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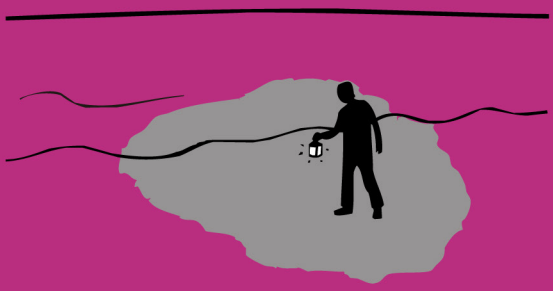

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José I. González Faus

GOD?

José I. González Faus

To all those who are searching, perhaps with great eagerness,
and don't seem to find anything. Also to those who doubt.

> "Perhaps the greatest of the pervesions in Israel —and in our own time—is the ambiguity with which the Word of God is presented, and especially the extremely ambiguous image we present of God."
>
> (L. A. Schoekel, in *La Biblia de nuestro pueblo*, p. 1180).

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CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA Edition - Roger de Llúria 13 - 08010 Barcelona
+34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com - www.cristianismeijusticia.net
Printed by: Ediciones Rondas S.L. - Legal deposit: B 24916-2015
ISBN: 978-84-9730-363-7 - ISSN: 2014-6566 - ISSN (virtual edition): 2014-6574
Translated by Joseph Owens - Cover illustration: Roger Torres
Printed on ecological paper and recycled cardboard - October 2015

PROLOGUE

God is the most inscrutable of all human words. No other word has been so sullied or so mangled. That is precisely why I cannot give up on it. Generations of human beings have discharged on it the full weight of their anguished lives and have beat it into the ground. […] The human races, with their religious differences, have strangled the word; they have killed for it, and they have died for it. […] Where else might I find a similar word for expressing what is supreme? If I were to choose a purer, more resplendent word from the esoteric language of the philosophers, it would provide me with nothing more than a conceptual image without commitment. Missing would be the presence of the One who has been venerated or humiliated by countless human generations with their dread-filled lives and deaths. […] Lacking would be the presence of the One alluded to by generations of humans who knock at the gates of heaven with infernal torments. They draw cartoons and write 'God' beneath them. They kill one another and say it is 'in the name of God.'

But when all delirium and all delusion have disappeared, when they face him in dark solitude and no longer say, 'He, he,' but rather sigh, 'You, you,' is this not the true God? When they all say that same word, 'You,' and then add 'God,' are they not invoking the only Living One, the God of the children of humankind? Is he not the One who listens and pays close attention? And is that not the very reason why the word 'God' has become forever the word of invocation and the most sacred of names in every human tongue? We should respect those who avoid the word in their rebellion against injustice and caprice, which are so quickly referred to God for his authorization. But we cannot give up on it. […] We cannot cleanse the word 'God' and restore its integrity. But as stained and mangled as the word is, we can lift it from the ground and hoist it high above an age of utter anguish.

(Martín Buber, *Eclipse de Dios*, Buenos Aires 1984, pgs. 13-14)

1. ARE THERE APPROACHES TO GOD? TO WHAT POINT?

It has often been observed that Saint Thomas does not speak about "proofs" of God's existence but of "ways."[1] A "way" is not a demonstration. Whereas a demonstration traps and controls the object that it seeks to demonstrate, a way sets a goal and points in a direction but doesn't guarantee that one can fully attain the goal.

On the other hand, at least from a Christian perspective, if God could be "demonstrated," he would no longer be God but would become an idol that humans can control. Believing that God exists would then be as contradictory as believing the Pythagorean theorem. That is not something one believes; it is something one knows.

The force of the five ways of Thomas is found not only in the arguments but in the multiplicity, which suggests that there are many ways that point in the same direction. Such multiplicity, given the structure of human knowledge, is a reasonable indication of credibility. Nevertheless, Thomas falls short on this point because all his ways are of an intellectual nature, and as we will now try to point out, it may be possible for us to seek and find God through non-philosophical ways, such as esthetics, mysticism, ethics, and even natural science. Do these other paths lead us in the direction of "that which we call God"? If such is the case, then there is an even greater accumulation of evidence than that cited by Thomas.

Even then, however, we wouldn't be able to speak about "proving God's existence," not only because God would then cease to be God, as I just stated, but also because the mere existence of evil (and the terrible forms of it that we experience in our own lives) calls seriously into question any demonstration of God's existence. Accordingly, if our rational arguments were true proofs, they could logically lead us to the affirmation of an evil God or at least to profess a type of Manichaeism that would allow for the existence of two opposed gods.

In God we can only believe, as I said in the title of another essay. That does not mean that our faith is irrational or unfounded. Perhaps we can find important signs in the various dimensions of our human existence that point us in that direction. These are the "ways" where we should begin, and since we've already taken the lead from Thomas Aquinas, we will respect his number and speak of another "five ways."

1.1. Science

God is not a question or a cosmological problem. The God that can be reached through the sciences may provide an explanation about the universe, but it still leaves unanswered the human question about God.

Despite the atheistic fundamentalism of some latter-day scientists, the sciences do not offer a uniform answer to the question about God. The sciences cannot answer either the how or the why of the "big bang." They cannot explain the origin of that almost infinite concentration of energy that produced the great explosion, nor can they enlighten us about what existed before it. Even the word "before" is inexact because not only mass and energy but also time and space came into existence only with the big bang.

Recently there has been much discussion of Anthony Flew's change of opinion about God's existence. Flew was formerly one of those apostles of atheism who often cited the well-known parable of John Wisdom about the "invisible gardener." Sam and Jerry find themselves in a garden, and Jerry concludes that there must be a gardener who takes care of it. They look for him everywhere; they wait for him day and night, but the gardener never appears. At last Sam, tired of waiting so long, protests to Jerry: "What is left of your original surmise? This gardener is invisible, intangible, and eternally evasive. How is he any different from an imaginary gardener and even from a non-existent gardener?"[2] Well, now at the age of 81, the man who was known as "the most notorious atheist of the world" has published a book called *There is a God,*[3] in which he declares that as a scientist he has had to yield to the force of data and to affirm the existence of God.

This is not the place to evaluate Flew's arguments. I only want to observe that, even if his argumentation is accepted (which logically *seems* to be correct), the most that the scientist affirms is a "divine mind" that programmed the immense computer of the universe. For us, however, the aim of the question about God is not only whether such a divine mind exists (however it might be called), but whether it has any relation with us and, if so, what that relation is. Do we humans matter to it at all, and in what sense? Or is the divine mind simply a kind of supreme chess player who is entertained by playing solitaire?

According to the Babylonian epic, *Enuma Elish* ("When in the heights"), the gods created human beings as their servants, to do the tasks they didn't like doing. Are the sciences able to determine whether the "divine mind" posited by some scientists resembles the god Marduk of the Babylonian poem? Or does it

have a different relationship to human beings? This is the correct perspective for asking the question about God, and in this regard science has nothing to say. God has more to do with history than with nature. The most decisive question for humans is whether this earthly history (and our lives within it) has any meaning or is moving in any direction. As Martin Buber used to point out, we are not as interested in the God about whom we can only say "he" as in the God whom we can address as "you."

That is why I believe that modern forms of scientific atheism exceed their competence not only by negating a particular way of explaining the universe's *origin* but, even more, by negating any *relation* of the hypothesis called God *with ourselves.* This latter relation is beyond the realm of science. It's as if we responded to the question asked by the protagonist of Gironella's *The Cypresses Believe in God*, "Why are there couples?" by saying, "To make sure there is human reproduction." Such an answer hardly begins to respond to the question.

Having said this, we should still reaffirm science in the following sense: if the universe exists and has been formed as science says it has, any affirmation of God's existence must be compatible with scientific data, which is an explanation of the way God works. As a believing scientist has said, God speaks through the Bible, but he has also spoken another word to us through creation.[4] This is undeniable and should not be forgotten, for it shows the idolatrous nature of the creationist fundamentalism thatis popular with the American right.

1.2. Philosophy

Something similar can be said about philosophy: human intelligence has a clear perception of its proper limits. It cannot surpass those limits, nor can it know whether the realm that lies beyond them is still "solid land" or only an oceanic abyss —or even whether that abyss is in some way habitable. That's why I have always liked Eugenio Tría's description of human reason as "frontier reason." A frontier is more than just a limit; it is a limit that can be exceeded. We'll offer a few examples of how the frontiers of our reason can be reached.

a) Although Thomas speaks of five ways, perhaps they can all be reduced to one basic intuition: in the diverse spheres of reality we can detect a dimension of solidity or absoluteness alongside a dimension of flux or relativity. This is the case with movement, with causality, with the actualization of possibilities, with the accuracy of blind instinct, etc. Reason perceives that it is impossible to guarantee such solidity (infected as it is with the virus of inanity) without reference to an Absolute that does not belong to this reality but nevertheless enables and sustains all the solidity and plurality of what is real. This intuition is essentially the same as that of the mad Nietzsche, who says in *The Gay Science* that denying God's existence is like "erasing our horizon with a sponge" and being left with neither north nor south, with neither up nor down.

In this way reason is clearly approaching its frontiers. But even those who think they are able to discern and affirm something lying beyond

our reason can propose nothing more than an "Unmoved Mover," a "Necessary Being," or an "Uncaused Cause of causes." They have no way of knowing whether that Being has any type of meaningful relation with us. For that reason, as Zubiri used to comment with irony, no one feels moved to pray a *Miserere mei* to the Cause of causes. Mere "belief" is one thing, but faith is another. For Luther God was someone in whom we can trust and take refuge,[5] or someone we can address as "you" and not simply denote as "he," as Buber said. Perhaps that is why Tierno Galván, when considering this topic from a philosophical viewpoint, prefers to avoid the word "God" and to speak of "Fundament." In this way he rejects the need to affirm or deny or seek any ultimate explanation of things —and that is the essence of agnosticism.

b) Another example from the opposite extreme (not agnostic but theist) is Voltaire. He seems to have considered the existence of God to be "evident," but both the bad example given by the official church and the lethal earthquake in Lisbon made him certain that the God he affirmed mentally had no relationship with us nor any desire to establish one. The expression "Deism" was coined in subsequent centuries to indicate belief in the existence of a God who has nothing to do with us human beings and about whom we can know nothing. Voltaire spoke of the possibility of explanation but not of relation.

c) Spinoza's definition moves us in the same direction. His expression *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature) should not be understood in the pantheistic sense of identity. Rather, Spinoza distinguished between *Natura naturans* (that which makes nature be nature) and *Natura naturata* (the nature that we ourselves experience). In his view God would be the force that makes reality real, understood in a sense of the Christian invocation, "O God, steadfast sustainer of all things" (*rerum Deus tenax vigor*). As in the previous cases, however, while Spinoza's concept of God helps to explain the existence of things, it does not inspire confidence. It tells us something about God, but it says nothing about God *with* us. That is why Spinoza thought that our desire to be loved by God was idolatry.

d) Plato thought that it was possible to affirm something that existed "beyond" human reason. For him God was the idea of the Good, and the true reality of things subsisted in ideas. But even if we prescind from the question of the reality of Platonic ideas, his affirmation says little about God's relation with us. It speaks rather of how our experience of inconsistency and incompleteness moves us to aspire for the Good.

e) Even the Buddha, according to many commentators, acknowledges "the Unborn, the Unoriginated, the Uncreated,"[6] but there is no evidence that this "Unborn" has any relationship with us. Consequently, the Buddha prescinds from discussing such a Being in his teaching because doing so would be a waste of time and would resolve nothing. The result is that Buddhism can be seen as atheist or agnostic but also at times as theist.

f) More examples can be given, such as the antithetical yet comple-

mentary experiences of Heraclitus and Parmenides. According to the former, "everything is in flux, and nothing remains the same,"[7]; according to the latter, being is permanently Being. The two of them anticipate the great question that has arisen with modernity: does human history have any goal or any meaning? or is it pure illusion and eternal repetition?

The foregoing examples are sufficient to help us understand this borderline territory of our reason.

1.3. Ethics

With ethics things get more complicated, but it is not because it is impossible to posit a morality without God. The autonomy that human beings possess by virtue of conscience and the right use of reason allows them to decide what is moral without needing instruction from any outside authority. It can be objected that we human beings only rarely make virtuous use of our reason and our conscience and that we more frequently place them at the service of our impulses. Moreover, even if we follow our conscience faithfully, we cannot *ground* the unconditional character of moral imperatives without having recourse to an Absolute. Reason and conscience can tell us what is good and what is evil, but they cannot explain to us why we should do good and avoid evil. Nevertheless, as human beings we can still experience those moral values.

Here is where things get more complicated. The supposedly absolute value of moral values seems to be contradicted by the fact that, in most cases, things go better for those who do not obey those imperatives. This was the drama of the Jewish affirmation of God, which from its beginnings had profound ethical implications. This was the prayer of the psalmist: "Turn away from evil! Do what is right! Then you will dwell securely" (37,27). But in the manner of a Goya etching, the saying can be turned around to read: "Turn away from evil! Do what is right! And you will never dwell securely!" The prosperity of the wicked is seductive, and it threatens to subvert all human behavior. Civil association becomes impossible, and society becomes a war of all against all in which human beings devour one another like wolves.

Consequently, no matter how much we argue that human beings can distinguish between good and bad, no one has yet dared to propose, or even to dream of, a society without "guardians of order," that is, without police, without judges, without punishments or rewards. That's the reason why there is much debate about Dostoyevsky's statement: "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted." Atheists like Nietzsche or the early Sartre subscribed to it. Others deny it on the basis of their own experience of the ethical imperative. Meanwhile, our post-modern, neoliberal culture seems to have adopted this version of the statement: if God does not exist, then everything is permitted for me, but not everything is permitted for my neighbor.

This dead-end alley led Kant to affirm the existence of God, not as the conclusion of a proof but as a "postulate of practical reason." In this way

he was able to save "morality" if not morals. The so-called "moral theism" of Kant[8] is not far removed from the defense of the just person offered by the biblical book of Wisdom (chapters 4-5). In both cases, what is affirmed is not only the existence of a supreme Being but also a clear relation of that Being with us, a relation too simply defined in the catechism as "rewarding the good and punishing the wicked."[9]

1.4. Esthetics

Recently the search for possible access to God through beauty has been intensified. Reference is made (even if out of context) to Dostoyevsky's statement that beauty is a "savior of the world." Perhaps people forget that Saint Augustine in his days of searching was already asking all the marvels of the world, "Are you God?" and was always receiving the same answer: "Look beyond us."[10]

Nevertheless, the experience of beauty contributes two important dimensions to our theme: gratuity and suggestiveness.

1.4.1. Gratuity

The most novel impact of beauty does not derive from the pleasure it produces but from the absolute gratuity of that pleasure. Things are not beautiful so as to have more value or to garner admiration, nor do things need beauty in order to fulfill their mission. They are beautiful simply because they are. Their beauty is an unexpected gift.

In the days when there was more devotion to Mary, someone commented that the most beautiful thing about Mary of Nazareth was not that she was filled with grace but that she herself was not even aware of it. We can understand the significance of this comment by comparing it with an expression we frequently use among ourselves, namely, that a person not only is beautiful but "knows that she is." That consciousness of one's own specialness cruelly devalues what is most attractive in people.

These two aspects (the lack of any reason for beauty and the lack of awareness of it) characterize the true message of beauty, which is one that is little appreciated today in a world where beauty is raw material for contests and prizes, for auctions and prices, for business and marketing.

On the other hand, if we recover and relive the true meaning of gratuity, then our experience will be able to approach that closed frontier which our reason is always probing even though, as we said before, we can say nothing about what lies beyond it. In fact, if we want to be honest, our experience of beauty is troubled by those striking verses of Blanco Vega: "See what it is to draw back, / to leave such great beauty amid such awful war…"

1.4.2. Suggestiveness

On the other hand, beauty, besides being pleasing, is very often enormously suggestive. Perhaps this is most truly said of music, which has a certain "sacramental" character in the way it refers beyond itself.

When we listen to music, it's not just that our ears are delighted by certain sensations (melody, rhythm, harmony), but we feel transported ourselves to

"something greater," something which we may not be able to analyze but which we can certainly experience. The finale of the first act of *Madame Butterfly,* the prelude of Lohengrin, or the serene peacefulness of Gregorian chant are able to carry us unawares beyond the sound produced by the musical notes. We intuit or affirm a "That" whose nature is not simply instructive but attractive. Plato understood clearly that when beauty is appreciated for its gratuitous aspect, it issues a call for us to "ascend" from corporal loveliness to admirable behavior and finally to the beauty of wisdom and love.[11]

Simone Weil called this synthesis of gratuity and suggestiveness "purity." She recounts how once, when she was "alone in the small Romanesque chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli [in Assisi], which is an incomparable marvel of purity… something stronger than I forced me, for the first time in my life, to get down on my knees."[12]. Again, it seems that the border that reason bucks up against was opened up and she was able to see beyond it. One no longer just assumes that the border exists; one "verges" on it. This step is taken not at the level of mere reasoning but at the level of experience, and indeed of *global* experience, because true beauty not only delights our senses (hearing or sight) but also affects the whole of our being and sets it in motion.

These allusions to experience lead us on to the next chapter, for it seems that in human life there is space for other dimensions of experience. These dimensions are equally inexpressible, but they are better defined than the bewildering suggestiveness of beauty. These experiences don't leave us with the mystifying messages communicated by many beautiful realities but rather are experiences of "contact"; they are experiences of encounter with that unutterable Mystery that we have called God. I am naturally referring to what is called mystical experience or (in a minor key) spiritual experience.

1.5. Mysticism

Mysticism is usually given less value and less credit than it deserves, and this for two understandable reasons: it is subjective, and it is experienced by few people. When hearing of the testimony of mystics, the frequent reaction of many people is not to pay heed; they tend rather to distrust it or to ask why that experience is given to others and not to them, thus discrediting the experience. We therefore feel obliged to spend a moment responding to these difficulties.

1.5.1. The reality of mystical experience

There are in fact few things more ambiguous or less verifiable than mysticism. But is there nothing more to say about it?

a) As subjective experience, mysticism is nothing more than the intensification of the spiritual experience that is accessible to most people who believe in God. The medieval classic written by Thomas à Kempis stated centuries ago: "I prefer to feel contrition than to be able to define it." Unfortunately the Catholicism of subsequent centuries devoted itself to defining almost everything while feeling hardly anything. And that ten-

dency, with the change of cultures, has dramatically influenced our modern-day Christianity.

When Rahner prophesied that Christians of the 21st century "will be mystics or they won't be Christian," he was making it clear that *experience* is a decisive factor for affirming God's existence, though it is not the only factor or the determining one. The hard truth is that God is known more by our loving him than by our rational arguments for his existence. We could parody Augustine by saying, "Give me a loving heart and it will understand what I'm saying."[13]

Using non-religious language, we can state the same thing by saying that mysticism seeks to *cultivate interiority* and that the present interest in mysticism is a painful confession of our lack of interiority. But here we also see the risks involved, because human beings are not purely "interior"; the interior and the exterior are equally potent, as are the personal and the communal.[14] Consequently, whenever we speak of mysticism, we do well to add the qualifier of Metz: it is "open-eyed" mysticism.

b) As to the objection that mysticism is the experience of only a few people, let us cite again the example of Simone Weil. She states, "At no moment of my life have I have sought God," and in another passage she claims that she knew nothing about mysticism. Nevertheless, she confesses to "having been taken by Christ, not only implicitly, but consciously."[15] For Christians the rarity of mystical experience may seem more acceptable since they understand that the faith is transmitted through the testimony of others and that God always prefers to work by using a few to influence "the many" (for the sake of all). Indeed, the foundational event of Christianity (the resurrection of Jesus) was experienced by only a small group of people, but those few consequently became witnesses for many others.

Christians might even suspect that there is a good reason for this, since mystical experience often creates many difficulties and problems for those who receive it. Luke shows surprising subtlety in his infancy narrative when he joins the nearly inexpressible experience of God's embrace of Mary ("Hail, full of grace… blessed among women) with the subsequent announcement, "A sword will pierce your soul." That seems to be the ultimate destiny of true mysticism.

That is why for Christians it turns out to be more comprehensible that God would manifest himself directly to a few and through those few reach out to the many. Still, we should recognize that such a limitation may appear bothersome and disturbing to modern agnostics who are searching for God, sometimes with great earnestness.

1.5.2. The contents

Let us now pass from the fact of the experience to its contents (and here we limit ourselves to Christianity since our space is limited).[16] We should begin by declaring that, even though it is nearly impossible to speak of the contents of mystical experience, we must make the attempt. Disregarding the sage advice of Wittgenstein ("Whereof we cannot speak, we had best remain

silent"), many mystics have in fact attempted to describe the reality about which it is almost impossible to speak. The inadequacy of language, however, leads us to prefer to address the formal aspects of the experience rather than its contents.

In this regard we can say that the great lesson of true mysticism is that God can be reached only by referring to him as "You" and not just in the third person. When one speaks of God in the third person, whether affirming his existence of denying it, one is effectively speaking of an idol. In contrast, when we address God directly, all our concepts about God are transformed. We can get a rough understanding of this by examining human relations: we reach the true being of another person when we see the person as a "you" and not simply as a "he" or "she."

Mystical experience is a strange synthesis of dispossession and fulfillment, of a "dark night" that is nevertheless "more lovely than the dawn." Mystical experience gives a person the definite sense of contact and presence, and this becomes visible in a thousand typical details of the person at prayer: kneeling down, removing shoes, being overcome in a silence that can be expressed only in the absolute certainty that "You are here." But that certainty is accompanied by the equally profound sensation of being overwhelmed: you realize that God is infinitely more than what you're experiencing and that all the formulas and words with which you try to express the experience do no more than diminish and falsify it.

Spiritual experience is therefore a source of freedom and confidence. It produces serene sensations of both certainty and relativity, and these in turn lead to a profound but humble feeling of being free. One of the first Christian mystics (Saint Paul) expressed it simply but intensely: "Where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom." By reason of their freedom and confidence, mystics are never aggressive, but they almost always present problems for institutions.

When mystics understand that they have done nothing to deserve their mystical experience and that it is a gratuitous gift, then they usually suspect that it was given them to be communicated to others. And this is where the Calvary of the mystics begins. When they return to this "godless" world, their experience of this reality clashes violently with the experience they had of God. And God is often no long longer available to lift the favored ones out of their morass. This is what we will try to show in the following excursus, which will help to prepare the way for another approach to the question of evil and suffering, which are true stumbling blocks to faith and the "bedrocks" of many kinds of atheism.

1.6. Excursus: mysticism and reality

I have cited previously the harsh contrast between the psalmist's expression of unshakable certainty ("Turn away from evil! Do what is right! Then you will dwell securely": 37,27) and what is frequently the law of the world ("Turn away from evil! Do what is right! And you will never dwell securely!"), something that our present economic crisis has driven home.

All mystical experience should be evaluated in terms of whether it attempts to flee from that harsh reality or whether it instead accepts the need to confront it and perhaps be devoured by it. The presumed mystics who flee reality are discredited in doing so; such persons arouse the suspicion that they are seeking their own wellbeing more than they're seeking God, and they end up being more isolated from others instead of being helpful to them.[17] In the case of those mystics who confront reality, we are dealing with "open-eyed mysticism" (J. B. Metz). Such persons will probably share something of the destiny of Jesus of Nazareth who for Christians was the man who experienced God most intensely. Simply because they perceive and proclaim the contrast we've mentioned, true mystics are always bothersome to the powers of this world, and it often happens that their destiny is to be eliminated. Nevertheless, their sheer dedication allows them to transmit something of their experience to others and thus to continue on the path of Christ, as I will now try to show.

In my work on Christology I described how the primitive church understood the death of Jesus as the "death of the Prophet, the death of the Just One, and the death of the Servant." In this way it made use of three important categories found in the tradition of the First Testament.[18] This understanding of Jesus' death stresses how our corrupt world reacts against everything that is possibly good ("The world created by him did not recognize him, and his own people did not accept him": John 1,11.12).

We will now present a similar schema by alluding to the book of Job, one of the most remarkable works of human history. The book is basically an argument about God. Job argues that his miseries are undeserved and unjust but are not a punishment from God; and if they *were* a punishment from God, then God would be unjust. Still, after pleading his cause, Job does not know what to do or how to explain his suffering. He is accused of blaspheming by his friends, who have no mystical experience at all (or no "knowledge of God," if we prefer to use the expression favored by the New Testament). Without realizing it, the friends profess a merely sociological type of religion that serves them as a security blanket, and so they condemn Job for thinking the way he does. They point out to him the incomprehensible mystery of creation, and they demand that he admit his guilt.

This debate takes a dramatic turn when Job realizes that it is not only his own misfortune that is unjust but that the whole world is filled with unjust misery and suffering because it is a world in which wickedness always ends up triumphant.[19]

The Judeo-Christian tradition has often been accused of being excessively pessimistic about this world. Even the atheist Marx, however, wrote that human history has from its origins been a "history of class struggle." He is stating in a totally non-religious (and perhaps rather reductive) way the same as what Judeo-Christian tradition states, namely, that human history has always been a story of aggression and the domination of some people by

others. In such a history there can be no space for God because such domination is completely contrary to the will of God. Any religious faith that ignores this datum and fails to make it central to its worldview is blind and inauthentic, no matter how agreeable the faith may seem in other ways.

Let us return now to the book of Job. When in the final act of the drama God begins to speak, he seems to repeat some of the arguments of Job's friends regarding the incomprehensible mystery of creation. Nevertheless, God also criticizes the friends severely for having asserted that Job's misery was a punishment from God. The judgment against the friends is so harsh that they will be saved only if Job himself, whom they have maltreated, intercedes on their behalf.

After the book of Job, the pseudo-religious idea that the good things of this world serve as God's rewards and the bad things as God's punishments should have been definitively abandoned. I expressly say "should have been" because today, twenty-five centuries later, countless people who claim to believe in God continue to think the same way as Job's friends did. They perceive the good fortunes and the ill fortunes of this world to be, not the victories of evil over justice crying out to heaven (the biblical vision), but rewards and punishments of God. This way of thinking, which is typical of so many religious people, is not only radically anti-Christian but ends up producing all kinds of atheism, which is only logical given the context we've described.

Let us conclude this excursus by saying that, as scandalous as the question of evil may seem when talking about God, the scandal cannot be explained by interpreting evil as God's punishment and good fortune as God's reward. Such an interpretation misrepresents the question of God and ultimately falsifies it. Those who believe in God can say that they trust in him despite the evil in the world, but they should never believe in God as an explanation for the world's evils.

The "five ways" mentioned earlier make it clear that all the finest aspects of humanity flow together toward a single goal: *human beings are defined by a searching question and an expectation; they are constitutionally open to the possible manifestation of a hypothetical Beyond.*

That is why Rahner defined the human being as a "hearer of the Word": an ear listening, in case that mysterious "Word" is pronounced. While that definition is not false, it is highly rational and needs to be complemented with other more inclusive definitions. Human beings are also seekers of Plenitude who are "expecting a Welcome," or to use the quaint language of A. Bentué, they are like the buttonhole awaiting the button. In this regard, M. Blondel stressed the enduring disparity between the object desired and the will that desires it ("the will desired and the will desiring"), and the way in which the will transcends the desired object.

This dimension of our being may at times be anesthetized or put to sleep, as happens also with other human dimensions. Nevertheless, there is nearly universal consent as to its existence, as is evident even in the language of many contemporary post-moderns: they say they are atheist but at the same time they claim to recognize something "sacred," meaning everything that exceeds our grasp or sounds mysterious to us.

Those who take stance must ask themselves: instead of seeking that toward which the finger is pointing, are they considering only the finger that is pointing, simply because the finger is more accessible and more tranquilizing than that intuited Beyond?[20]

The Christian proclamation can be formulated thus: in Jesus of Nazareth we have been given an answer to that searching, transcending dimension of our human existence. That revelation is given to us because without it the idea we conceived of the mystery of the

world would always be shaped in accord with our own interests. That is why early Christianity constantly insisted that "without God there is no knowledge of God" (*sine Deo non cognoscitur Deus*).

In the following section we will try to speak about that Word or Welcome that has been extended to us. We do so while fully aware that all language about God contains more untruth than truth, as the Fourth Lateran Council taught, and in that sense silence may be better. We will make the attempt all the same because language is absolutely necessary to create community and to come to mutual understanding among ourselves —and faith in the Christian God is intrinsically communitarian.[21]

3. THE CHRISTIAN GOD

"If there were gods, how could I bear not to be one?" (F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*). "For those who want to see there is sufficient light, and for those don't want to see there is sufficient darkness" (B. Pascal, *Pensées*).

"You would not seek me if you hadn't already found me" (B. Pascal, *Pensées*). "Truly you are a God who stays hidden" (Isaiah 45,15).

"Whoever sees me sees the Father" (Jn 14,8). "I was hungry and you gave me to eat" (Mt 25,35). "Love your neighbor and don't worry about anything else" (Augustine, Commentary on the First Letter of John).

Not only does Christianity profess that God exists and has responded to the dynamic cry that is the human being, but it also believes that that human longing is a gift of God himself to prepare for his encounter with humanity. Thus does the Judeo-Christian myth of creation speak of man created "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1,26). The word "image," in those times when there were no cameras or copying machines, had a more serious and dynamic meaning that it has in present-day language. An "image" was not a "copy" (as we say today) but an earnest effort, a never satisfied striving to become equal to the model.

3.1. From man to God

The first access that human beings have to God is in the recognition that they are not God: they are "self-atheists." In this sense we can say that *every human being* has the possibility of gaining access to God; the explicit negation of my own divinity opens me implicitly to a dimension of my being that negates my pretension to power. In the biblical and Christian conception of prayer, the main purpose of our praise of God (for which he has absolutely no need) is to make us acknowledge that we are not God (and that we need to acknowledge the fact). That praise and that acknowledgment

are the first indispensable steps toward being able to receive the revelation of God. Nietzsche's Zarathustra seemed to be quite aware of this. And Metz does well to repeat that the word "God" at first sounds like a threat for anyone trying to conceive its meaning.[22]

When such acknowledgment ceases to be simply theoretical (and thus able to coexist with practical attitudes of self-worship) and becomes a vital, attitudinal posture, then the human person is confessing God and is opening up to him in a way that is only implicit but still allows God to become consciously or unconsciously present "in ways known only to God" (GS 22). Therefore, it is good to recommend to contemporary agnostics, who through no fault of their own fail to believe, that they attempt to pray every day with more or less these words: "If you existed, you would be worthy of my adoration and my love, and so I want to offer them to you now, conditionally." This will help them to grow in their humanity so their "ignorance about whether they have an Owner" doesn't degenerate into thinking that they own themselves.

3.2. From God to man

3.2.1. Pedagogy

According to Christianity, the revelation of God has been dynamic and progressive. We will point out some of the characteristics of this revelation.

a) *The victory of monotheism*. When confronted with a God who revealed himself as liberator but then seemed disappear and leave the people alone in the desert to struggle with the myriad necessities of life, the Israelites could hardly resist the temptation to resort to other gods who seemed closer at hand and who offered "specialized" assistance, such as for harvests, female fertility, health, wars, and the like. The monarchy contributed to the polytheist temptation since it obliged the kings to engage in countless military endeavors. The biblical account of the kings reveals that most of them were idolaters. Temple worship tried to stem the infidelity by concentrating cultic activities in Jerusalem and by condemning the "high places" which represented the worst temptations to apostasy from Yahweh (cf. 2 Kgs 17,7-18). The Temple also produced among the people a sense of identity and unity: "How I rejoiced when they told me that we are going to the house of the Lord!" Consequently, to reassure the people's faith in the closeness of Yahweh ("What other people has gods that are so close?), Israelite religion had recourse to:

b) *Concrete places of divine presence*: the cloud, the ark, the temple, etc., are examples of a primitive faith that Jesus will bring to maturity by stating that God is not to be worshiped in any concrete place but "in spirit and in truth" (as Paul also says in Athens: Acts 17,24-25). The distinction between sacred and profane disappears in the God revealed by Jesus. What is truly sacred is the human being's growth in humanity. Jesus wanted his followers to be "fishers of people," in continuity with the prophetic language about God as the "sower of people" (e.g., Jer 31,27).

c) *From the other to the Other*. In this way believers will be led little by

little to discovering that God is close at hand not in specific times and places but *in other persons*, especially those who are suffering and victimized. The distinction between pure and impure also disappears (or else is transferred from the sphere of objects like foods and times to the sphere of human behavior).

In this way God reveals himself to be a Father, but a parent of adult children who are called to grow and not to remain minors forever (contrary to the strong unconscious temptation of many human mothers and fathers, who want to continue to feel needed). At the same time, God's progressive revelation shows us that in this life we see only "as in a mirror darkly" (1 Cor 13,12), no matter how brilliant and definitive our expressions of faith may appear.[23] What is "beyond" exceeds our imaginations and our expectations far more than the New Testament exceeds the Old.

d) This long process of "education" ends with the twofold paradoxical goal: on the one hand, living in overawed respect for the infinite mystery of God, before whom only silent adoration is possible, and on the other, daring to address him with the most intimate expression of confidence: the *Abba* of Jesus. Christian faith in God requires us to maintain these two inseparable polarities: remote but not inaccessible, and intimate but not controllable.

e) The Bible makes us understand that God often conducts his pedagogy with the help of human beings, moving "from the few toward the many." After humankind had perverted his good creation (Gen 1-11), God continued working through a people that was tiny but nevertheless called to be a "light for all nations," and then he worked in Jesus of Nazareth. Christian faith in God implies the possibility of this type of "representation" or substitution.

3.2.2. The acting rather than the being of God

Throughout this whole process God reveals himself not by holding classes or teaching about his nature but by acting in a particular way: "I am who I will be" (probably the best translation of Yahweh's response to Moses in Ex 3,14). In his revelation God makes manifest his attitude toward us. Saint Thomas began his magnum opus by stating that we can know *that* God is but we cannot know *what* God is (or *how* God is). Knowing *that* God exists echoes the vague conviction of many simple people: "There has to be something!" But defining *what* God is exceeds any such vague conviction: if we trust in Christ, then the "something that there has to be" is the indestructible love of God for human beings.

3.2.3. God of the poor

In portraying God as vindicator of the poor and the oppressed, the First Testament makes it clear that a close connection exists between justice and the revelation of God. The New Testament expands this revelation not only in the person of Christ, "who became poor for our sake so that by his poverty we might become rich" (2 Cor 8.9), but also in that song of Christian identity containing the longest definition of God in the Bible: he is the "mercy that

… brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly; that fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty" (Lk 1,50-53). This revelation is incompatible with the cult of the god of wealth (Mt 6,24) because the true proprietors of the Kingdom of God are the poor (Lk 6,20).

3.2.4. "God is Love"

Thus we find, at the end of the New Testament, the only biblical phrase that speaks not of what God does but of who God is: "God is Love" (1 Jn 4.16). We know the reality of love and goodness not by speculating about them but by seeing them at work. We understand their meaning when they touch us and move us, and that is precisely what a "narrative theology" attempts to explain.

Love is what is most present and most absent in our lives.[24] God is a love that is glimpsed but not recognized in our human experiences. To describe it the New Testament sought out an obscure Greek word, *agapê*, which denotes the gift of a disinterested giver. *Agapê* implies a freely given gift, as does the English word "charity" or the Latin *caritas,* and that is what should be understood when we say that "God is love." Unfortunately, that meaning has become lost because our incapacity for gratuitousness has devalued the word.

Both *agapê* and charity are at odds with our most frequent experience of love, which the Greeks called *eros. Eros* is love of the other for one's own benefit; that doesn't necessarily mean that such love is selfish (such as exploiting others for sexual or economic advantage), but it does mean that we are "needy beings" (Marx) and we have unlimited needs. The attraction exercised by beauty or goodness can move us to keep growing in our search for them. Consequently it makes no sense to set up a moral opposition between *agapê* and *eros* and make the former somehow superior to the latter; such moralism will only make us liable to the kind of accusations that were made against the Jansenists monks: "pure as angels, proud as devils."

Almost all the *agapê* that we humans possess springs from our *eros,* which it then transforms. That can often be seen in the love of couples for one another or in the love of parents for their children. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of our erotic desires has led many thinkers (from Aristotle on) to claim that the most complete experience of disinterested love is to be found in friendship, or at least in some forms of friendship, because friendship can also sometimes take the form of self-seeking.

Finally, claiming that God is Love deauthorizes cultic worship. As human beings, we are incapable of giving God anything that is worthy of him. There is no need to try to win God's favor because he is already on our side. The only thing he asks of us is a little trust and a firm resolve to love one another as equals. This is a theme that evolves marvelously in the First Testament, reaching its apex in chapter 58 of Isaiah.

3.2.5. Father, Son, and Spirit

It is within the framework of the revelation of God as Love that we must place the so-called dogma of the Trinity. Jesus didn't go about Galilee giving

theology classes and explaining that he was triune. It was the disciples' experience of God that emerged from the encounter with Jesus Christ that gave birth to the confession of the Trinity. Western theology later converted that confession into a type of "irrational mathematics," so that other monotheistic religions have accused Christians of being idolatrous. Even a fine philosopher like Kant thought that faith in the Trinity served no purpose and should be put aside.

But as I've said already, I am convinced that the Trinitarian intuition has a great contribution to make to our understanding of human existence. The first thing that it tells us is that the Absolute Being which is the ultimate source and explanation of all that exists is not Absolute Solitude but Absolute Communion, a communion so complete that God is simultaneously unity and community.

Further, on the basis of our conviction that God manifests outwardly how he exists inwardly, our faith in the Trinity marks our existence in the following way. Christians lament that God the Father is sadly absent in today's godless world. Nevertheless, that God who is absent makes himself present *outside* ourselves as Word, calling us to recognize him in all those who need our love, above all in the victims of history. He also makes himself present *inside* ourselves as the Spirit who transforms our spirit, allowing us to recognize God in all his children in need of our help and moving us to call him Father in this land where his paternity is so little acknowledged.

Thus God is at once unattainable Absence, nearby Call, and intimate Force —that's what it means to believe in God as Father, Word, and Spirit.

3.2.6. Newness

The foregoing shows that the revelation of the Christian God has a surprising newness that is foreign to our human disquisitions; no such revelation appears in any other sphere of history, thus confirming the dictum of the Church Fathers: "Without God it is impossible to know God." This phrase captures the significance of all the "ways" that were described in the first part of this booklet: the human dynamism does not reach its goal by itself but by the decision of God to meet up with it. That's why he created it.

3.2.7. Mystery always

But Christianity also affirms that God continues to be a Mystery for us even after he reveals himself. Despite everything Thomas Aquinas wrote about God and despite his insistence that we can predicate every perfection of God, he nevertheless followed his teacher Albertus Magnus in acknowledging that *the most beautiful of all God's names is "the Unknowable"* because it situates him far above anything that we can attempt to say about him.[25]

The Mystery is bipolar because he is at once the "Nameless God" but also the "God with a human face." He is the Unknown before whom it is best to be silent,[26] but he has the unrecognizable face of the victims of this earth and its history: the sick and the poor who call to us and turn out to be the protagonists of the gospels. In those disfigured

countenances God becomes for us a "voice" more than an image (which will always be an idol). This conception is closely linked to the long tradition of the First Testament, in which God always acts by calling but never reveals his Face (or his "Name" in the classical Hebrew usage).[27]

3.3. The human significance of God's existence

3.3.1. The justice that is born of faith

Therefore, the human attitude that is both a consequence of that encounter and a preparation for it is the willingness to fight for justice, fraternity, and equality among all human beings. If people are involved in this struggle, then they need not worry about whether they believe they can find God or not. According to the New Testament, they have already found him even if they don't realize it (Mt 25,31ff; 1 Jn 4). When God gives himself to humankind as Father, the first result (and best proof) of that donation is full equality among human beings as among sisters and brothers. It is as if God were telling us: "I have come down to you, but now you must bend down toward those who are below you or far from you ("forgive us our transgressions as we forgive those who transgress against us"). Equality is the most religious, the most theological, and the most Christian of all human longings because reason is incapable of justifying it. Nature is full of examples of inequalities, so we must recognize that a qualitative leap is taken in human beings. Since humans are "transcendent" with respect to nature (and so we say "supernatural"), natural inequalities cannot be used as arguments to justify human inequalities.[28]

We therefore take up again another slogan characteristic of our modern age: "liberty, equality, and fraternity." Although the slogan is now unfortunately quite neglected, it expresses well the significance of God's existence: it means that liberty, equality, and fraternity are possible and therefore obligatory.

John Paul II declared on a trip to France that "those are Christian words." (He did so in 1989, 200 years after the slogan was first proclaimed, as usually happens with the Church.) Nevertheless, that profoundly Christian cry was produced precisely by the French revolution, a revolution that rejected a Church that had forgotten the meaning of the words. Since it was born as a cry against God, that slogan severed its umbilical cord and ended up aborted. What happened to the revolution was described by Chesterton with enviable precision: "the modern world is full of Christian ideas that have gone mad."

In the centuries since, the cry of the French revolution has been reduced to an understanding of freedom that is antagonistic to fraternity and equality. Instead of joining with those ideals, freedom has been made to stand in opposition. As a result, no one now seems to believe in that fanatical cry; having been reduced to a kind of pseudo-freedom, it has been left mutilated and useless. Why has this happened? Simply because it was separated from God, and that is what I want to demonstrate now.

The revolutionary cry of Christians is about the dignity of the children of God and about the freedom that is born of that dignity. The freedom of God's children demands that all be treated fraternally as sons and daughter of the same Father, and fraternity requires equality as a sine qua non. Freedom for fraternity and equality is the inevitable consequence of faithful affirmation of the Christian God.

Once separated from the umbilical cord that makes freedom a gift entailing responsibility, the liberation brought about by the French revolution gradually became arrogant self-affirmation and self-determination. Imbibing this false freedom, individuals made themselves into divinities. Equality with others seemed to be a threat to their own absolute worth so that others ceased to be sisters and brothers and became instead "rival gods." Thus have we ended up with our modern concept of freedom as opposed to equality and fraternity. It is an example of how the Christian idea of freedom for fraternity and equality has "gone crazy."

We could even suggest that the triad of the French revolution has a trinitarian structure that reveals its theological background. Freedom is the gift of God as Creator and Father, and that gift unites us all in Christ as "sons and daughters in the Son." That fraternity then expands into the gift of the Spirit which (according to the New Testament) is always the unity of what is supremely plural, respecting all forms of diversity without converting them into inequalities.

We might also show how that theological and trinitarian vestige —formulated in popular terms as sons and daughters who are brothers and sisters equal in diversity (pillars of all authentic citizenship)— is counterposed to the present economic structures, which reduce human beings to a false triad of consumers, individualists, and falsely globalized. Consumerism is the negation of freedom insofar as it depends on manipulation and irrationality. We sometimes hear that "the consumer has now supplanted the citizen." That posture produces an exclusively individualistic ethics that completely lacks any social or community dimension. Such an ethics also produces a false globalization which is really an invasion and a conquest of the other; in such globalization only consumption and money have a universal character, not the humanity of each human being.

There is not space to demonstrate this further, but I think that it is important at least to give some indication of it.

3.3.2. Unavoidable and dispensable

This progressive revelation of God yields the strange fact that there is no need to know God explicitly. The Vertical has become so horizontal that it can now be found without even looking upward, just by looking forward. In his published dialogue with Rabbi Skorza, the present bishop of Rome comments that when he meets with atheists, he doesn't "speak to them of God." Instead, he asks them if they are ready to engage in the struggle against the injustices being committed against those most abandoned by the system, since that is enough. "I speak to them of God only if they speak first."[29]

3.4. The weak Almighty

Summing up what we've seen so far: the Christian God does not reveal his "Name" but his activity. That activity reveals in history more than nature does; it reveals that he is a God of the poor. Nevertheless, God does not intervene *directly* in our history but only by indirection. When God intervenes, it is from the few toward the many (a small people, the remnant, Jesus, the seed, etc.), and his revelation is progressive (as the day progresses from dawn to noon or a low note progresses from silence into a full chord). The revelation can conceal itself, and it does so at times, but without ceasing to be present in all that is truly human.

These are the traits that have led us to define God as Love, and we have already commented on what that means for us in terms of *agapê* and *eros*. Now, though, we need to broaden that definition in order to discover what it tells us about God himself.

One of the most surprising statements in the New Testament is that "God handed over his own Son" (Rom 8,32). He didn't just send him; he "handed him over," and he handed him over to human beings. That incomprehensible surrender demonstrates the extreme proximity to us of the always transcendent God. But this proximity is not of the gratifying sort, the kind suggested by the image of the "God-child" —there is nothing less divine than infancy, though we can glimpse something of the divine in the child's trusting helplessness, its charm, and its promise. Now, however, we are talking about the "Crucified God."

What that means is that God has so respected human freedom in his relation with us that he did not "send legions of angels" to rescue his Son (nor did the Son want them to be sent). Jesus presents himself as totally "de-divinized": weak and impotent before human beings. One of the most ancient New Testament hymns, in the course of a few lines, uses these three adjectives: emptied, overwhelmed, humbled (Phil 2,6ff.). Nevertheless, as Christians we believe that that experience of total absence was where God was closest to us. And precisely for that reason, the final word about God is not the Cross but rather "God raised Jesus up"[30] and revealed himself in him as the one who "calls us to fulfillment." That is why Paul unites these three actions that describe God: he is the God who "calls into being what is not"; he is the God who "raises the dead," thus disclosing his power as the origin and end of history, as the "God of living and not the dead" (Mk 12,27). But within history it is God alone "who justifies the unrighteous" (see Rom 4,17.24.25), which is another form of revealing his power in weakness: human beings carry out justice by condemning the unrighteous while God carries out justice by making the unrighteous righteous.

Thus the *Deus minor* is the *Deus semper maior.*

3.5. Conclusion

Accordingly, there is a need for a language about God that is constantly dialectical. Nicholas of Cusa used such language when he defined God as "the harmony of contraries." Long before him, in the second century, Irenaeus of Lyon held that what cannot be said

about God because of his greatness *can* be said about him because of his love, which is as incomprehensible as his majesty (AH IV, 20).

This shows us, perhaps, why Christianity today needs to shift from being a "doctrinal religion" to being a mystical faith. As indispensable as language is, it will always be an impotent instrument for speaking about God. It can only aspire to telling "smaller lies"; it can never utter the greatest truths (DS 806).

3.6. Some consequences

3.6.1. The world's religions

It seems to me that what we have said illustrates the enormous danger (not to says falsity) of a slogan that is being circulated out of a false desire for harmony, namely, that with regard to the world's religions "God unites, but Christ divides." First of all, shouldn't we begin by recognizing humbly that *God is what divides us* because, in Bonhoeffer's words, "the God revealed in Jesus turns upside down everything that religious people expect of God"?[31] Religions today can join together in an earnest search for God but not in the affirmation of God. They can come together perhaps in their experience of God but not in their doctrine about God. Even Paul was fearful that zeal for God might be an obstacle to the scandal of faith in the Crucified One.

In contrast, Jesus of Nazareth precisely as human is capable of uniting religions because what he offers is full humanization ("fishing for people"), quite apart from whether one believes in his divinity or not. Let us recall the keen observation of Simone Weil: "It is not how people speak of God but how they speak of earthly things that allows us to discern whether their souls have been seared by the fire of God's love."[32]

3.6.2. The vision of the world

I also believe that the aforesaid helps us to understand the diverse visions of reality insofar as they are based on diverse notions of God.

a) For the East, the real world lacks true reality or substance. It is pure appearance, sheer deception. It has the same reality as the things we perceive when we dream, which seem very real to us at the time.

b) For many South American cultures, living on the opposite side of the planet, natural reality is sacred; it is the source of our existence. It deserves our absolute respect as "mother earth" (Pachamama) or "father sun."

In neither of these visions is there any room for progress: reality is just as it is, in one case because it is all deception and in the other because it deserves a kind of respect that makes it untouchable.

c) It is therefore perhaps not an accident that the idea of progress was born in the Christian world, which is situated midway between the other two (both geographically and ideologically). Based on the idea of creation, the reality of this world has considerable consistency, but it is *a consistency that has been received*. It should not therefore be despised as useless, but neither should it be exploited as having inherent power. This balanced appreciation

of reality requires both the relativization proper to the East and the respect accorded by Amerindian culture. If separated from these, reality becomes (and already is!) prey, and progress becomes predator. Thus we have the drama of our modernity: human beings deny God and feel themselves to be not administrators but sole and absolute proprietors of reality. Progress then becomes corrupted, as W. Benjamin, S. Weil, and many others have warned us. When humans destroy the earth, then people's fears bring forth longings for the worldviews of the East and of South America.

4. CONCLUSION: BELIEVING IN LOVE

Christian faith declares that there is one infallible way to contact God: loving dedication to those who are suffering on earth. That contact with the divine may be observable, or it may not be, but there is never any doubt about it.

We Christians are accused today of not knowing how to speak about God, but our response should not be to speak of God by looking up to the clouds or contemplating ourselves or inflicting moralistic lashes. We can speak about God only by looking at this suffering, longing world. I will conclude by suggesting two possible linguistic universes for speech about God.

a) "Love that moves the sun and the other stars." With that phrase the unfinishable "Divine Comedy" of Dante comes to an end. In another context I called attention to how Dante's phrase resembles the first verse of the poem, "Lost on the path of life." The two verses coincide in that they point out the trajectory of human beings and show how our presence on this earth is oriented toward God. From the nearly infinite dispersion of energy in the initial "big bang" to the process of fusion ending with a "big hug" in which God will be all in all, there is a difficult, unrelenting process driven only by love and attraction. At times the process makes us despair because we wish that God would use swifter motors of change, ones that seem to us more efficient.

Faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ is faith in Love as the ultimate Reality that is the Source and Truth of life. It requires us to to turn our lives over to love even as we learn about love.[33] Such learning involves a desire to make our love not blind but lucid and intelligent.

b) "Without confusion or division." Christianity teaches that God's relationship with human beings is described by these two adverbial phrases. Both

of them were coined by the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century in its attempt to define the God-man relationship in Jesus Christ. By analogy, the phrases are useful for expressing all the dualities in the Christian faith: God and us, God and creation, supernatural and natural, grace and freedom, etc.

"Without confusion" means that God continues to be God, and humanity continues to be humanity after the union. "Without division" means that, despite the union, God and humanity constitute one unique and inseparable reality. As I have said in other contexts, the metaphysical language of substance and nature means little to most people today, but these two adverbs have a clear and simple significance even for modern folk, so they may well last longer than the dogmatic language of Christology.[34]

c) On the basis of the two previous points, we can conclude with another dialectical phrase: for Christians, God is the best and most important news that we can hear as human beings. It helps us understand this thought of Pascal: "Only two classes of persons can be called sensible: those who live for God because they have found him, and those who ceaselessly search for God because they have not yet found him."

At the same time, the question about God can be of less consequence since the most authentic way to love him is to love what God loves. This was revealed in the scripture which says: "God so loved the world that he surrendered his Son, not to condemn the world but to save it." Or reflect on this other saying attributed to Mounier: "Today human beings are divided according to whether they have made themselves present before the world's misery or not, not according to whether they believe in God or not." For the future, from the perspective of the Gospel, I find perfectly valid the thesis of M. Gauchet: Christianity is the "religion of escape from religion."[35] But not of escape from God…

NOTES

1. Nevertheless, in the previous question Aquinas speaks clearly of proofs of God (I, 2, 2).
2. A. Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *Readings in the philosophy of religion. An analytic approach* (1974), ed. B. Brody, chapter 4, note 28.
3. *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, HarperOne, 2008.
4. K. Schmitz-Moormann, *Teología de la creación de un mundo en evolución* [A Theology of the Creation of a World in Evolution], Estella 2005. A similar line is followed in the work of D. Jou, a poet and scientist of Catalonia.
5. Der grosse Katechismus, 132ff.
6. Cf. M. Buber, op. cit., p. 27.
7. "*Panta rei; ouden menei*".
8. J. Gómez Caffarena: *El teísmo moral de Kant*. Madrid 1983.
9. For this reason Kant's affirmation of the existence of God required also the affirmation of an afterlife, which was the place of God's judgment.
10. *Confessions*, X,6,8.
11. Symposium, 211. We say this while prescinding from the question as to whether Plato knew what we are like as human beings.
12. Simone Weil, *A la espera de Dios*, Madrid 1993, p. 40-41. Two pages earlier, Weil explained that the idea of purity took possession of her at age 16, when she was in the throes of her problems of puberty: "It arose in me while I was contemplating a mountain landscape, and little by little it has become an irresistible force in my life" (p. 39). L. Panero also has recourse to purity in one of his prayer-poems: "Now that the evening is so pure—and there is no one else but You—tell me who you are…"
13. *In Joan*, XXVI, 4.
14. Let us not forget that this was Harnack's error, which had a negative effect on the whole 20th century, both for Catholics and Protestants, until liberation theology appeared.
15. Weil, *A la espera de Dios*, p.37. Expanded further on pp. 41-42.
16. For more information in this regard, see González Faus, *Unity of God, Multiplicity of Mysticisms*, Barcelona, Cristianisme i Justícia, Booklet 147 (2013).
17. This accounts for the suspicion that is sometimes aroused by current waves of enthusiasm for mysticism. Although they can perhaps be understood as a reaction against the Prometheanism of the past, they are not free of the classical danger of "going to the other extreme" which is typical of all reactive behavior.
18. See González Faus, *La Humanidad Nueva. Ensayo de cristología*. Santander 2000[9], Chap. 3.
19. "The wicked remove landmarks, they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the donkey of the orphan, they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They thrust the needy off the road, the poor of the earth all hide themselves. Like wild asses in the desert, the poor go out to their toil, scavenging in the wasteland food for their young. […] The wicked snatch the orphan child from the breast, and take as a pledge the infant of the poor" (24, 2-5.9). If instead of the orphan and the widow we were to speak of the unemployed and the immigrant, and if instead of flocks and donkeys we were to speak of houses and jobs, then these words of Job would apply to our own times.
20. R. Otto spoke of "the Holy" as the *fascinans et tremendum* while post-moderns limit themselves, more vaguely and less seriously, to "the Sacred"; they are left thus with something that is attractive but no longer "tremendum" because they are no longer summoning us out of ourselves but are permitting us to remain comfortably ensconced in our egos.
21. Something similar happens with prayer: Jesus taught his disciples that there was no need to say much when praying because God knows only too well what we're going to say. Rather, it is we who need language, not God, so that our relation with God does not evaporate.
22. Metz, *La fe en la historia y la sociedad*, Madrid 1979, p. 66, and in many other places.

23. The Pauline expression requires that we understand what ancient mirrors were like: often they were simply water surfaces, where one's reflection was seen in a blurred, imprecise manner.
24. It is curious that the word "love" suffers the same fate as the word "God" suffers, as described by Buber at the beginning of this booklet. "Love" is the most noble word in our language, but it also the most prostituted; it has served all too often to justify dastardly deeds.
25. See the contribution of K. Lehman in *El problema de Dios hoy* (ed. G. Augustin), Santander 2012, p. 82, and in J. Vitoria, *El Dios cristiano,* Bilbao 2008, p. 18.
26. In fact, after publishing *El rostro humano de Dios* ["The human face of God"] (Santander 2007), I added to it *El Dios sin rostro* ["The faceless God"] (in *Iglesia Viva*, 233, January-March 2008).
27. Indispensable here is the chapter of J. Vives: "El ídolo y la voz" ["The idol and the voice"], in *La justicia que brota de la fe.* Santander 1983, pp. 63ff.
28. See A. Comin, *Unity of God, Multiplicity of Mysticisms*, Barcelona, Cristianisme i Justícia, Booklet 92 (1999).
29. Quoted by Juan Arias in *El País*, 30.03.2013.
30. Acts 2,24; 3,15; 4,19; 5,30: Rom 4,24; 8,11; 10,9; 1 Pet 1,21, among others.
31. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letter of 18.07.44, *Resistencia y sumisión,* Salamanca 1983, p. 253; see also the letter of 21-08-44, p. 273.
32. Simone Weil, *El conocimiento sobrenatural*, Madrid, Trotta, note 84.
33. "Love is the culmination of all our activity; it is the goal toward which we run. … Each person is what his love is." Such was Augustine's commentary on the First Letter of John.
34. Chalcedon added two other equally contradictory adverbs. It stated that the union between God and humanity cannot be reversed (*inseparabiliter*), but that doesn't mean that God has changed into something else. Without ceasing to be supreme or almighty, God actuates all the potentialities of his being as Love (*immutabiliter*).
35. *El desencantamiento del mundo. Una historia política de la religión.* Madrid 2005.

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N. 157, October 2015

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