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## Jean-Luc Marion's Theology of Eucharistic Presence

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Jean-Luc Marion's Theology of Eucharistic Presence

by

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology • Seminary of Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Systematic Theology.

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY • SEMINARY  
Saint John's University  
Collegeville, Minnesota

1.30.08

This paper was written under the direction of

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Fr. R. Kevin Seasoltz, OSB  
Director

John Nicholas Coffman  
Has successfully demonstrated the use of  
Latin  
in this paper.

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Fr. R. Kevin Seasoltz, OSB

1.30.08

## Jean-Luc Marion's Theology of Eucharistic Presence

Description: This work was originally submitted as part of a phenomenological exploration for a course on Eucharistic theology under the direction of Fr. Kevin Seasoltz, OSB. The assignment parameters included research and examination of a contemporary theological issue concerning Eucharist on a graduate level of engagement. This paper includes a discussion of two distinct Marion scholars, their insights, and Marion's treatment of the concepts of icon and idol, which are central to his conception of presence. It contains my translation of question 75, article IV in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. This section functions as a linguistic hermeneutic device for Marion's argument regarding the challenging application of metaphysics in the generally positivistic minds of contemporaries. This work also analyzes Marion's understanding of absence, as an entrée into his phenomenology of presence which is both intellectual and temporal. Finally, this paper addresses the strengths and weaknesses of Marion's theological insights with regards to praxis in the contemporary Roman Catholic Church.

This paper may not be duplicated.

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1.30.2008

### Jean-Luc Marion: Eucharistic Presence in a Postmodern Era

“One must obtain forgiveness for every essay in theology.”<sup>1</sup>

At the center of the Christian community lies the celebration of the Last Supper of Jesus, memorialized under the term Eucharist or thanksgiving. The task of understanding the Eucharist is an endless task which requires continual reexamination. Theology surrounding Eucharist is often accompanied by heated debate because it shapes the very identity of such communities. Jean-Luc Marion, a French, *Theo*-logical phenomenologist responds to the contemporary debates regarding Eucharistic presence and offers a solution. He proposes that the use of Aristotelian categories in metaphysics is both outdated and theologically incapable of appropriating an accurate sense of presence. Marion boldly implies that God is beyond Being, the foundational element of traditional Western metaphysics. The theological issue at hand emerges: the postmodern era has all but lost a mystical context for understanding metaphysics, but the church still insists on placing Eucharistic presence within this system, weakening if not destroying its communal and transfigurative potential. Jean-Luc Marion seeks to create openness in contemporary theology for Eucharistic presence as an icon of God’s gift. The presence of God inherently surpasses the category of Being, and belongs wholly to unintelligible action—Love.

This essay will begin to explore Marion’s insights as they apply to the contemporary theological issue of Eucharistic presence, beginning with a context for Marion’s thought. I will note reasons for the rejection of metaphysics, including a brief examination from the *Summa Theologica*, explore Marion’s idea of God as “Absence,”

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.

and delve into his notion of Eucharistic presence. This will lead into his proposed reforms of popular categorical understandings and ultimately respond to the contemporary issue surrounding Eucharistic presence, namely, how it can be expressed in the postmodern era. It must be noted that Marion is not widely known. Thus, this pursuit will evolve largely out of primary sources with a couple of commentators, starting with Robyn Horner and Nathan Mitchell.

Robyn Horner is one of the few authors to write on Jean-Luc Marion's insights, especially the notion of absence. She clarifies this concept as well as explains Marion's claim that theology is capable of evolving beyond the limits of Western metaphysics. For Horner, Marion develops a theology of "Absence" to avoid the pitfalls of metaphysics. "Where metaphysics often thinks of God as the foundation of being...Marion uses distance as a figure of the interpretation of thought."<sup>2</sup> Horner helps us to understand this notion and writes that "distance operates to mark the non-coincidence of God with any concept of God."<sup>3</sup> Horner informs us that Marion uses "Absence" to simultaneously provide freedom from metaphysical constraints, as well as to build a new ideological foundation for a thematic locus, the notion of gift. The gift of Eucharist establishes continuity:

...the gift orders temporality. The Eucharistic gift orders the present according to both past [memorial] and future [advent], making a gift of each moment according to charity, and dispossessing the primacy of the [metaphysical] here and now.<sup>4</sup>

In a way, distance is an essential characteristic in Marion's writing regarding God. This distance accentuates the excessiveness of God, and underwrites Marion's use of the terms

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<sup>2</sup> Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

gift, love and icon. According to Horner, Marion claims to overcome the problem of metaphysics by way of theology.<sup>5</sup>

Nathan Mitchell writes that Marion's work aims at de-centering and subverting self. "Marion's larger theological program might be described as a critique of traditional Western metaphysics..."<sup>6</sup> Mitchell notes that for Marion, God is not limited to Being, and such intelligible notions are inherently idolatrous.<sup>7</sup> Mitchell further emphasizes that in Marion's theology, God is Love and, "only Love gives without any expectation of return."<sup>8</sup> This is at the center of God's gift which is unconditional. Marion is responding against the notion of transaction with God. As far as the economy of time is concerned, Eucharistic presence has the following effect, summarized by Mitchell:

The metaphysics of being is, in many respects, a metaphysics of the *present*... Both past and future are thus defined by negative limits... Time has become captive, the hostage of consciousness... Both being and time have become things, commodities...<sup>9</sup>

The Eucharist removes the paramount value of the tangible, present, eliminating a controlled economy, relaxing reason's clutches. Marion's response is a rejection of metaphysical limitations, understanding time itself as a gift flowing from the charity of God. Within this context, the Eucharistic presence, "disrupts and subverts time."<sup>10</sup> Time is to be understood in terms of a whole event, whereas the Eucharist vivifies the past, future and present in one conscious moment of encounter with God's endless gift.

Mitchell summarizes: "The Eucharist, therefore, is not about our taking possession of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Mitchell, *Real Presence: The Work of Eucharist* (Chicago: The Liturgical Training Press, 2000), 108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 116.



past and future—but about their taking possession of us in the present.”<sup>11</sup> Presence is a gift from God that is to be received through openness, not retrained through the economics of metaphysics. These two introductory commentators illuminate Marion’s central contributions to understanding Eucharistic presence. We move to the concept of idol to understand why Marion rejects metaphysics, unlike other reputable contemporaries like Karl Rahner.

### **The Idol of Metaphysics**

“Love is made more than analyzed.”<sup>12</sup>

The idol is a source of entrapment, captivity and restricted growth. For Jean-Luc Marion, the phenomenon of an idol is both powerfully captivating and freezing. An idol is a “fixed relay between different brilliances produced by some first visible.”<sup>13</sup> It is an object which causes those who interact with it to lose sight of what lies beyond, creating self-obsession. The danger inherent in an idol is that it “allows the divine to appear only in man’s measure.”<sup>14</sup> It creates a self-gratifying vision, malleable through human reason. What makes an idol so volatile is that it limits the view of those who engage in visual interaction. An idol has the danger of tempting its viewer into a comfortable complacency of grasping at the divine with the scope or capacities of a human.<sup>15</sup> This is so because an idol inherently refuses transcendence; it does not signify a world beyond itself, but rather creates a much smaller, more manageable reality in itself. This temptation is as old as the first sin of Adam and Eve: the idol is the temptation to control that which is naturally left in the hands of God.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>12</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 16.

The detrimental nature of an idol is understood by Marion through gaze. An idol does not invite the viewer to interact with it, nor does it push the viewer outward towards greater simulacra. Marion writes simply this: “Idol—or the gaze’s landing place.”<sup>16</sup> Idols, through the temptation of gaze, do two things simultaneously: they limit (measure) the gaze, and they create a rigid relationship between the viewer and the idol. Marion clarifies these fundamental qualities with the metaphor of portal and mirror.<sup>17</sup> A portal leads to something (an icon), where a mirror reflects a gaze back upon the gazer (an idol). Metaphysics has become an idol, because it no longer discourses about being, but rather has become a self-centered mirror, with no foundation in the mystical.<sup>18</sup> Those who gaze upon an idol limit it through their gaze. Eucharist, like anything else, can potentially be reified and made into an idol by Western metaphysics, reflecting back only a desirable image and not a true reality. In effect, an idol is not an invitation to growth in understanding and humility before the divine, but rather is an inhibitor to encountering a deeper reality. “Every pretension to absolute knowledge therefore belongs to the domain of the idol.”<sup>19</sup> An idol divinizes a secular reality, creating a frozen and self-absorbed gaze that paralyzes perception.

The opposite of an idol is an icon, coming from the Greek, *eikon*, which means “the brilliance of the visible.”<sup>20</sup> Marion highlights the traditional Orthodox theology of icons, and mainly notes how an icon is a symbol which points outside of itself. They provoke vision, and are not the result of one.<sup>21</sup> An icon accomplishes two basic actions in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, *Real Presence*, 108.

<sup>19</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 17.

the relationship between the divine and those who gaze. Icons reduce distance and bestow visibility of the invisible God. Marion writes that an “icon recognizes no measure other than it’s own excessiveness... it is defined by an origin without an original.”<sup>22</sup> It is a liberating portal which fosters openness, displacing the limits of our visibility to the measure of its own glory.<sup>23</sup> In short, an icon enables an intimate relationship, and acts as the mediator between the person who gazes and the God who acts. Marion often refers back to the notion of an icon when referring to Eucharistic presence, because, like the Eucharist, an icon both visibly and invisibly manifests an unintelligible, holy reality.

The natures of idols and icons are crucial for understanding Marion’s notion of Eucharistic presence. They denote the endless potential of God (icon) and the temptation to encapsulate God’s Love (idol). For this reason, Marion writes that our age faces a great conceptual idol—the site of metaphysics.<sup>24</sup> Metaphysics is a product of Aristotelian categorical thought, and operates through the making of distinctions. Metaphysics categorizes, delineates, creates dichotomy and reduces reality into intelligible parcels manageable to human reasoning. For this reason it is limited with regard to the unknowable Love of God, “a God who must permit his existence to be proved in the first place is ultimately a very ungodly God.”<sup>25</sup> The Eucharistic event, or the great communal and iconic encounter with God is limited and debased when subjected to categorical reasoning. For Marion, to speak about God as Being is a claim that expresses an extremely limited and idolatrous view. “Being says nothing about God that God cannot

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 35.

immediately reject.”<sup>26</sup> It is imperative for Marion that humans humbly relinquish control of the God of Love, and instead learn to mimic God’s actions. “Love doesn’t pretend to know, it postulates its own giving without restriction.”<sup>27</sup> Viewing God in this way requires the discipline of being comfortable with ambiguity.

Marion recognizes the need to think of God in light of God’s endless giving, a topic to be pursued later. He asserts that “God” the title, is both idolatrous and presumptuous: “God remains unthinkable to me.”<sup>28</sup> Any attempt to rationalize God encounters the pitfalls inherent in metaphysics. Regarding the metaphysical discipline, Marion remarks that it has a strange relationship with wisdom, and does not possess it.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, metaphysics fails precisely because it seeks to grasp that which cannot be owned. Also, Western theology intrinsically links the title “God” to a metaphysical understanding of being, instead of gift. Marion recommends that we rename, or reconceptualize God in theological discourse by crossing out the idols entrapping the title. He follows the model of St. Andrew and crosses out the idol in the title of God, leaving us with this referent for the remainder of his text: simply “Gød.”<sup>30</sup> Saint Andrew wrote that we have an obligation to limit temptations to blaspheme the unthinkable. Marion agrees as he writes this about God’s<sup>31</sup> action: God “crosses out our thought-saturates it...”<sup>32</sup> God is unthinkable, but God is not unrecognized through action and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “The ‘End of Metaphysics’ as a Possibility,” *Religion After Metaphysics*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 183.

<sup>30</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> Although Marion insists that we rename God by crossing out the title in favor of a new representation, it seems highly inappropriate to adopt this notation within the context of this essay. Please note that in pages 47 and following from *God without Being*, Marion uses the crossed out representation.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 47.

renaming. God is love.<sup>33</sup> Marion writes that love is reinforced by suffering and absence, because it does not pretend to know the ultimate answers. Love postulates its own giving without restriction.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Marion renames God by the title “Gød” in order to further demonstrate the proactive motion Christians must take to deconstruct anemic idols in favor of appropriating new, vivid realities.

A similar and immediate difficulty arises within the Roman Catholic tradition regarding transubstantiation, indebted to Thomistic metaphysics. Since the historic, mystery-grounded concept is lost, it is often misunderstood and ascribed a very myopic value. The accepted term transubstantiation, which is a fitting and suitable term to describe the change that occurs during Eucharist, is originally based on categorical reasoning. Its root meaning is “trans,” a prefix meaning change or across, and “substation,” meaning substance—literally, to change substance. To you and me, substance means something entirely different in this era than it meant to those who used metaphysics as a system of measuring reality in the thirteenth century. This term has its foundation in contemporary metaphysics’ ultimate referent, Being. Transubstantiation denotes that being is changed. This type of language is complex even in its own time. Further, the mechanics are all but largely esoteric to the modern reader, critiques Marion. Though the advances of Aquinas and other scholastic writers were paramount, it is evident that their language makes active verbs into static nouns. For example, the *substantia* and *transubstantiatio* are static nouns, representing Aristotelian principles of motion which are all but alien to modern people of faith. Thomas Writes in Volume III, Question 75, Article IV of the *Summa Theologica*:

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 49.

*Sed Deus est actus infinitus... ejus actio se extendit ad totam naturam entis. Non igitur solum potest perficere conversionem formalem, ut scilicet diversae formae sibi in eodem subjecto succedant; sed conversionem totius entis, ut scilicet tota substantia hujus convertatur in totam substantiam illius;*

*et hoc agitur divina virtute in hoc sacramento,*

*nam tota substantia panis convertitur in totam substantiam corporis Christi, et tota substantia vini in totam substantiam sanguinis Christi;*

*unde haec conversio non est formalis, sed substantialis; nec continetur inter species motus naturalis, sed proprio nomine potest dici transubstantiatio.*

But God is infinite act... His action is extended to the whole nature of being. He therefore is not only able to perform a formal change (conversion), so that various forms succeed each other in the same subject; but the whole being changes (converts), so that the whole substance of one being is changed (converted) into the whole substance of another;

And this therefore is the divine virtue (or power) of this Sacrament (this is the power of the Sacrament),

for the whole substance of the bread is converted into the whole substance of the body of Christ, and the whole substance of the wine into the whole substance of the blood of Christ;

hence this is not a formal, but a substantial conversion:

nor does it continue between kinds in a natural movement, but its proper name can be called transubstantiation.

The formulation of transubstantiation in this passage presents an idolatrous temptation to the modern viewer, whose context is likely more empirical than mystical. While Aquinas and the medieval scholastics employed metaphysics in a theologically productive way, their methods are exclusive and inaccessible for most contemporary Eucharistic participants. Marion wishes to destroy metaphysical conceptions such as this, not to end their contents, but to liberate.<sup>35</sup> Because such doctrines are central to Catholicism, Marion must accommodate his ideology in order to maintain any relevance for the contemporary Roman Church. He calls us to re-evaluate our perceptions and to cooperate with God, “who strikes out and crosses out every divine idol.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Marion, “The ‘End of Metaphysics’ as a Possibility,” 170.

<sup>36</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 139.

### Absence: Marion's Insight Influencing Eucharistic Presence

“The Word [is] visibly absent.”<sup>37</sup>

Marion develops the concept of gift to help us understand why God is present everywhere and always while simultaneously tangibly absent. “God who reveals himself has nothing in common with the ‘God’ of the philosophers, of the learned, and, eventually, of the poet.”<sup>38</sup> This God is the “singular, unique, and ‘ultimate’ phenomenon: [L]ove.”<sup>39</sup> Marion affirms that God is Love, and lives in the action of continual giving. This gift is made present to us in mystery, the Word of God, and therefore does not always act through tangible immediacy or Being. It is Christ, the Word incarnate, who abolishes the gap between humans and God: “Christ does not say the word, he says *himself*, the Word.”<sup>40</sup> Christ diminishes the space between sign and referent, through action and the radical Love that is God.

Christ is God's gift to humanity in a temporal reality. Marion cautions all who speak of the incarnate Word, because “no human tongue can say the Said of God.”<sup>41</sup> He recognizes the inherent difficulty of our language and affirms Heidegger who writes that man does not master language, but must allow himself to be governed by it. Marion's rejection of metaphysics is an affirmation of this humble principle and gives way to three insights. First, theology has the task of allowing the Logos to be said,<sup>42</sup> granting us freedom to cooperate with God. Second, Marion accentuates that theology bears on the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>39</sup> “Introduction” found in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 148.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 143.

paschal mystery; in his words, “God speaks in our speech,”<sup>43</sup> coming to us through temporal, mysterious events. Third, the Word within the New Testament should be understood as a lapsed event, but also as an incarnational reality. It offers a timeless invitation that encompasses our temporal reality, past, present, and future. We are called to be contemporary with the Word through faith. Based on these three insights, Marion notes that when we encounter the Word, we should aim through it towards God, to see it from the point of view of the Word, rather than to control it from within.<sup>44</sup> We should train our theological gaze to be disciplined and iconic.

The Word reveals God to us at a distance, writes Horner. In Marion’s work, *The Idol and Distance*, “Marion describes God’s self-giving ‘within the distance that he keeps, and where he keeps us.’”<sup>45</sup> We cannot make sense of God, partly because of the distance between us and partly because God gives “*without cause*, and without any univocally assignable reason.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, the Word’s power of making a non-rational reality accessible does not necessitate any form of comprehension. “Afterwards we still remain unintelligent.”<sup>47</sup> Christ gives to us as the revelatory Word, but nonetheless remains outside of intelligible grounds, outside of our temporal grasp. The word is “visibly absent...recognized in the breaking of the bread.”<sup>48</sup> We cannot understand, but nonetheless we experience God through self-giving Love. God’s absence is “the self-giving of whom resists comprehension.”<sup>49</sup> The carnal world moves into a celebrating

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Horner, 56. Please note that this translation renders God under the masculine pronoun. This is directly counterintuitive to Marion’s notions, and is most likely a deliberate choice on behalf of the translator to relate the imminence of God through a personal pronoun, historically accepted within the Roman Tradition.

<sup>46</sup> Marion, *Givenness and God*, 118.

<sup>47</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 149.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>49</sup> Horner, 60.



community and the community is invited to respond, resulting in conversion and mission. Absence demonstrates how we experience God's action of Love, and yet remain incapable of grasping it through intellection. The gift of the Word "does not simply show itself in the visible... it adds a new visible that until then had remained unseen."<sup>50</sup> This gift given in time continues to come unexpectedly, bearing charity in each new contact.

Marion writes that God continues to give always, requesting our response. Marion says that the Word is the essential heuristic tool for recognizing the gift giving of a mysterious, active, and present God. The Eucharist accomplishes this hermeneutical link; it reveals God's gift through the familiar action via the breaking of the bread. "It [Eucharist] alone allows the text to pass to its referent, recognized as the nontextual Word of the words."<sup>51</sup> Thus for Marion, the celebration of the Eucharist reproduces the visible Word, both in a sense present and absent from our perception. Competence for participation in this encounter "comes with charity: knowing of the Word nonverbally, in flesh and Eucharist."<sup>52</sup> God is present through Loving action which is continually revealed in the Word, community and meal. This gift is given without preoccupation of economy and it is given "without the self-consciousness that would make it render reason of its account and multiply reciprocity."<sup>53</sup> Sharing in this sacred encounter requires a fundamental openness to the Word which gives without reason. Those who "take" the Eucharist, for example, are not open much at all.

In the contemporary Roman Catholic Church, poverty regarding the Word is very evident. Marion writes that the Word is Apostolic, demanding an infinity of

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<sup>50</sup> Marion, *Givenness and God*, 134.

<sup>51</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 150.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>53</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and God*, p.116.

interpretations.<sup>54</sup> The unspeakable Word saturates each of the signs in the text with the absolute, leaving room for never-ending consideration and praxis. Marion very strongly advocates the role of the Word, because it continually breaks down finished structures of thought and practice, requiring continual response to God. “All is given to the church so that the church may return it to the Word.”<sup>55</sup> It establishes a relationship between a people continually blessed by God, opening us to God’s life. “We see, finally, no more than an absence: the void of the tomb (John 20:2), or the void of a disappearance after the (sacramental) sign of recognition (Luke 24:30-31)...”<sup>56</sup> God operates in mystery, encouraging us to live with ambiguity. This maturity asks that as a people we constantly relate with the boundless Word to continue traveling the portal between humanity and God. As Marion writes: “Theology cannot aim at any other process than its own conversion to the Word.”<sup>57</sup> Thus it is necessary to respond to the Word, both as the non-visible good news, and the visible Eucharistic presence in a celebrating community. Appreciation of Eucharistic presence requires no less than a stable foundation in the Word. Absence is a marker of how we are in relationship with God, how we differ from God and how we need to continually respond.

### **“Presence” as Understood by Marion**

“Each moment befalls as gift: time is imparted by charity.”<sup>58</sup>

Eucharistic presence is a timeless gift, imparted by God, that encompasses all of time. We, however, are present only here and now within the confines of language, time,

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<sup>54</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 156.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>56</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “The Gift of Presence,” *Prolegomena to Charity.*, trans. Stephen Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 125.

<sup>57</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 158.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

space, etc. Marion writes that the Eucharistic presence is less of an available presence (available for our reification whenever desired as an object), and is more of a new advent which encompasses time past, present and future. Metaphysics privileges the present moment on the basis of being, which diminishes the past and future as *not* present. It is for this reason that Marion encourages us to go beyond the metaphysics of time to see the present as a gift within all of time as only the beginning.<sup>59</sup> Marion notes that there are three distinct temporal presences, and these presences give insight for the hermeneutic of discovering Eucharistic presence. Marion analyzes these in chronological order, but they appear here in contextual order to respond to our ultimate concern: Eucharistic presence for a contemporary world.

The first type of temporal presence is memorial. Through a memorial action, we “make an appeal in the name of a past event to God in order that he recall a covenant that determines the instant presently given to the believing community.”<sup>60</sup> Thus for Marion, a memorial has two defining characteristics: it determines (lays the foundation for) the reality of the present,<sup>61</sup> and it makes the past a decisive moment and reality for the present.<sup>62</sup> Memorials ritualize a past event, already completed in time, and serve to make that event present to participants here and now. In other words, the temporal presence of memorial re-members the paschal mystery and all of salvation in the Eucharistic gathering. Participants in this celebratory event are being transformed by past events, made present, becoming open to future hopes. The presence of God in Eucharist, however, is not just memorial in character; it is also anticipatory.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 173.

The eschatological quality of the Eucharist creates further context for understanding the present. Marion writes that the eschatological *epektasis* temporalizes (determines) the Eucharistic present.<sup>63</sup> The future-oriented quality of the Eucharist both invites and transforms those who participate. It is the first fruit of Christ consecrating the new creation which is to come.<sup>64</sup> Marion affirms an initiated eschatology, recognizing that the presence of God in the Eucharistic celebration is not only a present reality, but an invitation into future becoming. He writes, “The Eucharist anticipates what we will be, will see, will love: *figura nostra*.”<sup>65</sup> Finally, regarding the eschatological presence of God in the Eucharist, Marion directs us to the wisdom of Proust: “Sometimes the future lives in us without our knowing it.”<sup>66</sup> For Marion, the eschatological reality is both an invitation and imperative to further participation in God and a growing community of faith.

The Eucharistic presence is also here and now, recognized through momentary conscious encounter. The memorial and eschatological qualities of Eucharistic presence open our eyes to the much greater context of God’s endless giving, which is transformative and ever-beyond our conceptual grasp. Marion writes that “each moment befalls as a gift: time is imparted by charity.”<sup>67</sup> All of time, past, present and future, are shaped by the never-ending character of God’s endless and inconceivable Love. Eucharistic presence is our daily bread.<sup>68</sup> Marion encourages his readers to think of the present as a gift in this moment. In other words, we must receive the gift governed by

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 174. Marion defines *epektasis* on this page as the future *as future*... It is a memorial pledge set into operation and an anticipated future, concretely lived in the present encounter.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>68</sup> Mitchell, *Real Presence*, 120.

memorial and *epektasis* with openness. “The Eucharist, therefore, is not about our taking possession of past and future—but about their taking possession of us in the present.”<sup>69</sup>

The gift in this moment is determined through the timeless action of God in past memory and future anticipation. Our participation in the present moment acknowledges this temporal limitation and allows the Eucharistic presence to be our daily bread. It is provisional and is to be received with openness as a gift.<sup>70</sup> We receive the consecrated bread and wine as the gift at that moment of union with Christ. It is the gift of that very instant and cannot be controlled, saved for later or snatched with a deserving attitude.

The three temporal modes of presence aid us in understanding the resurrected presence of God. Marion writes:

The presence of Christ therefore disappears with the Ascension, but is accomplished in it. It is accomplished as gift of presence, which abandons itself in the heart and the body of the disciples. Presence thus manifests itself as a gift precisely in that the man Jesus, empirically determined, “takes some distance.”<sup>71</sup>

Marion affirms that the presence of God is accomplished in a resurrection context. The physical body of Jesus is not the icon of God, but the resurrected Christ is. Marion writes that presence finds its fulfillment in ascension, departure and unintelligibility. The paradox shows us the intention of God’s presence: “the disciples become the actors of charity.”<sup>72</sup> Disciples of Christ are sent on mission and are guided. The person of Jesus directs our vision as icon to “the highest presence of Christ [which] lies in the Spirit’s action of making us, with him and in him, bless[ing] the Father.”<sup>73</sup> Thus for Marion, the event of the Ascension illuminates the role of Christ’s presence, it shows the paschal

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<sup>69</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 117.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>71</sup> Marion, “The Gift of Presence,” 137.

<sup>72</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 141.

<sup>73</sup> Marion, “The Gift of Presence,” 145.

conversion of all presence into gift: blessing, submission to the Spirit which makes us act in and as Christ.<sup>74</sup> The memorial acclamation, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again,” encapsulates this notion and fittingly describes all of time as embraced in the Eucharistic presence of God.

As mentioned earlier, Marion sees the Eucharistic presence as the hermeneutic link to encountering the presence of God. We recognize the Lord Christ in the breaking of the bread just as the disciples did after the resurrection. Considering Marion’s temporal considerations, the practice of Eucharist memorializes the New Testament accounts of passion, death and resurrection, places them in the context of the hope of second creation to come and establishes in the present moment the presence of God. The theological site is the Word in person.<sup>75</sup> The act of receiving the person of God through the Word creates an open disposition to be aware of God’s radical gift, present in the Eucharistic celebration. Understanding time as a gift, therefore allows the present to be seen in the context of the whole.<sup>76</sup> Thus the Gospel of Luke says, “while they said these things, he himself stood among them. (Luke 24:37)”<sup>77</sup> The hermeneutical access to God is not limited to Eucharist, but rather Eucharistic presence is the great hermeneutic that transforms and repositions the faithful for apostolic mission in the name of Christ. Marion would emphasize that this event is daily, or needs repeating, because God is beyond our grasp, and the response to the gift of God’s Love is an endless calling.

How do we interact with Eucharistic presence? Marion’s presentation is witness to an un-intelligible and awesome invocation. We must become assimilated into God,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>75</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 153.

<sup>76</sup> Mitchell, *Real Presence*, 116.

<sup>77</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 152.

allowing our selves to be present to this event in order that we may be transformed. Assimilation into the Eucharist does not imply that we eat, and then become, but rather, we are consumed by God through our gathering nourishment in God's presence. At the Liturgy of the Word, "words remain with the meaning of a lapsed event."<sup>78</sup> This is the same at the Eucharist, the event does not totally reveal God's action, but invites a response and relationship to flow forth from the encounter. "We are explained through the text; we are told in it."<sup>79</sup> The Liturgy of the Eucharist resembles the Liturgy of the Word in this way; our lives are told in the mystery of God's endless Love that is demonstrated within. We are constantly being incorporated into God.<sup>80</sup> The visibly absent message reveals to us an invitation to become assimilated by the presence of God, which Loves, nourishes and directs.

The mystery, which is the ultimate reality of Eucharistic presence, is under abuse in theological discourse. "It is necessary to revive here the doctrine, common though fallen into disuse, of the couple *res et sacramentum*."<sup>81</sup> Marion places emphasis on the mystical reality in the Eucharistic celebration, and therefore notes that the transubstantiated Body and Blood are valid as the *res*, but contain a deeper reality:

...the transubstantiated Body and Blood are valid as *res*—Christ really given in the Eucharistic present—but, at the same time, they still remain a *sacramentum* with respect to the ecclesiastical body of Christ, the Church, which they aim at and construct. Only this ecclesiastical Body should be called purely *res*.<sup>82</sup>

This description indicates that the *res* is both the species on the altar, and those who celebrate. Marion redirects the use of this theological term towards the celebrating

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>80</sup> Marion, "The Gift of Presence", 152.

<sup>81</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 180.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

community, being assimilated and transformed through the self-asserting Word via words and meal. He further notes that the “here and now”<sup>83</sup> understanding of the Eucharistic event is a poor understanding, making a metaphysical error of championing the present moment over the timeless mystical reality. For Marion “the real is exclusively that which seems ‘mystical’ to the ordinary gaze—the Body of the Christ and his ecclesiastical body.”<sup>84</sup> Thus the *res et sacramentum* is the mystical reality in the species and the ecclesial body, both of which fall under the veil of an unintelligible but radically present phenomenon. The Eucharist must be celebrated in faith for the presence of God to be efficacious.

Regarding the Eucharistic Species, Marion appropriates the principles of the Second Vatican Council in a phenomenological explanation. He writes the following:

For our naturally blind gaze, the bread and wine *are* real, the consecrated bread and wine *are* real as bread and wine, sacramental (“mystical” in the ordinary sense) as Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>85</sup>

Marion does not deny the mystical character of the changed species, however, he does assert that the change of bread and wine is not the intended end of a Eucharistic encounter. The mystical Body of Christ is the ecclesiastical body, both real and sacramental.<sup>86</sup> The real presence is not only the sacramental species themselves, but the community as it is changed into the Body of Christ through the Eucharistic celebration. “The consecrated bread and wine of Eucharist, become the ultimate icon of a Love that delivers itself body and soul.”<sup>87</sup> The species, for Marion, serve as the sacramental

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 181

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 180-81.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Mitchell, *Real Presence*, 119.



mediator to the Word incarnate, and are the invitation to receive the gift of Love, becoming more fulfilled through each encounter.

We now move to consider implications of dogmatic revision, namely the task of liberating the term transubstantiation, which is not explicitly undertaken by Marion. As demonstrated earlier, the language surrounding transubstantiation is inherently problematic in our era. Marion does suggest that words of this kind can be useful outside of a contemporary metaphysical reading, retaining their inherent value from the tradition. These terms can be redirected to indicate a difference between us and God. “Transubstantiation thus has the merit of clearly marking the unbridgeable difference between the divine Other and ourselves.”<sup>88</sup> In theological discourse, however, transubstantiation “reveals criticisms so filled by the essence and the destiny of metaphysics that they [theological terms like transubstantiation] cannot stop themselves from reducing a discourse even as radically theological as that of the Eucharistic present/gift.”<sup>89</sup> Marion indicates the inherently problematic nature of this term, since it is bound up with the temptation to trap God in an object.<sup>90</sup> Please note that he does not call for its abandon. Transubstantiation, like the title “God,” represents part of a greater contemporary myopia regarding metaphysics that must be updated and remade for the sake of charity and all faithful. The path of such action is unspecified, and is the vocation of contemporary believers.

### **Conclusion: Marion’s Eucharistic Insights**

“Love is not spoken, it is made.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 121.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>90</sup> Mitchell, *Real Presence*, 114.

<sup>91</sup> Marion, *God without Being*, 107.

Marion's insights have two disadvantages. First, they reject the systems accepted within the Roman Catholic Church used by successful theologians such as Aquinas and Rahner.<sup>92</sup> Second, these insights are rooted in phenomenological philosophy, which is postmodern and relatively inaccessible to most readers. He is not for the light of heart, but rather has a powerful voice to be harmonized amidst the evolving choir of contemporary theologians. Marion's rejection of metaphysics offers limitless potential for humility and love, if such an ideological change is possible. Further, Marion's conception of God as action, namely charity and Love, have boundless potential to influence humanity, liturgy and the direction of theology. Understanding and appropriating these complex insights within a metaphysically rooted church poses a large challenge that is not without great reward.

Eucharistic presence as conceived by Marion can be conceptually summarized as follows: Marion writes that Eucharistic presence depends on charity, it aims at the ecclesial body, and is amenable to a mystical reality.<sup>93</sup> One can only approach these mysteries through prayer. Contemplating Eucharistic presence first requires prayer.<sup>94</sup> "The one who prays undertakes to let his gaze be converted in it—thus, in addition, to modify his thought in it."<sup>95</sup> Marion delivers an imperative to the contemporary world which demands no less than an active and open response to the presence of God in our midst. Through the lens of phenomenology he identifies idols blocking progression toward understanding Eucharistic presence, namely contemporary metaphysics, and he

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<sup>92</sup> Please note that Aquinas and Rahner represent a tradition grounded in mystery, which is at odds with the contemporary world. The metaphysics Marion rejects is the metaphysics of today, grounded in self, Being, and is devoid of mystery.

<sup>93</sup> Marion, *God Without Being*, 181.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

subsequently indicates a new direction through humble response to the Word. Marion sees contemplation on the Eucharist as urgent, recording the words of St. Augustine: “Not only do we not sin by adoring Him, but we sin by not adoring Him.”<sup>96</sup> In reality, this demands an ecclesiological shift as well as a theological repositioning, if not a new beginning altogether. If the church of today is to remain viably responsive to charity, it should attend with hope and openness to the transforming presence of Christ, becoming God’s action in the world. “Fundamentally, faith must be absorbed in charity.”<sup>97</sup> Thus for Marion, each moment imparts a sense of urgency; we are called to respond with faith and charity to the Eucharistic presence of the Risen Lord.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 183.

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