the primacy of life—and of mystery. Countless are the other episodes where a face to face confrontation defines, in the Old Testament, the human experience of God—from Adam to Moses, from David to Elijah, and, applied potentially to each member of the community, in the Psalms or in the Wisdom texts. Everywhere, a lived and suffered confrontation is at the core of religious experience. Paradoxically, and all the more dramatically, one comes face to face with a god whose face one cannot see, following a dynamic that is set up as emblematic in the primordial episode in Genesis. There, it is the humans who escape from a physically perceptible presence (Gn 3:8), and as a result an impenetrable barrier is set up to keep them from the easy access they had enjoyed (Gn 3:24). But this boundary does not annul the need for some access in whatever form. If anything, it reinforces it, as is powerfully expressed in a psalm: "O God, you are my God, I search for you, my soul thirsts for you, my flesh yearns for you, in a land of drought and thirst, without water" (Ps 63:2). As if referring to the situation described in Genesis, with an effort to reverse the effects deriving from the new barrier, the psalms plead: "Do not hide your face from me" (Ps 27:9; 144:7).

The later attitude in Judaism vis-à-vis the divine name (it could no longer be uttered, and could only be written in its consonantal skeleton YHWH; see above, 2.7), and the correlative development of the notion of *shekinah* ("dwelling" in the sense of "presence") show a profound coherence with the earlier biblical situation I have briefly described. It could easily develop into a

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of the concern not to omit unwittingly any "portion" of the divine referent, the names of God are multiplied, to the point that, for instance, the last tablet of the *Enuma Elish* is devoted almost entirely to the detailed exposition of fifty names of Marduk. It is an attempt to proclaim the cumulative notion of the absolute on the one hand, and to merge at the same time its portions into a single intellectual construct. Analogously, the "unknown god" to whom an altar is dedicated in Athens (Acts 17:23) is not a signpost of mystery; rather it reflects the intent of the Athenians not to forget any fragment of the divine world, even one so possibly minute or remote as to escape attention. Paul interprets this attitude in a positive (and possibly ironic) way as being indicative of great religiosity (or superstition: Acts 17:22).

mannerism, where the skeleton (the "Tetragrammaton"), which was supposed to deflect attention from the referent (the name) and direct it to the referenced (the present and living God), becomes instead itself the referenced, the center of attention. It is at this point in time, and in this milieu, that the Annunciation takes place, when, suddenly, the confrontation with the face of God acquires a whole new dimension. The search had been for a face unpredictable except, perhaps, for the firm expectation that it would be far from amorphous. The attitude of the search, passionate, insistent, had in fact stressed the particularity of the search's target. And in the apprehension of this particularity of the unknown face lay the presentiment that the face may indeed be endowed with particularity within itself—that the face may be that of the trinitarian absolute.

3.5 The Torah as logos: the particularity of the ordered system

What we normally translate as "law" can be seen in a more properly metaphysical light if we consider the profound unity between being and goodness and between being and knowledge. Outwardly, the law is a conglomerate of ordinances. But, by virtue of being anchored in the creative will of God, it is at the same time the matrix of reality. The profound difference from the Mesopotamian notion of fate helps to understand its nature. There is no Torah in Mesopotamia because fate does not will it—in fact, fate does not will anything, but is rather itself the sum total of what happens and can ever happen. Interestingly, the basic moral precepts outlined in the Bible are found almost verbatim in Mesopotamia, and even in the New Testament there are important, almost literal, echoes.[23] The real difference is in their foundational origin. In the Bible they derive from, and are founded on, the explicit will of a creator God who posits the rules not to coerce a pre-existing reality, but to establish reality itself with its particular teleological nature. In other words, the rule is the same as both the creation and the goal.

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[23]I have outlined in particular the correlation to the Decalogue and to the Beatitudes in my article "Ethics and Piety in the Ancient Near East," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson (New York: Scribner, 1995), vol. 3, 1685–1696.

For our current argument, it is the particularity of the systemic order of reality that is of interest. God is so enmeshed in creation that he establishes the very last detail of finality, for which the Torah serves as though it were a blueprint. But it is a living blueprint, as it were, for there is a constant correlation between it and the "living God" who has posited it—or, rather, constantly *posits* it, through a mysterious match between the eternal and the temporal present. The Torah is not a fossil, but a living organism, identical with the personal will from which it issues forth and which nurtures those for whom it is meant:

> When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. I called them—but they went from me, sacrificing to the Baals, offering incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. As a man would do, I led them with supporting straps, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. (Hos 11:1–4)

To this living Torah, humans must relate with the adherence of a lived response—prophetically:

> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will give [to be] within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your body and I will give you a heart of flesh. Yes, *my* spirit I will give [to be] within you, and I will make it so that you walk in the line of my willed decisions and I will make it so that you adhere to my particular determinations. (Ez 36:26–27)

The live interaction between God as the *constitutive* order and humans as the *constituted* order of reality presents us with the utmost degree of particularity: the most minute element of order is willed because it is so established. The Torah is the logos because it is both the rationale of being and the rationale of its adherence to its foundational point of origin, in every single manifestation of its nature. Hence it is that the Torah is a presentiment of the Logos. What would otherwise be a mere set of rules is transcended into a living principle, one that articulates the totality of details in their most minute particularity.

Two additional remarks are pertinent here. The first concerns the objectification of the divine grand order of things on stone tablets. Diverging details are given about the giving of the law.

First, "the law and the injunction" (Ex 24:12) are written by God's own finger (Ex 31:18; 32:16), so that the tablets can be qualified as the "tablets of the testimony" (Ex 31:18), because they give witness to God's direct involvement. Then, after the first tablets are shattered by Moses, God asks him to cut a second set of "two tablets of stone like the first ones" (Ex 34:1) saying that he, Yahweh, will "inscribe on them the words that were on the first tablets" (Ex 34:1). In the end, though, it is Moses who inscribes the tablets with "the words of the covenant—ten words" (Ex 34:28). While reminiscent, on the surface, of the Mesopotamian "tablet of destinies,"[24] the differences are more striking than the similarities. The Exodus tablets are written *by* a particular agent (they do not exist as primordial entities with a self-endowed power); they are written *for* a specific purpose (their use by the people with whom Yahweh establishes a covenant); their breakage causes no particular commotion (in fact, they come eventually to be reproduced by a lesser agent); the very fact of reproducibility entails that their eventual total loss represents no special metaphysical problem. In other words, the objectification in the shape of physical tablets is ultimately subordinated to the overriding control of divine will.

The second remark pertains to the reflections about canon law as developed by Eugenio Corecco.[25] Like the legislative component of the Torah, canon law is a codification system that spells out a detailed framework within which human relations are regulated. If mechanically objectified, both become the unbearable yoke about which Jesus speaks when he argues against intellectuals (scribes) and outwardly religious people (pharisees) who arrogate to themselves Mosaic authority ("scribes and pharisees sit on the chair of Moses," Mt 23:2) and "tie and place on people's shoulders heavy

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[24]See my article, "The Trinity in a Mesopotamian Perspective," presented at a conference on "The Historical-Critical Method and Scripture, the Soul of Theology," held at Mount Saint Mary Seminary in Emmitsburg 23 June 2006, forthcoming in a volume edited by Robert D. Miller.

[25]See especially *The Theology of Canon Law. A Methodological Question* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1992). The book develops the notion of the "unity of law" as a paradox that is rooted in both love and institution, freedom and limitation, because "canonical discipline guarantees the unity of the symbols of faith, of the Sacraments, of the preaching of the Word, of the ecclesial constitution" (3); in fact, it ultimately guarantees "fidelity to communion" (ibid.) and assumes "salvific worth" (77).

and oppressive burdens" (Mt 23:4). And yet, for this same Jesus, even the smallest stroke of a letter in the Law's written embodiment must command our fullest attention ("until heaven and earth go by, not one iota, not one small serif in a letter will go by" Mt 5:18). What gives life to the law is the inherent proclamation that God is directly involved in the particularity of time and space, of human life in its unfolding. Poetry offers a good parallel: its inner life is not in the strictures of meter, and yet meter is self-declared the moment the poet begins to channel feelings through the medium of particular words. Similarly, canon law, like the Torah, can be seen as God's poetry in articulating the particular details of the finite as it relates to the un-hemmed dimension of the absolute. That is why seemingly absurd regulations that seem to choke individual freedom can be received instead as a spiritual sign of an explosive divine grace.

3.6 The covenant: the particularity of the relationship

It seems rather contradictory that a most universal notion of the absolute, as it emerges from the Old Testament, should be tied to a social group of such a persistent and consistent marginal provincialism as ancient Israel. The unique religious flowering that characterizes it had absolutely no influence on the broader course of civilization, not until its prophetic period came to an end and Christianity claimed to pick up and bear the torch of that deeper prophetic dimension. It is important to stress that the self-perception of ancient Israel shows little evidence of any delusion of grandeur in the political or cultural sphere. Their epic memory clings to an inglorious nomadic past;[26] their cultic reenactment eternalizes an early condition of slavery; their greatest political achievement is but

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[26]My understanding of the record is that the text of Genesis contains a relatively ancient epic memory of an even more ancient, real past (see my "Ethics and Piety in the Ancient Near East"). If one accepts the opposite prevailing view—namely, that it was instead a learned invention of the exilic period—it is even more striking that these savants, uprooted from their homeland for which they professed great nostalgia (Ps 137:1–6) and immersed into a glittering urban culture in which they eventually prospered to the point that the nostalgia became a literary topos, should have picked for a reconstruction of their origins such an unflattering and decidedly non-urban set of themes as the ones found in Genesis.

a minor provincial kingdom; their art and architecture is essentially derivative; their social fabric is torn to shreds when they lose all measure of political integrity. But they proclaim unflinchingly that the God of all-that-they-are-not has chosen to be bound to the very-little-that-they-are. There is never a sense of embarrassment at the curious logic that they embrace, namely that such a lofty deity should be bound by the constraints of so particular, and so particularly humbling, a relationship.

If anything, the logic becomes more self-assured as the reasons for potential scandal increase. Thus the notion of remnant celebrates the poverty of the human base, as if it could drag the absolute into an ever greater situation of finitude. There is an inverted proportion between such poverty and the ever more elevated notion that the God of the small remnant is in fact the one and only universal God: the particularity of this God emerges as all the more stunning because of the insignificance of the human pole in the relationship. The perception grows that he is "faithful" just as his promise seems to wane. He had promised universality to Abraham, and now the death from which Abraham's son had been spared hovers ominously upon his latter-day children. God is perceived to be attached to an ever slimmer portion of the universe he is supposed to rule. And yet, he is faithful, in the eyes of the remnant, to the covenant he had offered. True, God freely chooses these covenantal bonds, but they are bonds nevertheless. They proclaim a very particular aim in the choice of the terms of his relationship.

These terms could not be more explicit, for they are embedded in a covenant that posits obligations. The seeming contradiction is precisely in the proclamation of limits placed on the absolute. Nor does the fact that these limits are seen as being self-imposed reduce their impact. The notion of covenant is as important for what it tells us about God as for what it tells us about the human recipients of its benefits. It tells us that particularity is built into the very essence of the divine absolute, because of the explicit choices made and the specific consequences that ensue from them. Herein we can see one of the clearest anticipations of the notion of person, as it will be elaborated in the early centuries of Christianity. The absolute is not amorphous—the strictures of the covenantal interaction bring this out sharply. It is as if the reality of the personal dimension were perceived not statically, but as the point of origin of a web of ties, very

explicit and well-defined as to their limits and conditions by virtue of the specificity of the originator of those very ties.

To appreciate properly what this means, it is useful to consider how the notion of covenant reflects another strong contrast with Mesopotamia, all the more so as the two conflicting perceptions address one and the same fundamental human need, that of security. Mesopotamian polytheism seeks security in predictability as a form of control, while biblical monotheism seeks security in trust as a form of surrender. In the former, the divine sphere is discovered through the progressive accretion of knowledge, which is appropriated and remains as such at the disposal of human enterprise. In the latter, the divine person proclaims faithfulness to a commitment, a faithfulness that cannot be grasped and owned, and to which humans are called to adhere even and especially when (un-controllable) events and phenomena contradict, at all appearances, the reliability of the divine signatory. As in other respects, here, too, we can see an important parallel with the modern situation. When science aims to provide the ultimate answer, as if in contrast with religion, it relies on the predictability of laws that entail control. Faith by no means excludes the validity of such laws, but it sees them as applicable only within partial domains of reality. When it comes to the question of ultimate predictability, faith proposes trust in an absolute that is at the same time universal and particular, i.e., capable of affirming, for himself, limits set in a covenantal mold. It is on these limits that the predictability of trust is based. And it must be noted that, in the final analysis, a science as a "universal theory of the universe" relies just as much on trust, trust in the coherence of laws and of the conceptual construct within which such laws are articulated—ultimately, trust in the impersonal.

The profound significance of the notion of covenant is underscored by the solemnity with which the "new covenant" (*kainē diathēkē*) is announced by Jesus when he offers the cup of wine at the last supper: "this is my blood of the covenant" (Mt 26:28 | Mk 14:24), "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20). In one of the many subtle instances where Jesus acts as the Yahweh of old, we see the originator of the covenant emerge in his full personality and individuality. The awesome echo inherent in the word "covenant" (*bᵉrît* in Hebrew) would not have escaped the addressees of the proclamation, the apostles gathered in the upper room. The newly established covenantal links could not be tied more explicitly and specifically to the originator. It is not only that

the person Jesus emerges as the lord of the covenant, but also that his physical participation remains linked to the covenant beyond, and through, his death. Note the seemingly curious phrasing: "my blood of the covenant" (*to haima mou tes diathēkēs*). The pronominal qualification of the blood ("*my* blood") is not in opposition to somebody else's blood—for there is no other "blood of the covenant." Rather, the genitive functions as an adjective ("my blood-of-covenant"), and it brings to the fore the personal involvement of the lord of the covenant. It underscores how such an involvement was true of the covenantal mode in the Old "Testament" (i.e., covenant) as well. While there was then no blood shed by Yahweh, the particularity of the involvement was the same.

The dynamism of this covenantal relationship, with all the particularity deriving from the personal, in fact physical, involvement of Jesus, is also the humus that nurtures the eventual apprehension of the Spirit as a trinitarian person. The covenant is always in flux, yet always anchored. And so is the Church. The Old Testament training is in the proposition that God is so particular as to be at the same time the foundation of the covenant (the covenanter) and the energy that sustains and inspires the covenanted. The human trust in the absolute is not of human making. It rather flows *from* the absolute in the first place. That is why the Church, like the covenant, does not immobilize interaction into a frozen construct. It is rather rooted in a spirit who is like wind that blows or fire that sparks. The human acceptance of God-the-spirit allows the interaction with God-the-creator. So the relationship not only originates in, not only is drawn toward, but is also sustained by a particular action of the absolute, in the most personal of modes. Again, it is such an insight that shapes the perceptual background against which the dynamics of God the Trinity unfolds from the Annunciation onwards. The Spirit as the announcer and the Son as the announced bespeak the Father as the originator.

3.7 The word of God: the particularity of the articulation

God expresses himself. What he has to say is embodied in articulate human speech. His "word" emerges more and more sharply, through all the definiteness of human language, as something circumscribed, hence very particular. The "word of God" (*dəbar ha'elohîm*) is the term of comparison used for the counsel given by a

royal advisor (2 Sam 16:23): that is to say, it is a very specific expression, fully articulated not only as to manner of speech, but as to content as well. There is no equivocation, either in the way it is expressed or in the way it is understood.

This definiteness finds its full manifestation especially in the prophetic realm. The prophet's voice gives utterance to His word: it is a "vehicle" that carries in all its specificity what God intends to communicate. Such is the etymological valence of the Hebrew word we translate as "oracle" (*maśśā*, from *naśā*, "to carry"). We find the full formulation as the title of a prophetic book: "vehicle of the word of Yahweh" (*maśśā dəbar YHWH*), i.e., "oracle to Israel at the hand of Malachi" (Mal 1:1). In the many other occurrences of the word *maśśā*, the qualification "word of Yahweh" is missing, and may be understood as a systemic deletion (somewhat like *šeqel*, "weight," omits the specific mention of "silver," which is implied when the term refers to a unit of payment). But, if deleted, we may assume that "word of God" is the operative element in all cases, even when missing.

At any rate, God speaks a specific word to which humans and the whole of creation must pay close attention: "Listen, heavens, and open the ears, earth—for Yahweh speaks" (Is 1:2). And what follows in Isaiah are specific "words," specifically attributed to Yahweh as the speaker. This is the overriding sense of the Old Testament. The "word of God" is not just an anonymous "Word" (however much with a capital W) seen as a generic and inarticulate creative force. It is in fact articulate speech, a discourse where specific "words" bring out the full particularity of the speaker and of his will. Herein, once more, lies the great difference vis-à-vis polytheism as in Mesopotamia—where the "word" of a given god (such as Marduk in the *Enuma Elish,* 4:15-27) refers not so much to a communicative linguistic utterance, as to a nod that results in a given effect.

The built-in antinomy between the absolute and the particular is the dimension that matters to us here. Yahweh's word is reductive because it communicates at a level that is truly human. It is reductive in the specific sense that it encapsulates the divine within a frame of reference that is culturally bound and definable. The Word is made word, the universal translates to the particular, the absolute to the relative. This unique property, which allows the functional bracketing of two dimensions that cannot be bracketed as to their substance, is the genius of ancient Israel. And it is this

perceptual openness that makes it possible, at the Annunciation, for the Logos to be accepted as history.

3.8 The prophetic "I": the particularity of the address

The prophet's involvement in communicating the specific divine "words" goes well beyond serving as a mere vehicle (*maśśā*), as a mouthpiece. In a way, it almost seems as though the prophet gives voice to Yahweh's shedding blood in the Old Testament as well. *His* "blood of the covenant" (anticipating Jesus', see above, 3.6) is the intense degree of passion with which he is perceived to address those who are supposed to listen, even (in fact, especially) when they do not. God speaks—unpredictably, unexpectedly, unimaginably. And God bears the hurt of his word being unreciprocated. The dramatic tension built into this profound antinomy shows, at its most apparent, the poignancy of divine particularity. For Yahweh's particularity emerges not only in what he posits or what he does—but also in how he personally acts, in how he suffers for the ensuing consequences. Let us touch briefly on three salient aspects of this dynamics.

God speaks in the first person when addressing, singly, specific individuals in a variety of different situations (Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Hosea, etc.). The episode of Samuel is particularly telling: the young boy hears physically a voice in the night, and through inexperience cannot identify the speaker. But it is not only to individuals that God speaks in the first person. Through the intermediary of the prophets, he speaks to the community as well. Thus, through Hosea (2:21): "I will pay the final bride price for you—I will do so through righteousness and justice, through kindness and through mercy." The prophetic message broadcasts the mystical insight of the individual, thereby making it, as it were, a mystical experience on a broad social scale. This is one of the sharpest contrasts with the polytheistic religious reality, such as the Mesopotamian, where such a first-person address on the part of any of the gods is hardly ever documented. It is also in contrast, one might note, with the wisdom tradition within the Bible itself: there God is predicated essentially in the third person, through a reflection that speaks more *about* him rather than *qua* himself.

The second aspect is that the poignancy of the personal involvement is all the more striking because the first person is used

not only as a form of address but also to externalize divine feelings. It is in fact a strong lyrical component of the biblical text that it should be giving voice to the divine urge to share emotions. These come to the fore with special intensity when they relate to love, and to the hurt of love unrequited. "What shall I do with you, Ephraim? What shall I do with you, Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early" (Hos 6:4). The emphatic, emotional participation of the divine "I" is without parallel in the ancient Near East. However less anthropomorphic Yahweh may seem on the superficial level of figurative imaging, the more "human" he emerges as to the deeper reaches of the psychological realm.

Finally, Yahweh's "I" is seen in even sharper focus through the "I" of Jesus. In subtle but clear ways, Jesus projects the same persona that Yahweh did in the Old Testament.[27] The prophetic "I" reaches its culmination because Jesus does not present himself as the mouthpiece of Yahweh, but rather speaks altogether in the first person: "As an absolute truth I say to you that before the coming into existence of Abraham, I am" (Jn 8:58). In retrospect, this helps to understand the Old Testament. The prophetic mouthpiece was not a poetic nicety. Yahweh's passionate involvement had to find a real way out of the divine beyond. Like the magma of a volcano, it had to explode through the cracks of human expression and so become incultured. The supreme explosion was to be the infleshing in Jesus. The voice is now personified. The Logos himself *is* the voice, he is the "I" who speaks even through merely being.

The reason I believe this has a bearing on my search for a pre-trinitarian trinitarian apprehension is the sharpness of the polarity that we see emerge within the absolute (see already above, 1.5). By relating emotionally, God places himself on the same level as the recipient of his emotions. We see true inter-action develop, and not a benign condescending to an inferior counterpart. And yet—God remains absolute, not fragmented into his own emotions. That is the wonder of the Old Testament apprehension: God's particularity explodes incultured (if not yet infleshed) in the most real of human dialogues, and yet God remains above and beyond the culture that might otherwise seem to imprison him. God is an agent within

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[27]See the insightful comments of J. Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus. An Intermillennial Interfaith Exchange* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), especially 66–74.

culture, and yet he acts wholly beyond it. Thus there is an apprehension of personal definition within the divine reality. Personal interaction *ad extra* is an essential aspect of Yahweh, of such an overriding intensity as to prepare human sensitivity for what, through Jesus, will come to be known as personal interaction *ad intra*.

One might say that the figures of the polytheistic pantheon, the gods and the goddesses, are also endowed with "personality." And that is true, inasmuch as they appear as lively protagonists of narratives rich with character. But there is never any recognition, let alone any exclusive emphasis, on the absoluteness of the divine agent. They are always multiple actors on the same stage, interacting and limiting each other, with no claim whatsoever to absoluteness. Fate on the other hand, which might appear to claim such absoluteness, never does project a personality, never does achieve the stature of a person. "It" does not speak in the first person—in the specific sense of the passionate, prophetic "I" that is so deeply characteristic of the Old Testament God. Truly, Fate never feels and expresses feelings as a "who," but only acts impersonally as a "which."

3.9 The living God: particularity as self-awareness

Perhaps the most poignant emergence of a trinitarian dimension is the notion of the "living God" that punctuates different strands of the Old Testament. For it goes to the epicenter of divine self-awareness in ways that the polytheistic conception never could fathom. The predication of God's life is not so much in contrast with a state of death to be predicated of the "other" gods as it is in contrast with their effective immobility. God is felt to be alive because in him we face divine self-consciousness: whatever mystery may shade the absolute from *our* awareness, we stand reassured that the absolute is not a mystery for himself. God is awake to his own mystery.

The theme of wakefulness is a telling one because of the contrast it proposes with the Mesopotamian perception. When Psalm 121 describes the watchfulness of Yahweh ("your guardian will not fall asleep, indeed, the guardian of Israel will not grow drowsy to the point of falling asleep," 3–4), the obvious echo for any listener familiar with Mesopotamian religious lore is from Atram-hasis or Anzu: there, the supreme god, Enlil, does grow drowsy to the point

of falling asleep, and the whole order of things is subverted in the process. Sleep is as much a counterpart of self-consciousness as death is. God's sleep, his tumbling into unawareness, causes the collapse of, we might say, all metaphysical regularity. By contrast, the living God is a god awake, awake in the first place to himself as the foundation of all being.

In this Old Testament perception we witness the Absolute bending over onto himself, as it were. To the outside, God being awake, God being alive matters because humans can rest assured that he will not neglect them, that (more broadly) the cosmic order will not be undermined. But the notion of the living God prefigures, at the same time, the *ad intra* dynamics of God's very life. It is an explicit denial of genericity in the divine absolute, and a proclamation instead of the supreme particularity of the person as a fulcrum of self-awareness.

This perception comes to a culmination with Jesus, through a double paradox. Jesus is the living God in the most concrete way: for in him we touch, physically, the Logos (see above, 2.4). And yet—he sleeps, he dies.

After a tiring day, he falls asleep, on a cushion, in the back of the boat. A great storm arises, and his disciples, experienced sailors, are afraid of capsizing and drowning. They turn to Jesus, asleep, for help: "They woke him up saying: Lord, save [us]! We are perishing!" (Mt 8:25); "They woke him up saying: Chief, chief, we are perishing!" (Lk 8:24); "They wake him up and say to him: Teacher, it doesn't matter to you whether we perish?" (Mk 4:38). Jesus, awakened, "reproaches" (*epetimēsen*) the wind and the sea. But he also rebukes the apostles for their lack of faith (Mk 4:40 | Mt 8:25 | Lk 8:26). This second reproach seems curious at first: after all, the apostles had turned to him precisely because they expected him to be able to save them. So why does he accuse them of being lacking in both faith and courage? (Courage appears only in Matthew and Mark—and remember, they were more experienced sailors than Jesus was.) Should they have let the boat capsize? Should they not have awakened the sleeping Jesus? What we may be witnessing here is a moment in the counterpoint training whereby the apostles slowly gain an insight into what came to be known as the dual nature of Jesus. Jesus asleep is God awake. On the one hand, he is very tired, and so truly and deeply asleep that not even the noise of the storm can wake him up. The apostles know him as thoroughly human and fear that he, along with the rest of them, will

be engulfed in death-threatening waters if the boat capsizes. Yet on some level they know that he belongs to some untold beyond: in Mark's formulation, "doesn't it matter to you" suggests they know he is in some ways above and beyond sleep. Jesus' disappointment is clearly not that they are disturbing his sleep. Rather, it is that they do not sufficiently set store in that instinctive knowledge; that they should fear he may not exercise the power they perceive he has over wind and water, whether asleep or awake; that the apparent inaction, not the sleep as such, should perturb them.

There is, in this episode, a subtle anticipation of the apostles' perception of his death. While asleep, Jesus retained his unique connection with the Father. The apostles should have known. Just so, while dead, just as absolutely and truly so as when he had been asleep, Jesus remains "the one whose existence is in function of the womb of the Father" (Jn 1:18, see above, 2.4). The apostles should know. Jesus' disappointment on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:25) is not unlike that during the storm on the lake.

Jesus remains the living God while asleep, while dead. This is well in line with the Old Testament perception. The "guardian of Israel" does not sleep, does not die, even when his great silence and distance seem to suggest so. Divine self-consciousness transcends all such appearances. God is aware of himself—and that will lay to rest any and all fears humans may nurture in their "timidity" (as Jesus says of the apostles on the lake, Mt 8:26 | Mk 4:40).

3.10 The articulation of the absolute

The Old Testament perception of particularity within the divine sphere is intrinsically trinitarian, I submit, because it consistently and steadfastly faces a major paradox—the presence of articulation within an absolute who is, at the same time, wholly above any split within his deepest reality. In other words, the Old Testament never flinches from upholding the co-presence of a fully articulated particularity on the one hand and, on the other, of a oneness that can never be ripped apart. This is in the manner not of a theoretical statement, but of a coherently developing experiential awareness.

The contrast with polytheism helps us to elucidate the significance of the monotheistic apprehension. On the surface, it would appear that the presence of many divine beings entails a real

articulation within the divine sphere, and that by contrast the obsessive emphasis on a single deity does not. On the contrary. The gods and goddesses effectively limit each other. They are, in other words, neither singly nor collectively, proper embodiments of the absolute. There is articulation, indeed. But an articulation of relatives. The wonder of the monotheistic position is that articulation is inscribed within the very heart of the absolute, who is never relativized as a result of it.

It should be noted that in this, as in many other respects, polytheism in no way differs from pantheism. In both, it is the sum total of the particulars, the bracketing or bridging of the articulation, that constitutes the essence of the absolute. In polytheism the accent is on the articulated fragments, while in pantheism it is on the very phenomenon of articulation. Both are true to their name—"poly-" referring to the segmented multitude of constituents, "pan-" referring to the re-composition of the same into an overall totality. But, in both, the articulated many are the starting, and ending, target of attention. In monotheism, on the other hand, the absolute is the starting, and ending, point. Transcending fragmentation, the absolute is nevertheless articulated.

It is the sensitivity for this reality that is proposed and steadfastly maintained in the Old Testament, even as the sensitivity develops in its details over the centuries. I have used the term "particularity" to refer to such a wholly idiosyncratic trait: distinctiveness within an absolute who transcends definition, numeration (of one) where there is no numerability, articulation without fragmentation. All of this, in turn, evokes a trinitarian dimension. Not, clearly, in the specific manner intimated by Jesus and then made explicit and theoretically defined by later, abstract theological reflection. The trinitarian aspect of Abraham's call, I suggest, lies in his apprehending an inner dynamics within divine reality that safeguards absoluteness while proclaiming particularity. One simple way to put this is to consider the following juxtaposition. A Plato, listening to Jesus speaking about the Father and the Spirit, would come up with abstract concepts that give a sense of intellectual grasp and ownership (as it well may have happened along the way to the concept of "Trinity," which we may sometimes think we do "own"). There would be here no waiting for the particulars to meet (that is, the human and the divine particulars); there would be no Advent; there would be no Incarnation. On the other hand, an Abraham (and of course a Mary or a Joseph) reflecting on the same

issue would look at Jesus and realize with wonder that one would not call Jesus "Father," nor the Father "Jesus," and that one is called to adore each without numbering either. Here there would indeed be an Advent that leads to the eventual encounter of the particulars, to a suture of the waiting, to the Incarnation—because the divine particular does indeed come.

4. Perception and coherence

Against the backdrop of continuity, Pentecost had sealed the new beginning that was first set in motion by the Annunciation. The bracketing of the time span between the conception of Jesus and what is rightly perceived as the conception of the Church sets off that specific moment in history when, through the human Jesus, humans come in touch with the *Logos*—and the Trinity. Like all watersheds, the peak symbolizes the coherence of the slopes. It is on this coherence that we want to focus now, linking the Old Testament perception with that of the Christian church.

4.1 Models of early Christian experience

The *pleroma* perception (see above, 2.10) caused the apostles to bracket two contrasting experiences: they had known a physical Jesus, and they came to know now, after the Resurrection, a Jesus still physically perceivable, but elusively so, until the Ascension robbed them of even this elusive new state of being. I have stressed (2.12) how, before Pentecost, it was considered important to link apostleship with the personal acquaintance of the pre-Paschal, physical Jesus: the group of men out of whom Matthias was chosen (Acts 1:15–26) had gone together through the growing pains of the confrontation with the temporally perceivable humanity of Jesus. Matthias, like the others, had come slowly to accept Jesus as belonging to the two spheres, human and divine. His apprehension of Jesus' trinitarian mode of life had gone through stages marked by the progressive self-revelation of Jesus.

When Stephen is chosen along with six others (Acts 6:5), the aspect of historical continuity plays no role: it is very likely that the seven had indeed known and followed Jesus during his ministry, but not necessarily intimately nor "from the baptism of John" (Acts

1:22), as had been the requirement for Matthias. At any rate, the very mode of election sets the seven at one remove from Matthias. Theirs is clearly a post-Pentecostal election. What this means for my line of argument is that it signals a change in the perception of Jesus as the Logos. The emphasis is now more on the transposed mode of being, on the permanent Transfiguration, as it were. For the apostles (in fact, for just three among them) the Transfiguration had been a single and exceptional event, and their primary mode of acquaintance with Jesus had been the day-to-day normal human contact. Stephen's vision (Acts 7:55f), which led to his execution, represents the full crystallization of this new perception: the permanent Transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus remains himself, and yet he is incomprehensibly (blasphemously, for his accusers) absorbed within the *shekinah*. He is not "the" *shekinah*: this is the deeply trinitarian aspect of Stephen's perception. Jesus' "standing at the right side of God" conveys a sense of the dynamics of what the apostles had already seen develop in their human interaction with Jesus the "son-of-man."

Paul may well have known Jesus from a distance, but clearly not as a disciple. He had not grown slowly to see his other dimension, or rather: he had grown to see and so well appreciate his *claim* to this other dimension that, aligning himself with the Caiaphas perception (see above, 2.7), he became a committed activist against the followers of Jesus after his death. Thrown to the ground by a sudden burst of light, he hears a voice that articulates a reproach: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Notice that he does not see anyone, he only hears, and seeks to identify who had spoken: "Who are you, sir?" (Acts 9:3–5). Saul had been seeking to eradicate what he perceived to be a blasphemy: the claim of Jesus that had led to the condemnation by Caiaphas—the claim of Stephen, whose punishment Saul had personally witnessed. They were explicitly trinitarian claims. Now, on the road to Damascus, Saul does not see Jesus "standing at the right side of God" (Acts 7:55), as Stephen had. But the voice out of the light-borne darkness speaks to the same trinitarian reality as the vision: "I am Jesus whom you persecute" (Acts 9:5). The flashback in Saul's mind was to Stephen's words explaining his vision: Jesus "standing at the right side of God." It is as if Saul could see in his darkness through the brightness attested to by Stephen. The trinitarian claim Saul had rejected now claims in turn Saul's full attention—and assent. The subsequent encounter with Ananias brings this out ever more explicitly: "May you receive

the fullness of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Saul has no hesitation. "Immediately," he goes out to proclaim that "Jesus is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). The "blasphemy," which now Saul fully embraces, is not in seeing or hearing Jesus as one would a ghost beckoning from a "human" afterlife. The "blasphemy" is in recognizing that the afterlife to which Jesus belongs is not human, but properly and fully divine. The "blasphemy" is in accepting the profound trinitarian implications of Jesus' being in the *shekinah*.

Yet another paradigm of the early Christian experience is in the Gospel of John, accepting that the writer is the same as the first (in time) of the apostles to follow Jesus (Jn 1:35–39). We see there a remarkable blending of vivid and heartfelt harking back to an experienced physical reality and, at the same time, a reflection about the deeper impact and nature of that reality. While the synoptics are still extremely close to the physical reality, and while Paul is overwhelmed by the spiritual dimension of the post-Pentecostal Jesus, John embraces both, in ways that only his experience could have made possible. John fully re-lives his early experience in the light of the post-Pentecostal ethos. And so the expression of his trinitarian perception is at once soaked with history (the Logos for him was the Jesus he had seen and touched) and transfigured in post-history (that physically real Jesus is indeed the Logos). Mary's perception would have been even sharper than John's, spanning a fuller arc of time, from the Annunciation to Pentecost. But she was not called to articulate it in words—unless, as tradition aptly proposes, she influenced John's own perception.

4.2 The Christian trinitarian ethos

After the time of those who knew Jesus "in his days-of-flesh" (Heb 5:7), comes the experiential confrontation with the Trinity of those who did not so know him—including us. I have suggested that there is a deep, if often implicit, trinitarian dimension to the Christian apprehension of the divine, and that such apprehension is rooted in the Old Testament experience, with special regard to the notion of particularity (which is as far as I can take the present argument). Let us consider how this notion manifests itself in the mental and attitudinal template of the average Christian, in the Christian ethos, if you will. We will do this briefly from the

perspective of the Eucharist and of grace, focusing also on the Christian (and specifically, the Catholic) attitude toward the saints.

The Eucharist has never been known to be conceived as the locus where a saint, instead of Jesus, may be found. However one may intellectually construe the doctrine of transubstantiation, and however one may devotionally approach the exposed host, no one who ever bothered to relate to the Eucharist could ever see in it any other sacramental presence but that proclaimed at the Last Supper. It can safely be assumed, in other words, that no one who ever approaches the Eucharist with the intention of partaking physically of a hidden presence does ever think that this hidden presence may have been that of a saint. Nor does anyone, we may further assume, ever presume to see in the Eucharist either the Father or the Holy Spirit. In other words, the fundamental Christian perception, however unreflecting or even unconscious it may be, is based on clear distinctions that unhesitatingly affirm the particularity of Jesus, if and when the question itself is posed. The trinitarian dimension of Jesus comes to the fore by virtue of the very fact that, when juxtaposed to alternatives, his singular claim to divine personhood emerges without shadows. The most average of Christians shares, then, in the Marian perception we have outlined above (2.2).

Conversely, it is an important dimension of sacramental reality that every sacrament addresses a person in his or her very specific particularity. Even in the case of celebrations with large masses of people, the sacramental encounter is always at the most personal level. This is most emphatically made evident when large crowds receive Communion. It remains an event that always concerns the individual person, regardless of logistical difficulties and long timeframes. It is not in the nature of this, or any other sacrament, to be transmogrified into an amorphous mass equivalent, where the particularity of the encounter becomes blurred. The particularity of the recipient remains central at all times.

Similarly, a Christian's posture vis-à-vis God's intervention in his or her own personal history is intrinsically awake to the unique singularity of the divine interlocutor. It is called "grace." Grace is God's interaction with history writ large and, at the same time, writ small, involving our own individual lives. It is the locus where we face the absolute each moment he touches us. And it is precisely in the experience of each such moment of grace that we relate to God trinitarially, i.e., in the specificity of God's answer to our desire. Even the dimmest Christian perception of the role of Jesus in one's

own personal life construes grace as his friendship—because we relate to him (Jesus, not the Father) as the brother in whom we are ingraced and through whom the Father accepts us as sons in turn. We will just as specifically construe grace as the Father's (not Jesus') bending down to touch and lift us to his level of transcendence. And we will construe grace as the Spirit's enabling us from within, inspiring us with the inner disposition actually to relate to the absolute.

Nor will any of these interactions ever be possibly attributed to any of the saints. While superficial onlookers may assume that the saints usurp the status proper to God, some simple observations should disabuse them of that notion. Thus, there can never be the feeling that the saints are the very source of grace. For it is an abiding Christian sentiment that we live by the grace of God, and neither in speech nor in thought could one ever articulate the notion that we live, say, by the grace of Mary or any other created being. This emerges all the more clearly if we consider the real dimension of intercession. The saints do intercede for us; in fact we all intercede for each other. But intercession does not happen extrinsically. We do not intercede from outside, but from within the Trinity. It is by virtue of the Spirit's enabling us actually to share in God's life, i.e., in the Trinity, that our intercession comes to be integrated, from within, with God's own desire. It is because we are divinized (as a longstanding tradition teaches us) that our intercession itself becomes a divine action. Herein lies a profound contrast between the Catholic and the Protestant positions. We are, in the Catholic view of redemption, ontically integrated into God's own life, not just legally renamed. We are truly redeemed, regenerated, not just redefined. Thus intercession is not an imposition on the will of God from the outside, but rather a rising to where we desire the desire of God. Clearly, the converse will never enter a Christian's mind: one could never imagine God as interceding. It can never be that the boundaries become blurred. Particularity remains, in this perspective as well, a hallmark of the trinitarian apprehension.

4.3 Trinitarian vs. triadic

It appears, then, that particularity is not only a distinctive trait of the Old Testament catechumenate, it is also a center-post of the Christian ethos. The Old Testament recognition of a very

specific particularity exhibited by the absolute in his relationship to the finite human world provides, I suggest, a perceptual backdrop for the Annunciation and all that developed in its wake. The disclosure of a trinitarian reality was not like the appearance of an alien being from outer space. It was more like a flower known from its bud. It also teaches us to view the very term "Trinity" in a different light. The emphasis need not be on the triadic aspect of the concept, fundamental and real though that aspect is. The New Testament disclosure does not, in fact, focus on it—which is why the term "Trinity" is not found there. It rather focuses on the presence of particularity, of articulation, within an absolute who nevertheless remains truly absolute. Hence when we speak of a "trinitarian" dimension we do not necessarily refer to the triadic aspect of the divine reality: Jesus' disclosure entails that indeed there is no fourth person, or whatever other "numeric" dimension we might imagine. But this is revealed as a fact, not explained as deriving from the essence of divine life. In other words, the triadic dimension is not an inescapable derivation of the trinitarian dimension, however central to the mystery it is. "Trinitarian" refers not so much to a numeric triad, but more broadly to the essential quality of particularity and articulation (alongside oneness and relatability) within the divine reality.

In this light, Rahner's concern,[28] that doing away with the concept of Trinity would not in fact impact many a Christian, may not exactly hit the mark. Christians, however little sophistication or reflection they may bring to their faith, do have an intrinsic bent toward the "trinitarian" dimension of the divine in the sense just stated, i.e., awareness of divine particularity. What is profoundly trinitarian in the Christian experience, and what is adumbrated already in the Old Testament, is the adeptness to accept the narrowing of the frame of reference of the absolute, without collapsing it. This is a proper trinitarian apprehension. The import of the triadic dimension, in and of itself, may instead become a stumbling block. One tends to focus on it when speaking of, rather than confronting, the Trinity. Of course it is the three persons we face in the mystery. But an excessive emphasis on the triadic, as if the divine persons were truly numerable, may in the end lead us away from the mystery of an articulated oneness.

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[28]K. Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

An important theological contribution along these lines is the concept of person, which originated and developed precisely as human thought (beginning with Augustine) grappled with categories suitable to refer to the mystery as perceived. That to this day even the most unreflecting Christian attitude would relate to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as persons, not as individuals, is indicative of the deep awareness for the properly trinitarian (rather than triadic) dimension of the basic Christian perception. They are, indeed, persons whose particularity ("personality," as it were) is never in doubt. While individuals are equivalent and not necessarily unique, persons are irreducible in their particularity. And even the simplest Christian apprehension of trinitarian relations will so perceive the divine reality—not as a blurred threesome of interchangeable individuals, not as the sum of three ones, but as a form of life that is properly absolute, wholly beyond, and yet just as properly particular, just as definably articulate. A mark of this is that there is, properly speaking, no syncretism in the Christian apprehension of the Trinity.[29] While at a loss (fortunately!) if asked to "define" the divine persons and their relationships, no Christian would ever think of the incarnation of the Father, or of Christ descending at Pentecost.

4.4 Advent—active and passive

Our life is soaked with the mystery of death. Not morbidly, but rather, in a Christian perspective, as a form of Advent. We wait for the ever-renewed revelation of the particularity of God. Emmanuel is both the God who is with us and the God who will come. He is the God of the *parousia*, the presence with us now and the presence that is to come. He is the Lord who came (*maran atha*) and the Lord whom we ask to come (*marana tha!*).[30] In other

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[29]Just such syncretism is instead found, for example, in Mesopotamia where a hymn may identify a particular deity with another as a sign of excellence, as in this hymn to Marduk: "Sin (the moon god) is your divinity, Anu your sovereignty, / Dagan is your lordship, Enlil your kingship" (B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, vol. 2 [Bethesda: Capital Decisions Ltd., 1993], 605). It is inconceivable for any Christian to praise the Son by calling him "the Father."

[30]On this see my article "Ascension, Parousia, and Sacred Heart: Structural

words, what we expect, beyond death, is neither a blurred, nor an already evident, vision. We know God in a particular way already, but we expect him to reveal an even more sharply defined particularity.

Such particularity connotes what we may call an active form of Advent. Its opposite, identified by passivity, is a wait for the apogee of a generic line of progress, a wishful expectancy for a higher level of a situation we already own.[31] The future is a given that needs to be unraveled by us. There is no expectation, in a pagan polytheistic setting, that the future may take the initiative and come toward us. Wholly impersonal, it needs to be found out in its constitutive pieces, grasped, conquered. In this sense it is neither active nor transitive, but properly inert and passive.

By way of contrast, an active Advent, a Christian Advent, is the expectation of something, or in fact someone, coming from an altogether different plane, an explosion that is to happen as a specific event. We are in the dark as to the modality of the event that is to happen; we are in the dark as to the definition of the subject who is to come. And yet we expect someone we know already. The explosion does not destroy, but rather builds on, a fundamental attitude of trust. The one who comes does not negate our present being, but neither does he come out of it. We do expect the one who comes, but he truly comes, he is not fashioned out of building blocks of our making. Going through Advent, we are in the dark even as we know where the light is to come from.

Christian death aims for the ultimate revelation of the living God, of the self-awareness of God. The particularity that is intrinsic to this (see above, 3.9) is supremely trinitarian on the level of the individual person. We wait for an encounter where the divine self-awareness will bring out the fullness of the human counterpart, our own self-awareness. Our particularity as persons will be at its fullest because grafted onto the particularity of the trinitarian God. In contrast, non-Christian death leads to landscapes of unawareness. They are anticipated and welcomed as the dissolution of our human self.

Correlations," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25 (1998): 73.

[31]On "owning," see the next section. Sokolowski's book cited above (n. 6) discusses in depth, and from a different perspective, the sharp contrast between a pagan view wherein the divine and the world are a continuum, and the Christian view defined by an unbridgeable distinction.

Advent is properly trinitarian in a liturgical sense as well. It is a period of preparation for the birth of Jesus, and it is also a recollection of the entire Old Testament experience. The birth is the moment when the Incarnation becomes public, emerging from the privacy of the Annunciation. So the conception and the birth, the Annunciation and Christmas, are the culmination of a waiting that is far from generic and aimless. It was a waiting for the Incarnation even while there was no inkling that it would be the Incarnation. The whole drama of the messianic ethos lies precisely in the contrast between specificity on the one hand and surprise on the other. It is such specificity that is ultimately trinitarian: before the triadic dimension of this particularity had come to the fore, the essential quality of an inner articulation within the divine sphere was already central to the human perception of God.

4.5 Waiting vs. owning

The reason why a non-Christian Advent is passive is that it basically excludes the possibility of a real surprise. In that perspective, we already "own" the future. Instead of revelation, we have discovery. It is the same contrast we see in comparing the constantly renewed revelation of the personality of someone we love with the discovery of a new scientific fact. The latter excludes a real surprise, because whatever comes to be known in the future, to be "discovered," is fully anticipated in our present control of its roots. In it, we do not search for communication, but only for greater possession; we do not expect a revelation, but a clarification of what is already known. A passive Advent is essentially incremental.

In the same sense that Advent was a dynamic state in the Old Testament, it must so remain for us after the Annunciation and the Incarnation. The liturgical season reminds us of this need. And so does the very essence of the *lex orandi*. The reason why it is perceived to be the *lex credendi* is not primarily, it seems to me, of an intellectual, but of an attitudinal, order. In praying we do not so much develop a construct as we seek a face. And a face that seeks us in turn. We do not fashion the target of our prayer; we rather wait for the face we seek to smile back at us, to disclose[32] the will that

[32]That is why, even intellectually, the notion of a reality that discloses itself is so

establishes, through a constantly developing movement of creative impulse, our most intimate reality—our destiny. As a mode of being, Christian prayer cannot be but profoundly trinitarian, because through it we wait for the self-disclosure of God. This self-disclosure affects us as the target, of course, but at the same time, it inevitably affects God himself as the origin. Discovering the will of God, in prayer and in life, is the locus where the dynamism of a trinitarian absolute discloses itself to our finite consciousness.

Tragically, the drug culture of our modern times points, fiercely and hopelessly, to the very reality of the Trinity. It desperately wants to grasp and hold on to a drug-induced, heightened state of awareness because it senses the possibility of sharing in the dramatic dynamism of the absolute—except that it does so by aiming, if unwittingly, to achieve "control" of that dynamism. It is, ultimately, a suicidal attempt; too often, alas, literally so. In this light, we may well recognize an unsuspected ontological dimension of the drug culture and of the growing justification of suicide. Through the first (a drug-induced state of awareness), humans seek to own the target—the source of happiness. Through the latter (self-induced death), humans seek to assert that they own the subject—themselves.

Not that waiting should be understood as sitting idly by. "The kingdom of the heavens is forced open through determination [*biazetai*] and it is the forceful ones [*biastai*] who seize [*harpazousin*[33]] it" (Mt 11:12). "The kingdom of God is announced as the good news [*euangelizatai*] and anyone [who can] enters it through force [*biazetai*]" (Lk 16:16, see above, 2.4). The virgins waiting for the bridegroom must be alert and prepared (Mt 25:1–13); from which the disciples must learn their lesson: "stay awake!" (*grēgoreite*, Mt 25:13), "shut out all sleep" (*agrupneite*, Mk 13:33 | Lk 21:36). The men waiting for their master to come home from the wedding must be awake (*grēgorountas*, Lk 12:37). Peter, James, and John are scolded

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critical, a notion profoundly developed by Sokolowski in his writings cited above.

[33]The root is used with a negative connotation in Paul: Jesus did not consider his being equal to God "a seized possession" (*harpagmos*) (Phil 2:7–8); see my article, "The Trinity in a Mesopotamian Perspective," cited in Part 1 of this article, n. 1. There, I deal at greater length with the notion of "owning" as it applies in particular to trinitarian thought.

at Gethsemane because they cannot stay awake (*grēgorēsai*) with him (Mt 26:40 | Mk 14:37). So waiting is an alert state of determined expectation and deep openness. It is, in line with the theme of this essay, an attitude that grows out of, and tends toward, a high degree of particularity. It must always be the case that a particular human being seeks a particular intervention on the part of a dynamic God. It cannot be the case that humanity in general rests inertly in the knowledge that things are encased within a generic higher force anyhow.

4.6 Coherence and tradition

I have argued for the significance of the experiential component: the divine reality is, and has of course always been, intrinsically and essentially trinitarian, so that on some level this trinitarian dimension could not have escaped human perception. This would have been especially the case within the historical setting reflected in the Bible, where a dynamic confrontation unfolded over the centuries which reached its climax with Jesus. This confrontation we call "revelation." Even with the stone tablets at Sinai (see above, 3.5), revelation was never seen as a static objectification: it was always properly a "confrontation," on a personal level, rather than the handing over of a frozen construct. This confrontation is founded on, and bolsters, particularity. The human target of the confrontation is particular as a collectivity (ancient Israel as a highly specific human group) and in its individuals (Abraham, Moses, the prophets, etc.). Just as particular is the source of the confrontation, Yahweh, who relates very personally to Israel and the individuals within it. It was the strong perception of this divine particularity that molded the sensitivity behind the human encounters with Jesus the Logos, from the Annunciation to the Ascension.

Therein we recognize the strong element of coherence in the tradition. Coherence speaks to the way in which the object of perception perdures as such, even while the perspective from which it is viewed changes. Thus it is that we can legitimately consider the Old Testament as a single whole on the one hand[34] while fully

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[34]In this light, the notion of a "biography" of God is justified: Jack Miles, *God. A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

realizing that it is articulated along the lines of a long and varied developmental history. A reflection on the coherence of perception sheds light on the significance of tradition. The "deposit" which Timothy is urged to guard (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14) is not an automatic continuance of time-honored practice, but rather a shared effort with the one who has the power to guard that same deposit (2 Tim 1:12). Tradition is a profound spiritual culture, alive with the dynamic sense of interaction. It is like being carried at the top of a wave, always moving, yet always cresting. Thus the question I have asked is: if God *is intrinsically* trinitarian, then how did human perception of this trinitarian aspect of God take shape in terms of normal human culture? Two main themes have helped us in answering the question.

First, it is obviously not the case that God *became* trinitarian when Jesus began to speak of the Father and the Spirit. Nor will God *become* trinitarian when, as per our hope, we humans will be associated with the fuller vision of Paradise. The human confrontation has always been with a trinitarian God, and will so remain. The glass through which we seek, we have ever sought, to see him retains various degrees of darkness. But through this changing darkness the God we humans seek cannot be but God, i.e., the trinitarian God. The "you" that everyone seeks, like Augustine (*inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*, *Confessions* 1.1.1), has always been, however obscurely, a trinitarian "you."

Second, the Trinity, "revealed," did not suddenly come on the stage as if a *deus ex machina*. It was rather, we may say, a *deus ex homine*. Jesus addressed a human experience of the divine that, within the stream of a long lived tradition, was already awake to the dynamics of God's inner life—of God's trinitarian dimension. It is not as though Jesus reshaped Yahweh into the Trinity. Rather, Yahweh had been the Trinity all along.[35] The Old Testament sense of Yahweh was, in its depth, profoundly trinitarian already. With Jesus, there came the full and live disclosure of a presence long since sensed and perceived, however dimly.

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[35]As a minor point, I would differ in this respect from Sokolowski when he says "Jahweh is the same God as the Father of Jesus Christ" ("Revelation of the Trinity," 144). Note, for example, that Jesus never addresses the Father as Yahweh.

4.7 Yahweh, ~~the Trinity~~

We may look back at our initial question. Why is it that the word "Trinity" has not, for all intents and purposes, become a proper name? And why is it that, in spite of such a missing dimension, the Trinity is in fact central to Christian spirituality and more deeply rooted in Christian perception than one is inclined to think? A deconstructionist turn of phrase may help us in proposing an answer: we do address the ~~Trinity~~ under erasure[36]. . . God, we may say in Derrida's mode of thought, is and is not the Trinity.

On the one hand, God is not the Trinity as a frozen concept, as a mental construct to be dissected analytically, as a collectivity to be addressed above and beyond the divine persons. Such conceptualizations may very well be valid as abstractions, but do not reflect the personal reality who sought us out, and whom we seek. A good reason why the word "Trinity" has not become a proper name is because, biblically, the Trinity is never as such the subject of any verbal process, whether action or condition. It is not only the word that is missing as a lexical item in the biblical text. The very referential reality of the word is missing as an operative agent in the biblical narrative.

And yet God is essentially and intrinsically trinitarian and it is in a trinitarian mode that he inevitably, if inexpressibly, deals with us. Biblically, this comes to the fore most dramatically in the tensionality that is always present in the posture Jesus takes vis-à-vis the divine dimension. He takes this so much for granted that, in our case as in Philip's (see above, 2.4), we wish he would spend more time in *explaining* it. Instead, he simply *lives* it. All the more strikingly so when, risen, he remains as profoundly trinitarian as in his earlier bodily dimension (2.9).

Trinitarian revelation is emphatically not contained in a treatise that Jesus in fact never wrote. More than through a "revelation" in the sense of such an argumented exposition, we confront the trinitarian dimension through our own private annunciations. Lest we reduce God as a collective triad to the status

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[36]See my article "Sacramentality and Culture," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 30 (Spring 2003): 31f. In the third of the articles I mentioned in Part 1 of this article, n. 1 ("Trinity *spermatikê*"), I develop further the natural disposition and inner urge, in modern thought, toward trinitarian reality.

of the "Trinity" as a legal person, we are called to face, each in our own way, the reality of the *living* God, the reality of the divine persons who are indeed alive in the supreme particularity of their interaction. We relate to the persons because they relate to each other. In a similar way, to affirm that God is love does not entail equating him with "love" as a mere concept. It is rather to face the inexpressible whirlpool of a supreme divine dynamics where love is particular and yet absolute. And our call is not to watch an unfolding process from the outside, as spectators. Rather, we are called to enter the whirlpool and dare to sear the divine persons, in their absolute particularity, with the totality of *our* nothingness. □

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