

William Desmond, Jean-Luc Marion, and the Passion of Charity

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Theologians have recently shown interest in the work of Irish metaphysician William Desmond. A prevailing antimetaphysical sentiment may, however, discourage others from engaging his work. To allay concerns, this article brings Desmond into conversation with Jean-Luc Marion on the topic of divine revelation. The purpose is twofold. First, for those wary of metaphysics, this essay demonstrates that Desmond's metaxology evades Marion's critique and, more importantly, shows how the two thinkers share a "familial intimacy." Despite the opposition between metaphysics and phenomenology, this intimacy renders them companion thinkers. Second, this companionship is theologically beneficial to Desmond. With Marion as guide, we consider how the concept of divine charity can be added into Desmond's metaphysics in what I call the passio caritatis, or "passion of charity." The article concludes by suggesting how undergoing the passio caritatis effects a theological expansion of Desmond's metaphysics and puts it at the service of theological reflection.

Keywords: William Desmond, Jean-Luc Marion, metaphysics, metaxology, Revelation, charity, phenomenology

SCHOLARS interested in philosophical theology, or in the way theology might draw on the work of contemporary philosophy, might now regard Villanova University's 2012 Truth and Mystery conference a missed opportunity. Although Jean-Luc Marion and William Desmond both gave keynote addresses, neither the French phenomenologist nor the Irish metaphysician deeply engaged the other's work. Desmond has since revised his lecture to offer a more sustained reflection on Marion's philosophy and, without downplaying their differences, acknowledges a "familial

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intimacy” between them.¹ This essay probes this familial intimacy with the hope of showing how Desmond’s metaphysics, in a manner akin to Marion’s phenomenology, might contribute to the task of theological reflection.

Newcomers to Desmond’s philosophy owe much to Christopher Ben Simpson. His *Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern*, along with the coedited *William Desmond and Contemporary Theology*, introduced many readers to Desmond’s philosophy of religion and its theological relevance.² Indeed, Simpson detects throughout Desmond’s philosophy “thinly veiled Christian concepts” such as “creation, agapeic suffering service (*imitatio Christi*), needing divine aid (grace) for higher selvings and community, and the consummate agapeic community of religious service (church).”³ He wags suggestively that this may require Desmond to “‘come out of the closet’ as a theologian.”⁴ Desmond balks at this suggestion. He came of age as a philosopher when mentioning God in some academic settings “was like mentioning sex in a prudish Victorian drawing room. An icy silence would descend, and the silence communicated more than overt argument possibly could: *we* do not now talk of these things.”⁵ So even though Desmond writes *of* God and at times sings philosophically *to* God, he refrains from donning the theologian’s mantle. Instead of developing a theology, he sees his task as renewing a sense of the porosity between philosophy and religion.⁶ In this way, he is similar to Marion, who protests that despite his thought’s theological resonances, his work is resolutely philosophical.⁷ Yet their reluctance to join theology’s guild has not disqualified theologians from appropriating and using their philosophy. Desmond, in fact, has enthusiastically supported such efforts.⁸

¹ Desmond’s talk is the basis for two chapters in *The Voiding of Being*: “Saturated Phenomena and the Hyperboles of Being: On Marion’s Postmetaphysical Thought” and “Being True to Mystery and Metaxological Metaphysics.” See William Desmond, *The Voiding of Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

² See Christopher Ben Simpson, *Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009); Christopher Ben Simpson, *William Desmond and Contemporary Theology*, eds. Christopher Ben Simpson and Brendan T. Sammon (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

³ Simpson, *Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern*, 94.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ William Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), xi.

⁶ See William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Malden, UK: Blackwell, 2008), 281–340.

⁷ See Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffery L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 235–36.

⁸ See the foreword to Ryan Duns, *Spiritual Exercises for a Secular Age: Desmond’s Quest for God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020); Renée Köhler-Ryan, *Companions in the Between* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019).

To show how Desmond's metaphysics can contribute to theology, I begin by comparing and contrasting his recent work on the event of divine revelation with Marion's. Marion has offered philosophical and theological takes on the topic, whereas Desmond has only recently turned his attention to the topic and does not venture far into theological speculation.⁹ Nevertheless, both understand revelation's dynamics similarly, regarding it as an event of divine address, unexpected and often resisted, whose arrival informs and transforms its recipients. For both, human reason is open and permeable to revelation. Yet there is a difference. Although Desmond draws a familiar distinction between special and general revelation, and even suggests Christ and the prophets as bearers of the former, he focuses on how the divine is manifested generally in the everyday. By contrast, Marion's focus, especially in *Givenness and Revelation*, is on special revelation, namely, that mediated through Jesus Christ. In his explicit invocation of the Trinity, Marion stands in continuity with Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*): "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature."¹⁰ Marion concurs with *Dei Verbum* that divine revelation takes place when the Spirit's gift of charity opens the "eyes of the mind" and enables recipients to perceive Christ as the way into God's life.¹¹

In their reflections on divine revelation, Marion and Desmond acknowledge and approach the border separating philosophy from theology. For Marion, reflecting on revelation requires phenomenology to accept a subordinated role to theology. Because phenomenology cannot dictate whether or how revelation occurs, the philosopher can reflect only on such phenomena as the theologian hands over to it. The Spirit's gift of charity, in effect, creates a one-way bridge leading from theology to phenomenology. Lacking

⁹ Marion treats revelation at several points. See *Being Given*, 234–47; Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berrand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Jean-Luc Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017). In *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction*, 132–34, Robyn Horner admits disambiguating Marion's small-r "revelation" from divine "Revelation" is complicated. For my purposes, "revelation" describes those events of divine disclosure through which faith arises, upon which theology reflects, and to which theology responds. For his reflections on revelation, see William Desmond, "Godsends: On the Surprise of Revelation," in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 91, no. 1 (2016): 8–28.

¹⁰ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), in *The Documents of Vatican II*, (Strathfield: St Paul's, 2009), §2.

¹¹ *Dei Verbum*, §5.

a similarly developed concept of divine charity, Desmond's metaphysics can bring one to the threshold between philosophy and theology, but passage between the two is difficult. Still, the longer one stands with Desmond in this between space, it becomes harder to shake the feeling that this threshold is somehow "haunted" by a presence glimpsed now "indistinctly as in a mirror" but which might, through charity, be seen "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). Upon close inspection, there are openings within his philosophy that can lead into hitherto unexplored areas of theological inquiry.

To uncover these openings and show the relevance of Desmond's metaphysics to theology, I enlist Jean-Luc Marion as a companion thinker. Admittedly, there is work to do to get these philosophers to journey together. In the first section, I consider Marion's rationale for "overcoming" metaphysics and argue that Desmond's philosophy not only withstands Marion's critique, but also, and more importantly, that Desmond's metaphysics and Marion's phenomenology share an intimate familiarity with each other. Their approaches to philosophy may differ, but each is, I argue, animated by the same "apocalyptic" logic. I next examine their depictions of revelation. For Marion, the Spirit's gift of charity is theology's *sine qua non*. Desmond, resolute in remaining a philosopher, offers no account of the Spirit or of charity. Here Marion's companionship bears fruit. With him as a guide, we can imagine how the infusion of divine charity into Desmond's metaphysics might open up new theological vistas. I describe this process as the Spirit-led *passio caritatis*, or "passion of charity." Infusing divine charity into Desmond's philosophy opens the eyes of the metaphysical mind to perceive the *Logos* sensed, but not clearly seen, throughout Desmond's work. What results from the *passio caritatis* is an opening to a metaphysical theology attuned to creation's christocentric depths disclosed, to grace-attuned senses, through everyday epiphanies.

From Bewitchment to Bedazzlement: Marion's Post-Metaphysical Thought

Marion's complaint against metaphysics, Christina Gschwandtner argues, extends back to his early work on Descartes.¹² And, John Betz observes, Marion's critique is "cut from the same cloth" as Martin

¹² Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, trans. Thomas Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Christina Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007). In later works, Marion expands this terminology to include the phenomena of art and the human other. See, for

Heidegger's.¹³ The debt to Heidegger is apparent when Marion defines metaphysics as "the system of philosophy from Suarez to Kant as a single science bearing at one and the same time on the universal common being and on being (or beings) par excellence."¹⁴ So defined, metaphysics conflates ontology (study of beings *qua* beings) and theology (reflection on being's source). The result is what Heidegger, appropriating a term from Immanuel Kant, called the "onto-theological constitution of metaphysics."¹⁵ By ontotheology he means human reason's attempt to make the whole of being intelligible to understanding. This means that the *theos* of onto-*theo*-logy must fit within the system's conceptual categories. Because it can admit nothing in excess of reason's grasp, the deity is reduced to *an* item or *a* being. The God of Holy Mystery becomes a god whose sole purpose is to make reality understandable. Ontotheology's god does not speak through the burning bush, lead the Exodus, and is certainly not manifested in Christ's Transfiguration. It is an etiolated deity who enters into thought "only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the deity enters into it."¹⁶ Before a god who has been nipped and tucked to fit human reason, as Heidegger famously observed, one can neither "fall to his knees in awe nor can he play and dance."¹⁷

Marion advances Heidegger's critique of ontotheology when he opposes the idol to the icon. Metaphysics, as ontotheology, is idolatrous because it leads to the "production of a concept that makes a claim to equivalence with God."¹⁸ In the idol, the "divine actually comes into the visibility for which human gazes watch; but this advent is measured by what the scope of particular human eyes can support."¹⁹ Protagoras *redivivus*: man is the measure of all things. But where the idol arrests and fills the human gaze, the icon allows no such cessation of movement. Instead, the icon directs the gaze beyond the visible into an infinite abyss. The beholder's gaze

instance, Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹³ John Betz, "After Heidegger and Marion: The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today," in *Modern Theology*, 34/4 (2018): 566–97, esp. 583.

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner and others (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 51. This should be read in light of *Being and Time* §6, "The Task of Destroying the History of Ontology."

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸ Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 13.

¹⁹ Marion, *God Without Being*, 14.

cannot measure or size up the icon because the icon “recognizes no other measure than its own and infinite excessiveness.”²⁰ For Marion, then:

The idol always moves, at least potentially, toward its twilight, since already in its dawn the idol gathers only a foreign brilliance. The icon, which unbalances human sight in order to engulf it in infinite depth, marks such an advance of God that even in times of the worst distress indifference cannot ruin it. For, to give itself to be seen, the icon needs only itself.²¹

Although an idol may seduce the gaze with its shimmer of “foreign brilliance,” its enticements are limited, for another, more brilliant, idol waits in the wings to supplant it. The icon faces no such fate because it remains open to and mediates an encounter with what infinitely exceeds it. It is not, then, the viewer who constitutes the icon but the icon that constitutes the viewer. The icon “opens in a face that gazes at our gazes in order to summon them to its depth.”²² Where the idol would collapse the difference between the finite and the infinite, the icon preserves it. This gulf between the visible and invisible is crossed not by our efforts but only through God’s initiative drawing addressees into the icon’s depths. If the idol is constituted by our concepts, then this is reversed by the icon that constitutes us through its call.

In *Givenness and Revelation*, Marion offers a trinitarian account of revelation that recognizes Jesus Christ as the Father’s icon. Here Marion opposes two logics of disclosure: revelation as *alētheia* (unconcealment) and revelation as *apokalypsis* (uncovering). Roughly, alethic logic emphasizes the human subject’s role in attaining knowledge. Knowledge, here, is the fruit of the subject’s effort to “unconceal” truth. He contrasts this with apocalyptic logic, a logic regarding truth as divinely “uncovered” or manifested. Apocalyptic logic, for Marion, is the logic of the Scriptures and of premodern theology. Francisco Suarez disastrously influenced theology by shifting the emphasis from *apokalypsis* to *alētheia*, a shift Marion detects in the *Disputationes metaphysicae* when Suarez inscribes God into his metaphysical system: “The adequate object of this science [metaphysics] must include God.”²³ Suarez thereby reduced revelation to a *sufficiens propositio* judged and either accepted or rejected by the knower. The consequence is that faith was no longer required to receive revelation. Within this genealogy, Suarez sets the stage for a modern metaphysics that interprets revelation in epistemological, rather than theological, categories. Animated by an alethic

²⁰ Ibid., 21.

²¹ Ibid., 24.

²² Ibid., 19.

²³ Ibid., 209.

logic, reason demanded all phenomena be submitted to judgment according to the principles of sufficient reason and noncontradiction. Of this Marion writes:

These two principles, like two doors of bronze, frame access to the true proposition, which is henceforth the object of a possession, at the very least possible, in evidence that is certain. The proposition henceforth known according to this metaphysical definition of the truth can then elicit assent, become a belief grounded in reason, and, in short, receive the sanction of the will.²⁴

Revelation thus ceases to be an encounter eliciting faith and assumes the status of data. In a surreptitious substitution, the *fides quae* (faith's content) replaces the *fides qua* (faith's act). In severing *fides qua* from *fides quae*, the alethic model mutates Saint Paul's "we walk by faith and not by sight" (1 Cor 5:7) and renders it: "we walk by clear sight, and not by blind faith."

Refusing to cede theology to *alētheia*, Marion labors to reprioritize the logic of *apokalypsis*. This effort unites two of his chief concerns: (1) recognizing the "givenness" central to phenomenology and (2) understanding the divine initiative as key to theology. According to apocalyptic logic, the subject neither anticipates nor imposes *a priori* conditions on revelation's arrival. Revelation comes from God and at God's initiative, and its arrival overwhelms our logical categories and inflicts a "rupture in rationality itself."²⁵ This rupture, however, leads not to logic's destitution but reconstitution: "The *apokalypsis* of the uncovering does not appear without logic ... but it places another logic, which it claims is more powerful, yet still logical, in opposition to the unconcealment of *alētheia*."²⁶ *Apokalypsis* imposes the counter-logic of divine wisdom. It is a revealed logic that, Paul writes, "is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor 1:18 NIB throughout)." *Apokalypsis* does not first offer data about the divine but reveals theological depths otherwise inaccessible to unaided human reason.

Given Marion's definition of metaphysics and his understanding of its disastrous theological consequences, it comes as no surprise that Marion opts for phenomenology as "first philosophy." If metaphysics is held hostage to *alētheia* and shackles God to human concepts, theologians must abandon it. Marion, Betz writes, finds in phenomenology:

²⁴ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

A way paved not by the metaphysical concept of a necessary ground, which approaches theology with stipulations as to who or what God can be, but by a comparatively modest phenomenology that can span the (analogical?) difference between the natural givenness of everyday phenomena (as studied primarily by philosophy) and the supernatural gift of the saturated phenomenon (as studied primarily by theology).²⁷

For Marion, phenomenology's "principle of principles" stresses the giving of intuition—a thing manifests itself from itself—over the subject's grasping. "Put another way," he writes, citing Husserl, "the phenomenon proposes itself (*sich darbietet*) in intuition and, in the limits of this intuition, it claims in principle that we receive it and accept it (*annehmen*) as it gives itself (*wie es sich gibt*)."²⁸ Phenomenology prioritizes the primacy of what gives itself, not the one to whom it is given. Unlike metaphysics, Marion claims, phenomenology sets no *a priori* conditions on revelation. Phenomena, whether a finite object or the infinite God, give themselves on their terms, not ours. The theological impact of this reversal cannot be underestimated. Whereas metaphysics dictates revelation's conditions, the humbler phenomenology receives and reflects on what is given to it. Phenomenology, Marion insists, passes no judgment on revelation's actuality because it possesses "neither the authority nor the competence to say more, but leaves at least the right to appeal about it to the theologians."²⁹ The phenomenologist considers only what is *possible*, the theologian what is *actual*. In short, the opposition between metaphysics and phenomenology is grounded in two opposed logics: *alētheia* and *apokalypsis*. The former is driven by conceptual grasping and domination, the latter remains attuned and hospitable to revelatory donation. Only apocalyptic logic can serve theology.

Unanticipated and unexpected, *apokalypsis* occurs "within the world, but starting from and within sight of an absolute outside-the-world."³⁰ Revelatory events interrupt and reconfigure the world's horizon. This interruption does not disclose a different reality but enables recipients to perceive reality differently and as "saturated" with divine mystery. For Marion, revelation is a "saturated phenomenon," a phenomenon that does not manifest as an object or datum but still manifests itself.³¹ Saturated phenomena overwhelm the subject's categories because the "giving intuition exceeds, submerges and

²⁷ Betz, "After Heidegger and Marion," 589.

²⁸ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 48.

²⁹ Marion, *In Excess*, 53.

³⁰ Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 98.

³¹ He introduces this in *Being Given*, 225–47. He has continued to develop the idea as seen in *The Visible and the Revealed*, 18–48 and 119–144; Marion, *In Excess*, 30–53; and Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 87–101.

saturates the measure of every concept.”³² In these events, the subject cannot “make sense” of the occurrence. There is simply too much to grasp. Nevertheless, the *apokalypsis* that explodes logic’s categories marks the advent of a superior logic, one not seized but received. Saturated phenomena provide, furthermore, the means and the method for interpreting their manifestations. They furnish their own logic or, Marion writes, the necessary “signification that is adequate to this excess of intuition.”³³ In the case of Jesus, Marion’s saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, one perceives him *as* Christ only through the Spirit who “sets the method of interpretation for the saturation of the phenomenon of Revelation.”³⁴ Unassisted, human logic cannot recognize the *Logos*. But, through the Spirit, charity-opened eyes see Jesus *as* Christ, *as* the iconic manifestation of divine mystery. Instead of fixing Jesus within a conceptual horizon (alethic logic), *apokalypsis* explodes conceptual horizons and permits the gaze to behold in Christ’s face not an object but an opening into God’s triune life.

At the heart of Marion’s critique of metaphysics is an effort to exorcise the specter of alethic logic. The alethic logic of ontotheology has the temerity to call God before the bar of reason and to insist that the Holy Other accept employment on its terms. No such hubris plagues a phenomenology that gives precedence to God’s self-donation and manifestation. It reflects only on what theology offers it, namely, that in Christ “the Father enters into an absolute epiphany, though filtered through finitude. If blindness sees nothing there and does not even suspect bedazzlement, the fault lies not with revelation, but with the gaze that cannot bear the evidence.”³⁵ Theology’s apocalyptic logic has priority, for the Spirit’s gift of charity converts the gaze to perceive and confess Jesus as Christ. Phenomenology receives this revelation and explores how its recipients are drawn into a new order governed not by terrestrial logic but by the revealed logic of divine love.

If Marion is right, if all metaphysical practices are possessed by an idolatrous alethic logic, we should applaud his efforts. Is it possible, though, that he too univocally construes and too narrowly constricts metaphysics? He admits

³² Patrick Masterson, *Approaching God: Between Phenomenology and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 15.

³³ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 51. Shane Mackinlay takes Marion to task on this score: can there ever be said to be any adequation to God? Marion needs, it would appear, a more robustly developed understanding of faith (*fides qua*). See Shane Mackinlay, “Eyes Wide Shut: A Response to Jean-Luc Marion’s Account of the Journey to Emmaus,” in *Modern Theology* 20, no. 3 (July 2004): 447–56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 60. See also *Dei Verbum* §5.

³⁵ Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 66.

that not *all* metaphysical practices are dominated by an alethic logic: Aquinas, for instance, is not an ontotheologian because he “does not chain God to Being.”³⁶ Might we not find other, more contemporary, practices animated by an equally nonreductive apocalyptic logic? Peter Fritz finds it in Karl Rahner.³⁷ For my part, I discern it in William Desmond. In fact, I regard Marion and Desmond less as combatants than companions committed to exploring the threshold separating philosophy from theology. It is toward that threshold we now venture.

Desmond’s Metaphysics

Despite Marion’s attempts to “overcome” metaphysics, Desmond senses a familial intimacy with him. In *The Voiding of Being*, he resists Marion’s critique by observing that there is no univocal practice of metaphysics to be overcome. There are, Aristotle observed, “many senses in which a thing is said to be.”³⁸ Desmond identifies three familiar senses or voices: the univocal, equivocal, and dialectical.

Univocity puts the stress on something or someone *determinate*, this or that character or thing. Equivocity puts the stress on something more *indeterminate*, something neither this nor that, something ambiguous, especially in the heart of acting human beings. Dialectic puts the stress on a togetherness of oneself and others, on a mediation of our differences in the exchange with each other.³⁹

To these Desmond adds a fourth, *metaxological*, voice. Desmond’s neologism, a metaxological philosophy, is “concerned with a *logos* of the *metaxu* or a wording of the between. Such a philosophy is concerned with life itself

³⁶ Marion, *God Without Being*, xxvi. This should not be read, as one reviewer observed, that Marion acknowledges metaphysics as valid. It is more that he absolves Aquinas from doing metaphysics as Marion understands it. I wonder if Marion’s isn’t a persuasive redefinition of metaphysics. Metaphysics can be practiced in many ways: Aristotle, Hegel, Aquinas, Rahner, and Desmond were metaphysicians, but they did not do metaphysics in the same way. I think it licit to challenge certain practices of metaphysics and to jettison ontotheological practices, but I am not keen on throwing out metaphysics with the ontotheological bathwater.

³⁷ Peter Joseph Fritz, “Karl Rahner’s Theological Logic, Phenomenology, and Anticipation,” in *Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2019): 57–78. I have tried to build on Fritz’s work in Ryan Duns, “Beneath the Shadow of the Cross: A Rahnerian Rejoinder to Jean-Luc Marion,” *Philosophy and Theology* 28, no. 2 (2016): 351–72.

³⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003b5.

³⁹ William Desmond, *The Gift of Beauty and the Passion of Being* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 255.

as a between-space, a *metaxu*.”⁴⁰ A metaxological metaphysics endeavors to preserve the truth of univocity, equivocity, and dialectic. Metaxology is not “the voice” drowning out other voices but is, instead, a way of philosophical reflection attuned to the way these voices harmonize. It has, thus, a choral quality that “sings” more than any one voice alone could “sing.” So, instead of envisioning it as an all-encompassing system, Desmond’s metaxological metaphysics offers a way to reflect systematically on the way beings intermediate with and shape one another.

The *logos* at metaxology’s core is apocalyptic, not alethic. Indeed, Desmond’s entire thought follows “an itinerary reminiscent of Augustine’s description of the double movement of his own thought, which proceeded, he said, *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*.”⁴¹ Metaxology originates not with the sovereign *I* but as a response to a transcendent other who addresses *me* and provokes my desire to know. This call awakens, first, a desire for what is beyond the self and, second, orients the subject toward the source of the summons. He envisions this occurring within the *metaxu*, wherein he writes:

the middle of things—the exteriors—we come to know the dunamis of our own being as an interior middle, a mediating self-transcending power of openness. This is the first movement. The second movement is: in the interior middle, within the self-transcending urgency of desire, there is an opening to an other, more ultimate than ourselves.⁴²

Instead of insisting that being, or God, be fitted into logic’s determinate categories (*alētheia*), metaxology remains attuned to the transcendent source whose manifestation (*apokalypsis*) elicits and orients self-transcendence. This ecstatic response is not a blind or desperate outer-reaching but, because originating in and oriented by the transcendent source’s call, it is other-reaching. This double movement is written into metaxology. For *meta*, in Greek, means “in the midst” and “beyond.” So, for Desmond, metaxological mindfulness is awakened when one is addressed “in the midst of being” (*meta*) and then directed toward a summoning source “beyond” being (*meta*).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 253.

⁴¹ William Desmond, *Desire, Dialectic, and Otherness* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 17. See also William Desmond, “Augustine’s Confessions: On Desire, Conversion and Reflection,” in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (March 1980): 24–33, esp. 30. Renée Köhler-Ryan writes on Augustine’s influence in “An Archaeological Ethics: Augustine, Desmond, and Digging back to the Agapeic Origin,” in *Between System and Poetics: William Desmond and Philosophy After Dialectic*, ed. Thomas A. F. Kelly (New York: Ashgate, 2007).

⁴² William Desmond, *Perplexity and Ultimacy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 11.

To underscore metaxology's dynamism, I find it better to approach Desmond's metaphysics as an *askesis* or "spiritual exercise" intended, as Pierre Hadot writes of ancient philosophical practices, "not to inform but to form."⁴³ Rather than providing a neutral analysis of Aquinas' Third Way, Desmond reconstructs and performs it to enkindle within the reader a "meditative, even prayerful mindfulness."⁴⁴ He begins by asking readers to notice how "things come into being and pass out of being."⁴⁵ Reflecting on any finite being's non-necessity stirs the question: *why anything at all?* The answer to this cannot be, à la ontotheology, another being or *ens* within the system. All contingent beings bear the mortal wound of finitude, yet the crack of contingency goads one to wonder whether there might not be "an Other that is not through another, or does not *become* through another, but through whom all others *come to be*."⁴⁶ Beginning from the *metaxu*, this "way" urges one to consider creation as the *poiēsis* or making of a Creator. Attuned to this *poiēsis*, one's perception (*aesthēsis*) of creation deepens.⁴⁷ Instead of taking creation *for* granted, one beholds it *as* granted and given. Further still, when added to his other "ways," Desmond's metaxological reflections discern the way that creation is an "agapeic origination" and the issuance of a Creator who gives "rise to the other for the good of the other; and though the originated other is not the origin itself, there need be no negative judgment of ontological defect."⁴⁸ This agapeic origin occupies a religious middle space between an impersonal "god of the philosophers" and theology's Trinitarian God. Metaxological reflection within the *metaxu* seeks, then, to arouse a sense of a God who creates not to satisfy divine lack but solely as the mysterious expression of loving generosity.

Desmond's agapeic Creator may surprise Marion, who believes metaphysics "has never (to my knowledge) picked up this name [love] for referring to what it understands by the name 'God.'"⁴⁹ Marion also claims that, in metaphysics, "Love is reduced to 'making love,' charity to 'doing charity'—words prostituted in the first case, betrayed in the second, each equally submitted to the iron law of 'making or doing,' and thus of objectification."⁵⁰

⁴³ Pierre Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, trans. Marc Djaballah and Michael Chase (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 91.

⁴⁴ Desmond, *God and the Between*, 128–34.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁷ Betz, "After Heidegger and Marion," 576.

⁴⁸ See Desmond, *God and the Between*, 59.

⁴⁹ Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 116.

⁵⁰ Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 168; see Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). In *The Erotic*

Although perhaps true of practices bewitched by *alētheia*, the accusation does not apply to Desmond:

Metaxological mindfulness mulls over the signs of God in the between, alert to what comes to it from beyond itself. Traces of transcendence are communicated in many ways to the twilight or dawn of the middle. The many ways and the one good are not antagonistic, for the one good as agapeic gives the plural between, communicates to it its being as good, whence comes the good of the “to be.”⁵¹

This insistence on “mindfulness” to disclosures of the transcendent within the immanent order further insulates Desmond from Marion’s critique. Desmond arrives at the agapeic origin not by calculus but through contemplation. The *nothing* out of which being arises and to which it returns—theologically encapsulated in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*—asks one to muse upon the gratuity of existence. As Desmond writes, “God gives for nothing. This is why in one respect being is for nothing. Being is without a why. There is a kind of agapeic nihilism implied by this, but the *nihil* is not any negating or destructive *nihil*. God does nothing for Himself; everything is done for the other ... God lets be, since everything given by God is for that thing, given for that thing itself.”⁵² The reader may hear within this an echo of Angelus Silesius, for whom God gives without a why (*Ohne Warum*). What we do not detect, though, is any hint of dominative grasping that would try to force God to offer an account for divine action. It is not we who “make sense” of being’s overdeterminacy, not we whose logic prescribes whether or how the Creator acts. Metaxological contemplation renews a sense of wonder at creation’s givenness. Its sheer gratuity overwhelms our categories, and we find ourselves astonished as we discover ourselves implicated in the drama of the *metaxu*, where, Patrick Gardner writes, we are suspended between being and nothingness.⁵³ Being’s fragility, metaxologically

Phenomenon Marion perpetrates with love the crime he charges metaphysics with: univocal reduction. He begins by writing, “Univocal, love is only told in *one way*” (5). He concludes with claiming God practices “the logic of the erotic reduction as we do” and insists that “God loves in the same way as we do” (222). Desmond challenges this reduction, in *The Voiding of Being*, 222–23. Christina M. Gschwandtner addresses this as well in *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 100–23.

⁵¹ William Desmond, *Ethics and the Between* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 219.

⁵² Desmond, *Perplexity and Ultimacy*, 231.

⁵³ Patrick Gardner, “God and the Between,” in *William Desmond and Contemporary Theology*, 165–190, esp. 168.

considered, evokes not dread at the *nihil* but renews wonder at the mystery of the non-necessary being in which we participate.

I need to introduce two additional terms central to metaxology and vital for understanding its relevance to theology. Even though Desmond does not invoke *alētheia* or *apokalypsis*, there is a discernible similarity between this dyad and his *conatus essendi* and *passio essendi*. Drawn from Spinoza, the *conatus essendi* describes living beings' endeavoring to be. It emphasizes striving and self-affirmation as beings "grasp" at existence. One thinks of Nietzsche: "Life itself *in its essence* means appropriating, injuring, overpowering those who are foreign and weaker; oppression, harshness, forcing one's own forms on others, incorporation, and at the very least, and the very mildest, exploitation."⁵⁴ Desmond sees the influence of the *conatus* on modernity, particularly its reductive drive to univocity where "to be intelligible is to be determinate."⁵⁵ Marion would likely identify in the *conatus* an operative alethic logic, a logic well evidenced in Descartes' hope for us to become "masters and possessors of Nature."

But before one can grasp at being, Desmond observes, one must first be given to be. He describes this "being given to be" as the *passio essendi* or "patience of being" that occurs prior to, and that has priority over, any effort of the *conatus*:

This passion of being is more primal because life opens us before we open to life. We are given to be as living before we give ourselves to be as determined, or self-determining, in accord with the particular form of life we are. The patience of life—in this sense of its being received from sources beyond self-affirmation—is often hidden from sight when the *conatus essendi* is wrongly claimed to be the essence of life itself.⁵⁶

The *passio* describes the ongoing creative event in which being is not given as an inert block, full stop, but as part of a donative process. The *passio* recalls and is "redolent of the primal gift of being at all."⁵⁷ If Marion's phenomenology gives primacy to givenness, metaxology enacts a similar move by accenting the agapeic Creator's *givingness*.⁵⁸ By emphasizing divine giving over human grasping, the *passio* operates according to an apocalyptic logic. Whether one is confronted by a saturated phenomenon or aroused to the

⁵⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Marion Faber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 152–153.

⁵⁵ William Desmond, *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of Press, 2012), 14.

⁵⁶ Desmond, *Gift of Beauty and the Passion of Being*, 87.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁸ Marion, *In Excess*, xxi.

passio essendi, the effect is the same for Marion as for Desmond: “the *I* loses its anteriority and finds itself, so to speak, deprived of the duties of constitution, and is thus itself constituted: it becomes a *me* rather than an *I*.”⁵⁹

This apocalyptic logic comes to the fore in Desmond’s essay on revelation or what he calls the “godsend.” With the godsend, “the ball of the divine play is first thrown to us. There is the gift of receiving. There is something of a reversal—it is not we who are intentionally in search of something, but something finds us, finds us out.”⁶⁰ Without denying the godsend’s ability to inform its recipient, Desmond accents its transformative effect on its recipient’s perception:

Before one did not see, but now one begins to see; begins to see because a light that one cannot command is coming up and coming over one. One is being lighted; one is not enlightened, one is being enlightened. We are recipients of something that we cannot entirely specify or pin down.⁶¹

The godsend’s in-breaking exposes a “crack” within immanence and offers a glimpse of a transcendent order and, indeed, intimations of the Transcendent Sender Transcendent. Its arrival yields a renewed way of knowing. The godsend exposes the *metaxu*’s porosity, unclogs the boundary between immanence and transcendence, and confronts its recipient—in a way similar to Marion’s saturated phenomenon—with being’s overdeterminate too-muchness. Desmond describes this as a “hyperbole of being,” a happening “within immanence that yet cannot be entirely determined in the terms of immanence.”⁶² A godsend, then, is a communicative event within the *metaxu* whose excess points beyond the *metaxu* toward an ultimate and overdeterminate source. Or, recalling Betz, it enacts a *poiēsis* to deepen an *aesthesis* that enables one to perceive what had been concealed. The godsend becomes, effectively, metaphysics’ mystical consummation: a happening amid being pointing one beyond being toward a transcendent presence who, neither silent nor aloof, communicates the divine self in this sending. The godsend does not annul human reason but, by disclosing a source in excess of reason, fulfills it. Beheld with eyes opened by this gift, one beholds as the *metaxu* graciously transmogrifies into a threshold saturated or overdetermined by divine mystery.

So far, I have offered an overview of Desmond’s metaxology and shown, first, that it withstands Marion’s critique and, second, is animated by a

⁵⁹ Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 44 (emphases in original).

⁶⁰ Desmond, “Godsends,” 23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25–28.

⁶² Desmond, *The Voiding of Being*, 195.

similar apocalyptic logic. Both thinkers regard mystery's manifestation as an event taking place at God's initiative, not ours. Divine giving, moreover, precedes and exceeds our grasping. Yet neither depicts the recipient as wholly passive. As we consider in the next section, revelatory communication is often received as a threat. Its interruption of the terrestrial *logos* elicits resistance and hostility. Paradoxically, this is a salutary sign, for the superior *logos* disclosed in revelation refuses to be fitted neatly into extant terrestrial categories. The godsend's inbreaking precipitates a transformative (and usually unwelcomed) breakdown of one's former categories all the while bringing about a breakthrough into a renewed way of knowing and perceiving. Neither phenomenology nor metaxology purport to master mystery but, as practiced by Marion and Desmond, seek only to serve it.

In *The Voiding of Being*, Desmond begins to make up for 2012's missed opportunity to engage Marion at the Villanova conference. He explicitly connects the communicative excess of his hyperboles with Marion's saturated phenomena. For both thinkers, mystery's unexpected address thrusts recipients into a paradoxical

exodus into a bright darkness in which one is almost nothing, and yet the nothing is not nothing. One can be strangely full of emptiness, where there is a fulfillment in being emptied. One is emptied of false fixations, and of false absolutizations of autonomous knowing. To be full of emptiness is to be filled in emptiness by the passage of mindfulness in the porosity of being.⁶³

In these revelatory events, one discovers oneself caught up in a re-creative process that transforms and deepens perception. One is plunged into darkness, purged, and renewed. This event of being drawn into and saturated by mystery, Paul Camacho writes, "must be seen, not as a dark emptiness fundamentally opposed to truth, but rather as a luminous over-fullness that makes possible our very seeking after the truth."⁶⁴ Both Marion and Desmond lead readers to mystery's threshold, yet stand before it in markedly different ways. By contrasting their depictions of revelation, we may appreciate better how Marion's understanding of divine charity makes it possible for him to pass between philosophy and theology. Without a similarly developed

⁶³ Ibid., 202.

⁶⁴ Paul Camacho, "Philosophy and Excess: William Desmond and Jean-Luc Marion on Being True to Mystery," in *Philosophy and Excess*, 1–9, esp. 8, https://www.academia.edu/9605077/Philosophy_and_Excess_William_Desmond_and_Jean-Luc_Marion_on_Being_True_to_Mystery.

concept of charity, Desmond's metaxology remains—at least for now—religiously open but not yet theologically developed.

Revelatory Narratives

In her review of *William Desmond and Contemporary Theology*, Gesa Thiessen notes that a book bearing this title has “notably few references to Christ, the Trinity, and other central Christian concepts.”⁶⁵ A similar critique might be leveled at Desmond's work in general, or in particular at his *God and the Between*. For, even though Desmond's philosophy is religiously saturated and frequently theologically allusive, one finds few explicit references to grace, Christ, or the Trinity. Nevertheless, the theological notes are discernable for those with ears to hear. In the final chapter of *God and the Between*, for instance, we find ten “cantos” or poetic laudations intended to “bring us back to the passion of the religious.”⁶⁶ In the Fifth Canto, Desmond muses on an agapeic God who is “the communication of the full with the full, in a love that is overfull,” a God who, in an evocation of the Trinity, “already is agapeic community.”⁶⁷ In an allusion to the incarnation, he describes a “kenotic agape” in which the “origin embraces the radical otherness of the creature in its consignment to mortality.”⁶⁸ And, in Canto Ten, he offers a vision:

By the flaring of this fire
We behold Your face
In the criminal innocence
Of the saving one⁶⁹

A glimpse of Christ, but no confession. And this, I think, is what is most theologically promising about Desmond's metaphysics. Theological notes resound everywhere and nowhere within the *metaxu*. To bring out the theological depths latent within these notes, we need to consider how the gift of divine charity might reconfigure the way one beholds and abides within the *metaxu*.

Let us look at Marion for guidance. For Marion, the Spirit's infusion of charity transforms and deepens perception. “Charity,” he writes, “opens a

⁶⁵ Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, “Review of William Desmond and Contemporary Theology,” *New Blackfriars* 100, no. 1089 (2019): 619–20, esp. 620.

⁶⁶ Desmond, *God and the Between*, 282.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 327.

distinct world by opening other eyes in man.”⁷⁰ This means, Gschwandtner adds, charity is not “a mere emotion that can be dismissed easily. Rather, it is a different way of seeing the world that has its own rationality.”⁷¹ Charity awakens to the “divine milieu” in which we live by initiating a graced *poiēsis* that leads to a theologically attuned *aesthēsis*.⁷² Through the Spirit, charity is *how* and *what* one perceives because it opens recipients’ eyes to recognize the order of charity in which we live. Quoting Basil of Caesarea, Marion describes the charity-led itinerary: “The path of the knowledge of God lies *from* One Spirit *through* the One Son *to* the One Father.”⁷³ The Trinity is thus uncovered in a “*trinitarian way*” as *apokalypsis* discloses and draws us into God’s own life.⁷⁴ Even though we find intimations of this journey in Desmond’s work, it remains beneath the surface. Lacking a theologically developed understanding of divine charity, when Desmond peers into the crack between the immanent and transcendent orders, he cannot perceive clearly the person, or community of persons, at the heart of mystery. He sees, but indistinctly.

For Marion, “only charity (or however one would like to call it if one is afraid to acknowledge its name) opens the space where the gaze of the other can shine forth.”⁷⁵ Through charity one perceives the Divine giver. Indeed, Robyn Horner summarizes Marion’s entire “theological manifesto” as working out the claim that “God’s first name is love (not being), love is the content of revelation, and revelation is only to be known by loving.”⁷⁶ What Christ reveals, that “God is love” (1 John 4:18), is the meaning and method of interpreting revelation; charity is how one knows God. But, instead of seeing charity as a hermeneutic, he describes it as a “heuristic.”⁷⁷ His reasoning: a hermeneutic would be applied *by the subject* upon the revealed. Apropos of alethic logic, a hermeneutic of charity “would be a mere interpretive device that leaves all ‘real’ investigation to philosophy and subsequently puts a Christian ‘spin’ or ‘garb’ on these prior and fundamental insights.”⁷⁸ A hermeneutical approach would, accordingly, subordinate theology to philosophy by indexing revelation to reason. Consistent

⁷⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 313.

⁷¹ Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 226.

⁷² See Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 71.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 115 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 99 (emphasis original).

⁷⁵ Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 166.

⁷⁶ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction*, 66.

⁷⁷ Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 66–79.

⁷⁸ Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 230.

with an apocalyptic logic, Marion takes his point of departure from Christ who “reveals what has always been hidden (the mystery of God) and makes all things new.”⁷⁹ Christ’s innovation is to manifest God as love.⁸⁰ This disclosure renders charity the bedrock of theology:

Charity deploys itself immediately in the character of Christ, where it appears carnally, mediately in the Trinity, from which it deduces its interpersonal depths, and as a derivative in the Church, where the Son of the Father recapitulates human beings in the Spirit as his adopted brothers and sisters.⁸¹

Charity makes visible hitherto invisible phenomena. It is at once the content and the method for responding to this disclosure. Instead of a hermeneutic imposed by the subject, charity is a Christ-revealed heuristic that opens a passageway from theology to philosophy. “Charity discovers and introduces new phenomena into the world itself and into the conceptual universe that are saturated with meaning and glory, which order and possibly save this world.”⁸²

Let us look at Marion’s interpretation of Matthew 16:13–20 to get a sense for *how* revelation unfolds. Entering Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Although they have all accompanied Jesus, only Peter answers correctly: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Peter’s answer, Marion suggests, marks “the crossing of the divide between the points of view on the *mystērion*, the passage from one interpretation (that of the men of this world) to another (that of Christ), in short, the shifting of the point of view.”⁸³ This perspectival shifting, what he calls *anamorphosis*, is not Peter’s achievement. Rather, it is the work of the Spirit who prompts Peter’s confession. Jesus’ response confirms this: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in Heaven!” Peter, Marion notes, “is the first to

⁷⁹ Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 71.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 77. It is worth mentioning that Marion’s hermeneutics has been challenged by critics like Richard Kearney. In a dialogue with Marion, Kearney raises the question of the hermeneutical status of the saturated phenomenon. Marion’s privileging of Revelation as *irrégradable* would seem to defy interpretation. Revelation must be accepted as it reveals itself to be. Yet, for Kearney, there is no reception of any phenomenon that is not interpreted. Richard Kearney, “A Dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion,” *Philosophy Today* 48/1 (Spring 2004): 12–26. Also Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

⁸³ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 80–81.

perceive the uncovering (*apokalypsis*) of the *mystērion*, because he allows himself to be placed in the very place of its phenomenalization, the trinitarian site opened by the Spirit between the Father and the Son.”⁸⁴ In order to perceive the *apokalypsis* of *mystērion*, or to behold the love of Christ in all its “breadth and length and height and depth” (Eph 3:18), or to see in his face the “icon of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), one’s own spirit must first pass “to the Spirit of God, so as to see it as God sees it.”⁸⁵ The Spirit’s infusion of charity does not inform Peter about Jesus but transforms how Peter perceives him. The Spirit allows “the paternal depth of the filial icon to be seen, which no one can see without him and outside of him.”⁸⁶ Herein the logic of *apokalypsis*: the giving of the gift reveals the giver; the Spirit’s charity makes it possible to perceive in Christ’s iconic face the heart of the God who is love.

Peter’s confession does not imply any totalizing comprehension of Jesus’ identity. A few verses later, he rebukes Jesus for foretelling his death: “God forbid it, Lord!” A harsh reply: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things (Matt 16:23, NIB). Peter’s terrestrial *logos* resists the scandalous wisdom of the *Logos*. So although he gave the right answer to Jesus’ question, he has not yet allowed himself to be drawn fully into the order of being revealed through charity. The *apokalypsis* of Jesus as “Son of God” does not make Christ transparent to finite human logic. In fact, the opposite is the case. *Apokalypsis* does not exhaust mystery but draws the recipient into its depths. Hence Marion’s apothegm: “so much *mystērion*, so much *apokalypsis*,” the greater the sense of mystery, the greater the revelation.⁸⁷ In Christ, the finite *logos* faces the infinite *Logos* and, by the work of the Spirit, passes into its depths to enjoy communion with the Father. This trinitarian manifestation continues, moreover, in and through ecclesial participation in the Eucharist, where the invisible God is made visible in the liturgy, through the sacraments, and validated through the community’s witness.⁸⁸ Divine revelation is not a proposition but an ongoing process that knits its recipients into a theological way of life.

When Desmond takes up the topic of revelation, he draws not on the gospels but upon Flannery O’Connor’s short story “Revelation.” The story

⁸⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 114.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁸⁸ Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 112. For criticism, see Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 94–103.

begins when Ruby Turpin, a large and respectable woman, enters a doctor's office. Squeezing into a chair, she emits a sigh and exclaims, "I wish I could reduce." An ironic statement for, though incapable of diminishing her physical size, she proves quite competent in reducing those around her. Beneath her outward pleasantries, the reader is privy to the way the racist and bigoted Ruby sizes up those in the waiting room, judging most inferior to her. One character, Mary Grace, defies Ruby's categories. The girl glares through eyes that "appeared alternately to smolder and to blaze," and Ruby finds herself prosecuted by the gaze.⁸⁹ Mary Grace persists in "looking at her as if she had known and disliked her all her life—all of Mrs. Turpin's life, it seemed too, not just the girl's life," a look penetrating the hidden recesses of what the reader knows to be Ruby's pusillanimous heart.⁹⁰

Readers watch the silent crescendo of Mary Grace's rage until the moment she launches her book—ironically titled *Human Development*—at Ruby's head and seizes her by the throat. The melee is resolved by sedating Mary Grace. Before the girl lapses into unconsciousness, Ruby interjects:

"What you got to say to me?" she asked hoarsely and held her breath, waiting as for a revelation. The girl raised her head. Her gaze locked with Mrs. Turpin's. "Go back to hell where you come from, you old wart hog," she whispered. Her voice was low but clear. Her eyes burned for a moment as if she saw with pleasure that her message had struck its target.⁹¹

Before grace can heal, O'Connor believed, it has first to cut "with the sword Christ said he came to bring."⁹² Mary Grace violently breaks Ruby out of her revelry, disrupts her delusions, and creates an opening that confronts her with a new, unsettling, logic.

Angry and confused, Ruby rages against the *apokalypsis*, which she, quite rightly, interprets as having come from God. She protests her righteousness, her superiority, but it is for naught. Shaking with fury she roars, "Who do you think you are?" Instead of evanescing into silence, it ricochets back and puts her into question. She who would demand the Holy One stand before her reason is called to the docket. In place of an answer, she receives a vision of:

a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven.

⁸⁹ Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," in *O'Connor: Collected Works* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 637.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 640.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 646.

⁹² Flannery O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the South," in *O'Connor*, 864.

There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives ... and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized ... They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away.⁹³

Ruby sees, now, aright. Not, of course, according to her logic but by the revealed *logos* she resists. "If there is a kind of violence to this godsend," Desmond writes, "at its deepest and most intimate, it is a violation of her understanding of herself as only on the side of the angels or the good."⁹⁴ As day cedes to night, a dark light falls over her. She receives no answer, no *propositio sufficiens* to caulk the crack left by Mary Grace. As she walks home in the darkness, one wonders whether and to what extent she has changed.

One discerns in Ruby's revelation the logic of Jesus: "the last shall be first and the first shall be last" (Matt 20:16). And looked at from the right angle, the story roils with theological motifs: grace, revelation, biblical allusions, an eschatological vision. But even if Ruby intuits her experience as the work of the *Logos*, she does not confess it outright. The same holds true for Desmond. He lingers at the threshold of religious mystery, a boundary between the finite and the infinite reopened by the godsend. The godsend exposes the *metaxu's* religious depths and unveils a superior counter-logic. Yet, without a way of interpreting its excess, its recipient can neither see clearly nor confess its source.

What prevents recipients of Desmond's godsend from confessing the *Logos*, I think, is that metaxology lacks a theologically developed understanding of charity. By no means is this a critique: Desmond is not a theologian. And, I would add, few philosophers today speak of God as often or as eloquently as Desmond. Nor should he be forced to make a confession. But for those who wish to engage with his metaphysics, it is worth considering how an infusion of charity might open a passage between metaxology and theology. So, given a familial intimacy nourished by a complementary understanding of mystery and its apocalyptic disclosures, I propose that we see how Marion's understanding of charity might inform, and theologically transform, metaxology. This will require transposing Desmond's *passio essendi* or "passion of being" into a theological key. With the *passio caritatis*, I hope to describe how the Spirit's work (*poiēsis*) deepens and transforms human

⁹³ O'Connor, *O'Connor*, 654.

⁹⁴ Desmond, "Godsends," 27.

perception by opening the “eyes of the mind” and allows charity’s recipients to behold the *Logos*, who abides at the heart of the *metaxu*.

The *Passio Caritatis*

In a way, Desmond prepares metaxology for its theological expansion. In *The Intimate Universal*, he brings out the religious dimension of the *passio essendi* when he makes reference to a “sacred *passio essendi*: the receiving of our being as patient to the divine communication.”⁹⁵ The crack exposed by the godsend reveals that “while there is divine transcendence in excess to immanence, this transcendence is intimate with the being of the *metaxu*, the between.”⁹⁶ This intimacy is vertical and horizontal. Vertically, every created being is porous to the agapeic Creator. Every mineral, every blade of grass, every living creature is sustained by the same agapeic source. Horizontally, this intimate universal binds creation into a communion. A *logos* of the *metaxu* turns out to be a *logos* of our *oikos*, or our shared home. Opened by the godsend and attuned to the creative givingness of the sacred *passio essendi*, our sense of creation as gift deepens. We become like Augustine, who begged earth and wind and creatures, “‘Tell me about my God—the God who you are not—tell me something about him.’ And they cried out with a loud voice, ‘He is the one who made us.’ My scrutiny of them posed the question; their beauty answered it.”⁹⁷ Undergoing creation’s beauty restores one’s porosity and reopens communication with beauty’s source. One may speak of *creatio ex nihilo*, but for one who has undergone the sacred *passio essendi*, the “from nothing” is nothing less than a profound expression of the depths of the Creator’s love.

If the sacred *passio* bespeaks a religiously charged opening between the immanent and transcendent orders, it is the gift of charity that makes possible a *transitus* across the passage. Through what I am calling the *passio caritatis*, the Spirit’s infusion of charity opens the eyes of the mind and allows the recipient to perceive the *metaxu*’s mysterious depths. One’s terrestrial *logos* is enlightened and graciously tutored by the *Logos*. The passion of charity is the divinely initiated *apokalypsis*, whereby the Spirit’s gift of charity reveals the order of charity (*ordo caritatis*) in which we live. The Spirit’s *poiēsis* graciously deepens *aesthēsis* and enables one to gaze upon creation and discern

⁹⁵ William Desmond, *The Intimate Universal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 403.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2019), 10.6.9.

in its “breadth and length and height and depth” (Eph 3:18) the saturating love of Christ, the *Logos* who had hitherto been concealed in the *metaxu*. The *passio caritatis* brings Desmond’s Augustinian itinerary to an end without end. Through the Spirit charity reaches one’s innermost depths from the exterior to the interior (*ab exterioribus ad interiora*) and, by tutoring the *logos* with God’s *Logos*, gradually brings one to behold all things with faith’s eyes from the inferior to the superior (*ab inferioribus ad superiora*).

Given this new terrain for Desmond’s thought, I allow Marion to open the theological trail. For Marion, as noted, “revelation reveals the Trinity and, above all, it reveals it in a *trinitarian way*.”⁹⁸ In this *apokalypsis*, the Spirit shifts the viewer’s gaze to perceive in Christ’s face the Father’s infinite depths. In revelation, accordingly, “what shows itself gives itself in the mode of an anamorphosis, a shifting of the witness’s point of view on the *mystērion*, a crossing of the epistemological break that makes him see Jesus as the Christ, as the Son of God—that makes Christ show himself to him as Christ gives himself, as Son *from the Father’s point of view*.”⁹⁹ Christ is the hyperbolic phenomenon of divine charity revealed *through* divine charity. Peter’s confession of faith, his recognition of Jesus as the Christ, was not the result of a syllogism or accumulated evidence but emerges as a response to the Spirit’s prompting. Still, even with senses attuned by charity, he does not get the measure of Christ. The *apokalypsis* of divine *mystērion* cannot be indexed to Peter’s logic but confronts his *logos* with divine logic. Instead of mastery over mystery, charity’s *apokalypsis* makes Peter into a witness charged to proclaim the revealed *Logos*. So, from Marion, I derive two criteria for the gift of charity to enter the *metaxu*:

1. Charity cannot be grasped (*conatus*) but only received by undergoing it (*passio*).
2. Charity’s arrival occurs not on our terms (*alētheia*) but unexpectedly and as the bearer of a christocentric logic (*apokalypsis*) enabling recipients to perceive in a trinitarian mode.

Let me suggest how this might work.

An obvious example would be Jesus’s Transfiguration. (Matt 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36). On Mount Tabor Peter beholds Christ anew. Through the *passio caritatis*, he perceives God’s infinity disclosed in Christ’s finitude. The eyes of his mind are opened and Peter recognizes Jesus as Christ saturated in glory. What was “too much” for unaided senses is made perceptible

⁹⁸ Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 99 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82 (emphasis in original).

by grace. The *passio* enables Peter to perceive in a trinitarian mode. Moreover, this pericope shows the ongoing tension between alethic and apocalyptic logic. Although Peter has been enlightened by charity, although he beholds Christ in his glory, the dominative drive of *alētheia* is present. Peter: “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (Luke 9:33). The *conatus* rises and the *passio* recedes as Peter is drawn to fix in place what had been given. The lesson: divine charity is not a one-off but an ongoing process into which we must be drawn and through which we are renewed.

A second example. I write in June 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic exposes deplorable national inequalities. For nine days, protestors have flooded city streets to express outrage and frustration at the systemic racism that has claimed the lives of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. In a searing essay, Bryan Massingale suggests that only an “invasion of divine love” can purge the racism from our nation’s heart.¹⁰⁰ He quotes Constance FitzGerald:

The time will come when God’s light will invade our lives and show us everything we have avoided seeing. Then will be manifest the confinement of our carefully constructed meanings, the limitations of our life projects, the fragility of the support systems or infrastructure on which we depend, the boundaries through which we shall never break, the dreams that will never reach fulfillment, the darkness in our own heart.¹⁰¹

God’s light and love, Massingale continues, is “subversive and destructive. It exposes self-serving political ideologies as shortsighted and corrosive.”¹⁰² For those who benefit from white privilege, the *passio caritatis* will be a *passio*, a suffering. For charity illuminates the darkness of history—our personal narratives as well as our nation’s—and slowly and painfully purges all that blinds us and prevents us from recognizing our sisters’ and brothers’ humanity. Charity’s inbreaking precipitates a breakdown of structural inequalities as God’s kingdom breaks into and reconfigures our world. For the downtrodden and marginalized, this is good news. For the privileged, it is a dark grace and an unwanted wisdom. Yet, through the power of Spirit and revelation of the

¹⁰⁰ Bryan Massingale, “The Assumption of White Privilege and What We Can Do about It,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/assumptions-white-privilege-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>.

¹⁰¹ Constance FitzGerald, “The Desire for God and the Transformative Power of Contemplative Prayer,” in *Light Burdens, Heavy Blessings*, eds. Mary Heather MacKinnon, Moni McIntyre, and Mary Ellen Sheehan (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2000), 216.

¹⁰² Massingale, “The Assumption of White Privilege and What We Can Do about It.”

Logos, those in power find themselves making their own the words of the man blind from birth: "I was blind, but now I see" (John 9:25). By charity's light, we discover ourselves within a fraught *metaxu*, between an old order and a new, where we hear a summons to conversion.

The *passio caritatis* gives rise to a poetic, rather than dogmatic, theology. Through the Spirit's *poiēsis*, a graciously attuned *aesthēsis* perceives what, and who, had been invisible. This bears a cost. "The price for this new insight and compassionate love," Constance FitzGerald writes, "seems to be darkness, suffering and even death."¹⁰³ The very charity that animates one's confession of Jesus as Christ is the charity that bids his companions to stand in solidarity beneath the cross. How, then, does the *passio caritatis* appear in the ethos or *metaxu* of North America in 2020? If divine charity gives us a share in God's own triune life, if charity brings us to see with Christ's eyes and feel with Christ's heart, then the words of Psalm 34:15–18 are heard anew:

When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
And rescues them from all their troubles.
The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
And saves the crushed in Spirit.

By grace we hear as the Holy One hears and, by grace, our hearts are moved as the Holy One's heart has been moved in history. Through the Spirit's *poiēsis*, a transformed *aesthēsis* recognizes and makes possible a response to the "cry for help." Through the passion of charity, we are made agents of the kingdom's *poiēsis* as it reconfigures the *metaxu* according to the *Logos*.

Epiphanic Thinkers

Jean-Luc Marion and William Desmond have dedicated a great deal of their philosophical acumen to probing the limits and possibilities of human reason. Some might worry that Marion has gone too far in conflating philosophy and theology; others, that Desmond has not gone far enough. My intuition: the *logos* of the *metaxu*, when contemplated by a mind enlivened by divine charity, is revealed as the *Logos*. On account of the "familial intimacy" Desmond shares with Marion, I portrayed them as companions who both draw near to the threshold between philosophy and theology. Following Marion's lead, I tried to show how Desmond's metaphysics can both

¹⁰³ FitzGerald, "The Desire for God and the Transformative Power of Contemplative Prayer," 218.

welcome and be transformed through the gift of divine charity, or the *passio caritatis*.

Desmond and Marion are epiphanic thinkers, each attuned to the way the transcendent is manifested through the immanent, the infinite through the finite. Marion's sense of epiphany is markedly liturgical and christocentric. Marion finds, in Desmond's theologically expanded thought, its complement. For through the Spirit, the *metaxu* becomes a monstrosity that allows us to behold, and adore, the *Logos*. Such was the twofold epiphany of Gerard Manley Hopkins in the poem "Hurrahing in Harvest." First, he saw Christ disclosed through creation, the manifestation of the divine through the mundane. Second, it dawns on him that what has been disclosed has been there the entire time: "These things, these things were here but the beholder Wanting."¹⁰⁴ It was *he*—Hopkins—who lacked the eyes to see creation's innermost depths. We find a similar epiphany and logic in Matthew 25, where those who fed the hungry and clothed the naked are shocked to discover that in doing to the "least of these" they were, in fact, doing to the Lord. In the *metaxu*, the passion of charity uncovers creation's christological breadth and depths.

This effort to redress a missed opportunity at a conference in 2012 will not have healed divisions between metaphysics and phenomenology. If I have been successful, it will be because by reading Marion and Desmond as companion thinkers, new theological vistas open for metaxology. Should Desmond lead his readers to the threshold of mystery but go no further, we may still raise a glass to Marion for guiding our reflections on how charity might enter, and reconfigure, how we behold, live, move, and reflect theologically, within the *metaxu*.

¹⁰⁴ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Major Works*, ed. Christine Phillips (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 134.