

THE REALISATION OF I-WE

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Ever since Plato, a tragic conception of the human self has been the *point de depart* of moral and political philosophy: the I and the we belong to one another yet oppose each other. Ancients such as Aristotle contended that the we is ontologically prior and moderns such as Hobbes that the I is ontologically prior. I make the case that Jesus Christ realised an ontology which collapses this dichotomy: the human self is neither I nor we, but fundamentally I-we. I demonstrate that this is an ontology of gift-dynamics, made explicit in the mythical complex of the cult centring on Jesus Christ, and engraved unto this cult's heart through ritual.

Upon being brought into existence, I was immersed in my mother, enmeshed with her being. I could not distinguish between my mother's self, the womb and myself—phenomenologically, as it were, I *was* the womb, and I *was* my mother. Then, through birth, I was thrown out and into a world in which my mother was *a* rather than *the* being, or: the familiar among foreign beings.

In this unknown world of unknown beings, I found myself not only enmeshed with her, but also with another, who, for me, was foreign yet familiar: my father. And as I became aware of my mother and my father as conscious beings, I became aware of myself as a conscious being also; I came to 'notice the divergence'¹ between their attention, their awareness, and my own—and that they and I are capable of bringing our awareness and attention together, acting communally in pursuit of common goods while simultaneously maintaining our individuality.²

Thus, in this triune community, my self emerged as both 'I' and 'we'. Indeed, this dualistic mode of being manifested itself in a duality of basic need-desires: I need and desire to be part of a community, but also to be set apart from it; I need and desire to be one with others, but also to be someone in and of myself.

Despite being basic, however, the need-desires of the I and the we appear to be contradictory. How can I *truly* be part of the community whilst set apart from it? Be one with others whilst someone in and of myself? If these basic need-desires in fact are contradictory, then satisfying one implies frustrating the other. Herein lies a paradox of human becoming: by virtue of being, I need and desire fulfilment of being, yet my very nature, it seems, opposes such fulfilment; to be human, to be I-we, is seemingly to exist in basic disequilibrium. This is captured especially concisely in the Kantian notion of 'unsociable sociability' (*ungesellige Gesellikeit*): humans have the propensity for individuality and community—even though the realisations of these propensities are mutually exclusive.³ Humans must therefore expect 'resistance everywhere'.⁴

This tragic conception of the human self has ancient origins. Consider the myth of Aristophanes, for instance, in which Plato depicts the primordial human as a couple that existed in undivided unity. The gods, however, decided to divide them, and ever since, both have longed for 'throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces', growing into one.⁵ However, as Martha C. Nussbaum explicates, though deep in us all, this longing for wholeness

apparently involves an ambivalence: it demands ‘immobility, the loss of limbs, of movement’.⁶ The one and the whole are ‘tragically woven together’ in the sense that the longing demands that one loses oneself to the whole.⁷ Humans’ very ontology is therefore wounded—and the ancient Greek hoped that *eros* might be the cure; in the naked embrace, humans can melt together again. But because the one and the whole remain tragically woven together, *eros* is, for the ancient Greek, ‘actually the acting out of a complex, contradictory, and in part impossible fantasy’.⁸

Ever since Plato, this tragic conception of the human self has been the *point de depart* of moral and political philosophy. Consider, for instance, the aforementioned individual-communal dichotomy: is the individual ontologically prior to the community or *vice versa*? Ancients such as Aristotle believed that the community was ontologically prior,⁹ whereas moderns, from Hobbes on,¹⁰ that the individual is ontologically prior. We must therefore inquire: does the duality of the human self truly necessitate that either I or we be ontologically prior to the other? Are humans doomed to exist in basic disequilibrium?

Elsewhere, I have contended that, contrary to the ancient world at large, the I did not emerge in opposition to the we in ancient Israel: here, the I emerged as the human self came to know itself, implicitly and subconsciously, as I-we.¹¹ This emergence was predicated on an implicit philosophical anthropology of gift-giving, ‘the gift theory’, which came to penetrate the ancient Israelite collective psyche: since humans *are* gifts to one another, humans *ought* to give themselves to one another.¹² And when one receives the other’s gift of self, one is set apart from others, which is to become I; when giving oneself to the other, one becomes part of the other, which is to become we. In order to be become I-we, the human self must therefore participate in the ‘singularity’, that is, mutual and absolute gift-dynamics *qua* the giving of oneself to the other and the receiving of the other’s gift of self.¹³

But could this emerging I-we ever in fact be realised? I shall make the case that Jesus Christ archetypically realised the I-we—and, moreover, that neither I nor we are ontologically fundamental: I-we is ontologically fundamental. I begin by establishing that John 17 reveals the inner logic of the Trinity in terms of the gift theory (section 1). Then, by interpreting the climax of the eschatological myth of Revelation 19-21 in relation to the logic of John 17, I corroborate the gift theory’s explicitness in the mythical complex of the communities centring on Jesus Christ in the Apostolic Age, which I refer to, rather anachronistically, as the ‘trinitarian cult’ hereafter (section 2). Lastly, I contend that this gift theory materialises in erotic rituals, and especially in marriage-sex and the eucharist, so that the gift theory is engraved unto the very heart of the trinitarian cult (section 3).

Before doing so, however, I must briefly expound the meaning of ‘myth’ and ‘ritual’. I construe ‘myth’ broadly, as expressions (which may or may not correspond to historical fact)¹⁴ Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1969), 7. of the inexpressible, attempting to reach the abyss of existence and being. To approach the myth *qua* myth is to be drawn, through the myth’s words, its *mythos*, into the myth’s inner logic, its *logos*: from the outside, we will ‘grasp nothing of its inner significance’.¹⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, ‘Structuralism and Myth’, *The Kenyon Review*, New Series 3, no. 2 (1981): 65–88, 86. See also: Masvie, ‘The Emergence of I’, 97. Despite the strenuous efforts of certain scholars, the *mythos* and *logos* cannot be torn apart from one another: the myth just is *mythos-logos*. And to approach the myth *as* myth, is to recognise that myths belong to complexes of other myths, so that a structure that occurs in any of these ‘will recur, in the same or other variations, in other parts of the complex’.¹⁶ Thus, in order to understand the trinitarian cult’s eschatological myth, I must approach it in relation to the trinitarian cult’s grander mythical complex—by superimposition¹⁷—as well as its materialisation in social structures in general, and rituals in particular.¹⁸

1. THE INNER LOGIC OF THE TRINITY AS GIFT THEORY

The sacrifice at Golgotha springs out from the ‘garden’ (Jn 18:1) of Gethsemane—the garden in which Jesus is ‘betrayed’ (Jn 18:2). And the garden context is certainly significant: in the mythical complex of ancient Israel, the garden draws the reader-listener into the singularity of Eden, evoking a sense of universality, invoking cosmic concerns.¹⁹ Here, in the singularity’s mutual and absolute gift-dynamics, the reader-listener senses *shalom*, this deepening harmony amongst the Lord God, humans, and creation—a ‘dynamic equilibrium’ that comes from fulfilment of being.²⁰ However, the garden of Gethsemane is an eerie perversion of Eden’s singularity, while simultaneously, and paradoxically, beautifully transforming it.

From the synoptics, the reader-listener knows that in Gethsemane, Jesus is amongst close ones but still alone (Mk 14:32–42; Mt. 26:36–46; Lk. 22:39–46)—hauntingly captured in the ‘kiss’ of betrayal (Mk 14:45; Mt. 26:49; Lk. 22:47). And with this kiss of betrayal, Gethsemane is revealed as anti-Eden: the sinners chase (Jn 18:3–5; cf. Gen. 3:9), mock trial (Jn 18:19–24, 28–38; cf. Gen. 3:16–19), and ultimately judge to death Jesus *qua* the Lord God (Jn 18:39–40; cf. Gen. 3:16–19). Humans have made themselves gods and the Lord God has made godself human; order has collapsed into chaos. But in the very chaos of Gethsemane, order is being transformed. This becomes evident as we superimpose Gethsemane upon Eden.

‘Where are you?’ (Gen. 3:9), the Lord God asks. Ashamed of themselves, the humans hid and covered their nakedness, suggesting that their sin was to *give* themselves no longer to the Lord God.²¹ In Gethsemane, it is as if Jesus answers the Lord God. ‘Whom are you looking for?’ (Jn 18:4), Jesus asks, which is to say: ‘I am here’. Humans sinned, but it is the Lord God *qua* Jesus that subjugates godself to the trial and judgement that sin necessitates. In Eden, humans sinned by ceasing to give themselves to the Lord God, wounding cosmic unity; in Gethsemane, the Lord God gives godself to humans, healing cosmic unity. How does the Lord God do so? By becoming one with the chaos of Golgotha, which penetrates humanity itself—that is, by becoming the Sacrifice of sacrifices—so as ultimately to transform, from within, chaos to order, enabling knowledge amidst confusion (Jn 18:37–38). And here, in this very sacrifice, I-we is archetypically realised.

To explore the Sacrifice of sacrifices, we must turn to John 17 and the discourse within the Trinity, echoing the prologue.²² The significance of this passage is threefold. Firstly, Jesus ‘consecrates himself for a sacrifice’,²³ *the* sacrifice. Secondly, the consecration enables the reader-listener to grasp the logic of the sacrifice. Thirdly, this logic—the inner logic of the Trinity—is revealed as mutual and absolute gift-dynamics.

In John 17, gifts constantly flow from the Father to the Son and *vice versa*; it is because the Son is ‘gifted’²⁴ that he is able, through the Spirit, to reciprocate the ‘total self-gift’.²⁵ Or, with David Bentley Hart, ‘the Father gives himself to the Son, and again to the Spirit, and the Son offers everything up to the Father in the Spirit, and the Spirit returns all to the Father through the Son’.²⁶ These gifts create a unity in which the selves are blurred but not diminished. ‘All mine are yours’, the Son exclaims, ‘and yours are mine’ (Jn 17:10)—‘we are one’ (Jn 17:11). Within the Trinity, therefore, the Son and the Father are bound together by love: ‘you loved me before the foundation of the world’ (Jn 17:25). This unity of love is characterised by glory, the splendour of holiness. Because the Father loves the Son and *vice versa*, the Son is glorified by the Father (Jn 17:10), and this very glorification of the Son glorifies the Father (Jn 17:1).

Similarly, the Trinity longs for humans to partake in godself, again blurring, but not diminishing, the distinction between the human self and the Trinity. ‘The glory that you have given me I have given them so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become

completely one' (Jn 17:22)—or as another translation might render it, made 'perfect' or 'fulfilled' or 'consummate' (τελείω)—'so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' (Jn 17:23). It is the gift that enables oneness—climaxing in the Sacrifice of sacrifices—and oneness that enables the knowledge of love.

Thus, as the inner logic of the Trinity is revealed to be mutual and absolute gift-dynamics, as singularity, the rationale of the incarnation and crucifixion is revealed also: to make the Lord God known,²⁷ which is the precondition, meaning, and *telos* of human participation in the Trinity's singularity. 'I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them' (Jn 17:25-26). And to make known the name of the Lord God is to reveal 'all that can be known'²⁸ of the Lord God, whose heart is love. As humans give themselves to the Lord God by trusting this revelation, or, rather, coming to *know* the revelation of Jesus, they are drawn into the singularity, into the Holy of holies (Jn 17:3).

Here, in the singularity, humans come to know the Lord God as triune, as both one and three, both I and we. And by archetypically realising the gift theory, Jesus Christ archetypically actualises human potential, the I-we, thus unveiling the *imago Dei*.^{29,29} Masvie, 'The Emergence of I', 22. The nature of the human self is indeed a profound reflection of the Trinity as gift.³⁰ The *imago Dei* is therefore really an *imago Trinitas*, a community of individuals among which there is an outpouring and overflowing of aroused *agape*, that is, *eros*.³¹ And I take *eros* to denote the need and desire to be in unity with the other, so as to become who and what one is—that is, to possess the other freely and be freely possessed by them; to delight in the truth, goodness, and beauty that is revealed through such mutual and absolute giving of self.

The radicality of the Lord God's sacrifice demands that we unremittently lend it further consideration. The original covenant between the Lord God and cosmos is a structure that is built into existence and being. If the covenant is broken, then justice, according to tradition, must follow—if justice does not follow, then the Lord God is unfaithful to godself, implying that order has forever been annihilated. Thus, in order to bring humans back into covenantal unity with godself and be true to justice, the Lord God sacrifices godself. And here is the traditional conundrum: if the sacrifice was necessary, if it was demanded, then how can the Lord God's death really be a gift proper? If the Sacrifice of sacrifices was not a gift proper, then Jesus Christ could not have archetypically realised the gift theory and its I-we.

In order to explore whether or not the Lord God's sacrifice was a gift proper, I must begin by determining what a gift proper is: x is gift if and only if x is free submission of ownership—and the essential purpose of x is to create or deepen relationships.³² Determining what is gift proper, then, is a matter of construing 'freedom' and 'ownership' properly, which in turn is a matter of philosophical anthropology. Among the ancient Israelites, humans were free when becoming *imago Dei*, that is, when able and willing to give and receive *appropriately*.³³ And to give and receive appropriately is to uphold the order of creation and be creative within that order—otherwise the giver rebels against their own givenness, refusing to receive oneself, and the world, as first and foremost *given* by the Lord God. Furthermore, humans have ownership in the world when appropriately extending their self into that world—and since humans are *imago Dei*, thus holy, that extended self ought to be respected.³⁴

It should be noted that freedom is assumed to coexist with gift-dynamics: freedom, for the ancient Israelites, is to be able and willing to give appropriate gifts. Human freedom cannot, therefore, be reduced to the mere absence of constraint, not to mention independency. Rather, freedom is to actualise human potential by creating and deepening relationships so as to uphold the order of creation *by* being creative within that order (cf. Jn 10:17-18). Most ancient theologians and philosophers would hardly reject this understanding of freedom—but some moderns certainly do: for Pierre Bourdieu, the gift is a 'collective hypocrisy',³⁵ and for Jacques Derrida, an 'impossible

possibility'.³⁶ The modern objection is that the gift proper does not exist because no gift *can be* properly free, and thus cannot ever be anything beyond contract. Precisely because the gift's essential purpose is to create or deepen relationships, the gift has strings attached to it, rendering it unfree. One can respond to this objection simply by rejecting the modern understanding of freedom. Put all too crudely: freedom is predicated on actualisation of potential, which in turn is predicated on creating and deepening relationships.³⁷ I shall also, however, critically consider John Milbank's response to the objection of Bourdieu and Derrida.³⁸ Though excellently expounded, Milbank's gift does ultimately not enable the emergence and realisation of I-we.

The gift, Milbank reasons, exists within gift-dynamics as 'delay and non-identical repetition' if it is purged from its 'archaic agonistic components'.^{39,39} Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given?', 131. What does that mean? The 'delay' implies that, if A gives x to B, then there must be an indeterminate, though not infinite, interval during which B owes nothing to A. The 'non-identical' implies that when B reciprocates y to A, it cannot be the case that $y = x$. For Milbank, if there is delay and non-identical repetition, then gift-dynamics do not necessarily collapse into contract, into mere discharge of debt. Moreover, such delay and non-identical repetition must be purged. Any gift can, should, and indeed must be interested. But this cannot be an interest to *inflict debt* on the other, rather, it must be an interest to *be with* the other, to self-express in order to know and be known by the other. Furthermore, it cannot be an interest to possess the other: receiving the other in their gift 'demands that the *distance* of the other remains in place'.⁴⁰

There is, however, a problem with Milbank's gift: it merely captures some kinds of gifts, not the gift *simpliciter*. Whereas repetition that is identical in each and every respect cannot deepen the givers' relationship, and therefore is not gift-giving proper, it is, as Milbank admits, only 'usually' the case that there must be delay.⁴¹ Indeed, delay does not describe the gift that lies at the heart of the myths of the trinitarian cult: the spouses' naked embrace. Although the Bride and Bridegroom certainly give non-identical gifts—they give binaries to one another—there is no delay. The Bridegroom's gift of sex is contingent on the Bride's gift of sex; after the relationship is created, the deepening of that relation is brought about by simultaneous gift-giving, there is no delay.

This problem is suggestive of a profounder problem: the notion that there must be distance between the one who gives and the one who receives. This is true in one sense, but false in another. There is distance between the spouses—as well as others that participate in mutual absolute giving and receiving of self—in that they emerge as I. But this distance is also covered, as the spouses come to possess one another, emerging as we. Milbank, following Jean-Luc Marion, explicates that to possess the other and their gifts 'would be simply to obliterate them'.⁴² I believe, however, that this reasoning is erroneous, and that the error is due to a deficient understanding of 'possession', or 'ownership', which I take to be synonymous.

When Milbank and Marion apply these terms, they do so, it seems, in both a descriptive and a normative sense. The descriptive sense is this: if A is the owner of x , then A is in some special relation to x —and some other B ought to respect this special relation. The normative sense is this: if A is the owner of x , then x has become an objectified piece of property which A may do as A likes with, indeed, even exploit or destruct. Thus, for Milbank and Marion, when the gift is being owned, it is no longer gift, because the owner 'does not count the given character among its properties', the owner regards the thing as its own, something it does 'not need *to go on receiving*'—and thus the 'gift has disappeared as such; the only thing that can still be seen is a thing owned'.⁴³

The descriptive sense is correct, I believe. Indeed, it seems to be a 'universal human belief' that ownership is the extension of self: when A believes that x is *mine*, A also believes that x is *me*.⁴⁴ This is clearly captured in the term *possessing* and its cognates: *possessing x*, unlike *owning x*, elicits a sense of *extending into x*. And to be situated in the world just is to extend into it, implying that this understanding is uncontentious. Rather, it is the *modus operandi* of

such extension, as well the appropriateness, that is controversial. Here, however, it suffices to recognise that ownership can reasonably be understood as extension of self. And this descriptive sense does not entail Milbank's and Marion's normative sense. That is, ownership gives the owner the possibility and perhaps power to violate the integrity and dignity of that which is being owned, but it does not demand, encourage, or sanction any such Bataillan⁴⁵ transgression of order. On the contrary, the owner is made *responsible* for that which is owned—as well as reciprocating oneself, which now includes that which is owned. If the owner does violence to the owned, then the owner is perpetuating chaos and confusion.

I shall assume that ownership is the extension of self and that the owner is obliged to do good *with* the owned, if an object, or *to* the owned, if a subject. In order to consider the implications for the gift, I turn to the gift of self in general, and, as already indicated, *eros* in particular, originally materialised in the spousal naked embrace. The reason for doing so is threefold. Firstly, if owning the other and their gifts in fact implies that we obliterate the giver, then, if at all, that will be made clear in the gift of self. Secondly, *prima facie*, the trinitarian cult believed that the spousal gift of self implied mutual and absolute ownership of the other (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:1-12; Eph. 5:22-23). Thirdly, the myth and ritual of the trinitarian cult is erotic in the sense that Jesus Christ's archetypal gift of self is conceived of in terms of the spousal naked embrace (Rev. 19-21). And I shall contend that there indeed is a sense of obliteration in the spousal naked embrace, a sense of death, but that the spouses are resurrected as transformed beings, and that this transformation is predicated on the obliteration.

Consider the cultural-historical context of the trinitarian cult: in ancient Rome, marriage and sex perpetuated a cosmology of hierarchy and domination. When a male citizen married a female citizen, the status of their respective *familia* determined the status of their marriage, and thus also of the *familia* arising from their marriage: *matrimonium* just is to make a mother (*mater*), that is, to make a *familia*—whose social, legal, and religious master was the *pater familias*. The wife and mother, like everyone and everything else in the *familia*, belonged to this master. Thus sexual satisfaction within marriage belonged to the man; the woman's satisfaction was only relevant if the man was satisfied, or if it otherwise contributed to the man's satisfaction.⁴⁶ Marriage was therefore not in any meaningful sense oriented towards love (although love, of course, could occur within it)⁴⁷ Ovid. *Tristia and Ex Ponto*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. A. L. Wheeler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002)., but towards perpetuating the cosmology of hierarchy and domination upon which the empire was based.

Sex, like marriage, was also essentially characterised by hierarchy and domination: sex was conceptualised as an active superior's penetration of a passive inferior.⁴⁸ And the male citizens were 'impenetrable penetrators', demonstrating their status by *feminising* a passive inferior through penetration—not only their wife, that is a female citizen, but also slaves and prostitutes, be they male or female.⁴⁹ That does not imply that a superior could coerce just any inferior to have sex with him, nor did this concept of sex inevitably abolish love, but it did imply that sex was never simply sex. To participate in sex was to participate in a cosmology of hierarchy and domination. Sexual practices that neglected the superior-inferior dichotomy, for instance by *equally* pursuing mutual satisfaction, was conceived of as 'diseased', indeed, even 'vilified as the nadir of corruption'.⁵⁰ And the trinitarian cult did not only neglect the dichotomy, but rebelled against it (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:1-12; Eph. 5:22-23), reflecting their belief in an altogether different cosmology: the spouses *qua* spouses need and desire to possess freely and be possessed by each other as complementary, and thus mutually dependent, equals. And as they do so, extending into one another, they become we.

In becoming we, he and she are obliterated. But from this obliteration, from this death, they are resurrected: in his giving of everything to her, she is completely loved by him, and thus she is completely adored and appreciated—and so is he by her. Thus, they emerge as I also, or rather: as I-we.

In this singularity, the gift is simply free submission of ownership of self. There is distance between the giver-receiver and the receiver-giver in that a gift is given from one to the other, yet the very same gift covers that distance. This does not imply, of course, that A and B become numerically identical. Rather, it implies that A, when being given the gift of B's self, incorporates B's self into itself, so that A emerges not merely as proper I or proper we, but proper I-we. The erotic blurring of the self-other distinction is not merely experiential, the ecstaticism of Freudian⁵¹ discharge of tension. Rather, the blurring is ontological. And that blurring enables, perhaps paradoxically, epistemic clarity: if our deepest being is not known by virtue of being extended into by the other, we cannot really know ourselves, as the other corrects and affirms our self-knowledge.⁵² And if we cannot know ourselves, then we have no basis from which we can come to know the other either. Thus, if we are not owned, if we are not *possessed*, then we are doomed to the confusion of chaos.

To participate in gift-dynamics, then, just is to come to know the nature of one's givenness. In the marriage of the trinitarian cult, for instance, the spouses come to know their self and the other as male and female. The ontological blurring does not diminish the distinctness of their natures; that would collapse their oneness into confusion and chaos. The spouses become *imago Dei* by being male, female, and male-female—that is, I and we—and delighting in their givenness, while adoring and exalting the other's gift of self.⁵³ Masvie, 'The Emergence of I', 99–101. And through the spouses' gift of self, they come to know the meaning of such maleness, femaleness, and male-femaleness. The spouses give themselves to the other in order to be given back,⁵⁴ transformed, in order to give themselves again.⁵⁵

The sacrifice is therefore essential for understanding the trinitarian cult's mythical complex: by becoming sacrifice, Jesus becomes the gift that enables unity with the Trinity—and amongst humans.⁵⁶ Though in itself, this sacrifice does not educe marriage or sex, there is undoubtedly something erotic about John 17. That is, not at all erotic in the genital sense, but in the sense of drawing close to one another, possessing each other in joyous, generous freedom.⁵⁷ It is therefore not surprising that the eschatological myth of Revelation depicts the consummation of the sacrifice precisely in terms of marriage and sex, as foreshadowed throughout John (e.g. Jn 2:1-11; 3:22-31; 14:1-3): just as *Yahweh Elohim* is depicted as the archetypal husband, so is Jesus Christ.

2. THE GIFT THEORY IN THE MYTHICAL COMPLEX

The dramaturgy of the ancient Israelites' mythical complex finds its energy in the gift theory and its *grundstruktur*: to begin with, there is an equilibrium of gift-dynamics (singularity: *S*), then a collapse of the equilibrium (collapse: *C*), before a transformation of the equilibrium (transformation: *T*), reestablishing an equilibrium of gift-dynamics (singularity: *S**).⁵⁸ The closing of the cycle is not a return to origin; rather, the original singularity is transformed. And this cycle of collapse and transformation is most profoundly true in cosmic history. In the garden of Eden (*S*), humans chose to worship the gift rather than the Gift-giver (*C*), and must now live through the trials of history (*T*), longing for the cosmic singularity of the coming cosmic covenant (*S**). It is therefore not surprising that Revelation's singularity is the original garden transformed, that is, a blossoming and fruitful city (Rev. 21:9-27).

In Revelation 19-21—which is strikingly similar to the apocalyptic of the Torah in general,⁵⁹ and in particular Jeremiah (31-32) and Isaiah (54-56)—the cosmic consummation (*S**) is depicted as an *erotic* consummation. 'Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready' (Rev. 19:7). There are clear echoes of the Song of Song's chorus (Song. 5:1), and their celebration of the consummation

of the Bride and Bridegroom's covenantal commitment. This makes the image of the marriage of the Lamb all the more striking. And upon turning to this image, I must, in passing, expand on the language of analogy.

The Lord God is humanity's wholly transcendent other: the formulation of concepts about the Lord God within our finite, fragile existence is therefore destined to fail. Yet, mystically, the Lord God is nevertheless immanently present within our existence, such that we can come to know the Lord God. But in order to maintain the wholly transcendent otherness of the Lord God, that knowledge must be expressed in the language of analogy, of likeness and difference. And through revelation, the Lord God likens godself to certain categories of knowledge within our existence. There is, therefore, truth above and beyond our existence that can be approached, or rather: that approaches us so that we can approach it.⁶⁰ And if this truth is to be universally true, then the analogies' constitutive concepts must exist (and be good) objectively in our consciousness, rather than subjectively by our imposition upon being.⁶¹

Still our categories cannot ever capture the essence of the Lord God: the interval of difference within the analogy is irreducible and infinite. The image of the marriage of the Lamb speaks truly about the Lord God in terms of *eros*, marriage-sex, and gender—but none of these concepts and their distinctions really capture the essence of the Lord God; there is an irreducible and infinite distance between the concepts and the Lord God. That does not, however, render our language otiose: even though we may experience that words fall short in capturing the essence of a beloved, it is still the case that some words are truer than others. And as the Song demonstrates, when our love demands to witness to its beloved, analogy is the appropriate mode of language.

Here the relation between knowledge and intimacy is emphasised: for the language of analogy to make deep sense, it cannot, for the knower, be detached from intimacy.⁶² And the human predicament is that our relation to the Lord God is not as intimate as it should be. We are like the Bride, whose veil prevents her from seeing her Bridegroom face-to-face—but that does not prevent the Bride from having some knowledge about the Bridegroom.⁶³ 'Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known' (1 Cor. 13:12). Until the consummation, our intimacy consists in these veiled glimpses, which we witness to in the language of analogy. Indeed, 'we have nothing more than images'⁶⁴—and so we turn to the image of the marriage of the Lamb.

Firstly, the *Lamb* marries *Jerusalem*. This makes it very clear that the Bridegroom is something wholly other than the Bride; they cannot be compared; they are categorically different. And in Revelation, the archetypal Bridegroom is the Lamb of lambs. Thus the immense, perplexing holiness of the Lord God is revealed: the Lord God is, in a sense, binary to our very existence and being—yet we are united with the Lord God. This is mirrored in the trinitarian cult's marital unity of male–female. The Lord God is the Sacrificer and the Sacrificed, the Giver and the Gift (and also, significantly, the Receiver), 'the Alpha and the Omega' (Rev. 22:13).

Secondly, the Lamb *marries* Jerusalem. To marry the other is to bind oneself to the other, become one flesh, through the commitment of covenantal promises and the consummation of this commitment. And becoming one flesh is to come to know one another ever deeper. Since the Lord God is (in a sense) binary to our existence and being, it is impossible to know the Lord God without experiencing such fear (Prov. 9:10). However, this does not suggest that the Bride should be afraid of the Lord God (Rev. 1:17). This difference is paramount: 'fearing' the Lord God draws humans closer to the Lord God, in awe and wonder,⁶⁵ Temper Longman III, 'Proverbs 1: Book of', in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*, ed. Temper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 549. stirring a need-desire to worship the Lord God *as* the Lord God, whereas 'being afraid' of the Lord God pushes humans away from

the Lord God, hiding and cowering in disbelief that the Lord God also loves *me*, which is to reject the Lord God *qua* the Lord God.⁶⁶

Even though the marriage of the Lamb is yet to come, there is nevertheless unity between the Bride and Bridegroom—they are betrothed, as it were, eagerly but patiently awaiting marital consummation.⁶⁷ In the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lord God tears the flesh of Jesus, taking on godself the justice demanded by humans' betrayal, the breaking of the original cosmic covenant. But this tearing of the flesh is also a *cutting* of flesh, the bringing about of a transformed covenant, through which humans again can participate in the Trinity.⁶⁸ Thus, the Lord God has bound godself to humans, enabling humans to bind themselves to the Lord God.

Who is this Bride, 'adorned' (Rev. 21:2) for her Bridegroom? It appears that while the Bride is the trinitarian cult, that is the Church, 'the wedding guests are the members of the Church, and their deeds are her bridal dress'.⁶⁹ The Church is therefore characterised in feminine terms, yet she has been given to Christ, and is therefore already becoming one with *his* body. Furthermore, just as the garden of the Song signifies the Bride, and more specifically, her erotic being,⁷⁰ the city of Revelation signifies the Bride and her erotic being transformed. Within her, there is no chaos and confusion (Rev. 21:1; 4). In the consummation, the Lamb becomes one with Jerusalem. Thus, the city becomes the archetypal sanctuary transformed,⁷¹ in which the Lord God 'will dwell' (Rev. 21:3): there is 'no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (Rev. 21:22). And since the Bride has betrothed herself to her Bridegroom, being faithful by repenting from unfaithfulness,⁷² she has given herself to him. Upon consummating the betrothal, upon becoming one flesh, the Bride can no longer be allured by anything or anyone, because her needs and desires have melted together with the Bridegroom.

In the singularity of the Bride and Bridegroom, humans participate by becoming *imago Dei*: 'they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads' (Rev. 22:3-4). The fact that humans encounter the Lord God's face demonstrates that creation is yet again able to stand naked in front of their Creator. Yet again, humans know their Lord God—now with a transformed knowledge. There is no sin, no shame. And because they know their Lord God, they become *imago Dei* transformed. However, those who have been allured by 'the great whore' cannot enter this city (Rev. 17:1-7, 19:2; cf. Prob. 1-9). They have the image of the idol rather than the Lord God on their foreheads (Rev. 20:4; 22:4); they have become one flesh with sin. And the transformation of chaos and confusion to order and knowledge demands the annihilation of chaos and confusion (Rev. 20; cf. 6:10).

Thus, when expounding the climax of Revelation in relation to John's revelation of the trinitarian logic, the gift theory is made explicit—not of course, as *theory*, but as normative principle: humans are gifts and thus ought to be gifts, that is, to participate in mutual and absolute gift-dynamics.⁷³ This truth is tainted by sin in the sense that evil and confusion make humans unable and even unwilling to be gifts. However, the post-Eden predicament does not alter the fact that humans are, fundamentally, gifts, and can only be human by being and becoming gifts. Humans must therefore bind themselves to the Lord God, who has bound godself to humans, to be drawn into the gift-dynamics of the Trinity, deeper and deeper still, until the consummation brings about the cosmic singularity.

3. THE GIFT THEORY'S MATERIALISATION IN EROTIC RITUALS

The mythical complex must be further expanded on in relation to relevant social structures in general, and rituals in particular. And I shall consider a duality of rituals—that is, marriage-sex

and the eucharist, which I hereafter refer to interchangeably as the ‘original’ and ‘transformed’ ritual respectively. These rituals, I contend, engraved the gift theory unto the very heart of the trinitarian cult.

Marriage-sex is the original ritual simply because humans are sexed beings.⁷⁴ Thus, for humans, existence and being ‘permeates sexuality and *vice versa*’.⁷⁵ There is a longing for embracing and being embraced—even though, post-Eden, when two beings embrace, they do not know what they are doing in the sense that they do not know precisely what they look for or what they find. Simultaneously, humans have ‘the vivid and yet obscure feeling’ that sex partakes in the primordial forces of the cosmic harmonies, forces which are ‘forgotten but not abolished’, and, moreover, ‘that sexual joy makes us participate in this mystery’.⁷⁶ However, this mystery is sunk within us, ‘no longer accessible to simplicity, but to the learned exegesis of ancient myths’.⁷⁷

In the myths of the ancient Israelites, and specifically that of Genesis 1-3, sexuality is a reflection of the created order.⁷⁸ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Baker Publishing Group, 2007), chap. 1-2. See also: Masvie, ‘The Emergence of I’, 94. Thus marriage-sex, for the trinitarian cult, is a reflection of the inner logic of the Trinity: the self is given creatively within the created *qua* given order. Indeed, marriage-sex is a brief proto-experience of trinitarian unity, the coming together of three subjects: male, female, male-female; you, me, we. Through marriage-sex, therefore, the lovers experience I-we. However, post-Eden, humans no longer understand the relation between the needs and desires within themselves and the order of cosmos. The transgression of sin materialises in human sexuality, also: when giving into temptations for knowing sexually those and that which ought not to be known sexually, in manners which are inappropriate and thus appropriating, chaos and confusion is perpetuated.⁷⁹ For the trinitarian cult, therefore, participation in the ritual of marriage-sex, and the keeping and treasuring of its constitutive categories, is a manner of perpetuating order within chaos, knowledge within confusion. This becomes especially apparent when the pharisees confront Jesus on the lawfulness of divorce, a centre of dispute amongst Jesus’s contemporaries, upon which Jesus shamelessly points towards Eden as the ideal of marriage.⁸⁰

Under what circumstances is it ‘lawful’ to divorce (Mt. 19:3)? Jesus refuses to recognise the laws of Moses as fundamental, directing their attention and awareness to a deeper law. Husband and wife become one flesh, and so divorce was not originally lawful (Mt. 19:8). It was made lawful because the people were ‘hard-hearted’ (Mt. 19:8). The laws of Moses were therefore only a step on the path from the desert to the transformed city. And the deeper law, underneath and beyond that of Moses, is that divorce is only lawful if one of the two has broken the covenant by adultery (and perhaps not even then)⁸¹, that is, by becoming one flesh with someone else. Jesus, then, does not recognise that divorce ever *can* be truly good. That is, Jesus recognises the original order as the deeper law, by which humans, when binding themselves to that order, embrace the Lord God, and thus come to know the Lord God deeper. In the trinitarian cult, therefore, those who long for the Lord God must strive to practise sex as it was intended originally: within the binding covenant of one man and one woman.⁸² For Jesus, sex outside this covenant, as well as the mere lust for it, is adultery *per se* (Mat. 5:27-28). Even the disciples found this teaching harsh: they complain that ‘it is better not to marry’ (Mt. 19:10). Jesus does not rebuke them. But then again, the teaching is not really harsh, but tragic: to bind oneself to the goodness of the original order demands—in a world in which chaos and confusion penetrates the human being—crucifixion of the self. Yet the original order, and the *imago Dei* which is entwined with it, perfected by Jesus Christ himself, cannot be adjusted to the current state of sinfulness. That would collapse order into chaos, knowledge into confusion.⁸³

But what about the eunuchs? Are those who cannot participate in the ritual of marriage-sex—be it a matter of lacking libido, a libido that cannot be satisfied within the spousal covenant, or a decision not to enter the covenant at all (Mt. 19:12)—cut off from the ritual in which humans are revealed knowledge of the Lord God?

On the contrary, Jesus suggests that faithful eunuchs will be especially blessed: the Lord God will certainly not cut off ‘the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant’ (Is. 56:4-5). The reason for that might be three-fold. Firstly, the eunuchs rebel uniquely against the infidelity of Eden, against the chaos and confusion of the world: in abstaining from the fruit of (sexual) knowledge, shockingly disturbing in the eyes of the world, the eunuchs practise the trust that Adam and Eve could not—which is that only unity with the Lord God reveals the deepest knowledge. Secondly, the eunuchs perpetuate the original order *transformed*: ‘in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels’ (Mt. 22:30). Thirdly, by embracing celibacy so as to consecrate themselves for the Lord God—be it by monastery, *adelphopoiesis*, or otherwise—the eunuchs participate in the most erotic ritual of all. The eunuchs give their all to the Lord God, and thus their need-desire for love and intimacy is met by the Lord God godself and the body of Christ, that is, the trinitarian cult: the delights of the Song are to be experiences by the eunuchs also, in the transformed rather than the original sense. Just as the lovers of the Song delight in becoming one flesh, the limbs of the trinitarian cult delight in becoming one body. The married and the eunuchs are necessary parts of this whole: the married manifest one dimension of holiness, the eunuchs the binary other. And, as such, the married and the eunuchs bring together the duality of the original and the transformed order (cf. Mt. 22:30), manifesting the fullness of the trinitarian cult’s cosmology. In this sense, the original and the transformed orders are, in this world, interdependent. The eunuchs need and desire the witness of the married and their families, and to be incorporated into the intimacy of their family, whereas the married need—and in the depth of themselves also desire—the presence of the eunuchs’ witness: the giving of self within marriage is so inherently imperfect.⁸⁴ After embracing the spouses’ bodies separate, lying next to one another, aware of their inability to penetrate each other truly; it is a matter of time before the children which their love conceived leave them to have families of their own.⁸⁵ The absolute and mutual gift-giving of the spouses is only a reflection in a mirror of the truly complete gift-giving that comes from participation in the Trinity. As such, the eunuchs’ witness breaks into the spouses’ world so as enable them to direct and redirect their attention and awareness to the singularity of the Trinity. And for the trinitarian cult, the unity of these orders and their representatives just is the body of Christ, that is, the *imago Dei* transformed: betrothed, awaiting consummation.

The logic of Jesus’s teaching on marriage-sex is therefore the gift theory: humans ought to participate in mutual and absolute gift-dynamics, and to freely submit one’s ownership to the other demands that one does so appropriately, that is, creatively within the created order. Indeed, Jesus’s teaching is itself a gift (Mt. 19:11). It is a gift to be revealed that humans are gifts—to one another, certainly, but more fundamentally: to the Lord God. Moreover, although the Lord God enables humans to become gifts, humans must themselves participate in such becoming of gift. If not, then their gift of self would be coerced, making it impossible to become gift *qua* gift.

The gift theory is perpetuated in the Pauline epistles,⁸⁶ and especially so when it comes to marriage and sex. For Paul, marriage-sex reveals the erotic beauty of creation and the Church, mirroring the erotic beauty of the Creator and Christ (Eph. 5:21-33). Paul does not diminish the teaching’s tragic dimension: to participate in this beauty in a fallen world demands sacrifices,

incurring suffering which mirrors the crucifixion (Rom. 8:17; cf. 1. Cor. 7). Imitate the Lord God, Paul nevertheless exclaims, ‘and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice’ (Eph. 5:1-2).

Like the ancient Romans, therefore, Jesus and Paul seemingly assume that to participate in marriage and sex is to participate in a certain kind of cosmology. Unlike the ancient Romans,⁸⁷ the man and the woman are given to each other within marriage, as complementary equals,⁸⁸ wherein sex materialises their gifts to one another: as male and female, they are parts belonging to the whole which is the original male-femaleness of the *imago Dei*. To change or challenge this covenant and its constitutive categories is to perpetuate chaos and confusion (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:14–15). It is to reject the identity of being *given* by the Lord God. It is to shape the world in the image of oneself, rather than shaping oneself in the revelation of the *imago Dei*. Indeed, as indicated, the family that naturally springs out of marriage-sex is itself a gift, not only to the spouses, but also to those needing and desiring a family, be they widows, orphans—or eunuchs. Just as the spouses ought to give themselves to one another, the family ought to give itself to those who do not have a family, and those who do not have a family ought to give themselves to the families, recreating the boundaries of familial unity within the created order (Mk 3:31-35; Mt. 12:46-50; Lk. 8:19-21).⁸⁹

This is the body of Christ. And the blood of Christ’s body, as it were, is the flow of giving. When the giving is corrupted, the body is corrupted: to not give everything back to the Lord God wilfully is to poison the body of Christ (e.g. Acts 5:1-11). Paul cannot, therefore, bless or even allow practices that contradict the original-transformed order, the very bones of Christ’s body. But this order is only governing those who have embraced it, that is, the limbs of Christ’s body: ‘what have I to do with judging those outside?’ (1 Cor. 5:12). To receive the Lord God is to give oneself back to the Lord God, to enter the singularity of the Trinity—whose order is not of this world. If that order is rejected, then the singularity is rejected, and therefore the Lord God also. But none can be coerced to embrace the singularity: coercion empties the embrace of its meaning, and, as such, coercion also prevents the potential embrace from actualising.

The body of Christ incorporates a transition from the original *imago Dei* to the transformed *imago Dei*, which is materialised in the eucharist. This becomes evident when considering the literary context of Paul’s elaborate discussion on the eucharist (1 Cor. 11). The discussion of the eucharist begins with marriage-sex. The spousal naked embrace, Paul explains, makes the participants one with each other. And, similarly, our bodies belong to Christ, with whom we are unified. To know the Lord God, then, and be a rejoicing witness to the singularity of the Trinity, demands participation in the rituals through which the Lord God has revealed godself, and the keeping and treasuring of its categories, even amidst chaos and confusion (1 Cor. 6:12-20).⁹⁰ That is, sexual practice outside the spousal covenant on the one hand, and fidelity to the Lord God on the other, are ‘mutually exclusive’.⁹¹

This dwelling of the Lord God in our bodies is epitomised in the eucharist, the transformed ritual: there is eating of flesh and drinking of blood so that Christ melts together with our flesh and blood. In the ritual of the eucharist, as depicted by Paul, the trinitarian cult believes that the Lord God comes to dwell in their body as they become limbs of the body of Christ—all of which implies that humans come to know the Lord God and are known by the Lord God. This knowledge enables humans also to know their self, which humbles in delight before the Lord God who loves this self (1 Cor. 8:1-2), transforming their understanding of existence and being. As such, the ritual of the eucharist is a transformation of the ritual of marriage-sex.⁹² The transformation becomes clear when Paul, in a second epistle, elaborates on the first epistle to the congregation in Corinth. The role models that Paul points to are

those who ‘gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us’ (2 Cor. 8:5). Paul is carefully making sure that the concept of gift as free submission of ownership does not turn into coerced submission of ownership. ‘Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion’, since the Lord God loves those who give joyfully (2 Cor. 9:7).

When Paul discusses the transformed ritual, therefore, the paradigm is erotic, predicated on the understanding that the Bride-Bridegroom relation is the very essence of the created order.⁹³ In this ritual, the Holy of holies reveals godself. One cannot, therefore, participate in an ‘unworthy’ manner (1 Cor. 11:27). When one participates in the ritual, one is drawn into the Holy of holies: the Church is given to Jesus Christ in betrothal, becoming his body—and Jesus Christ, who already gave himself to the world, gives his blood and flesh again and again to the Church. As such, mysteriously, the eucharist is a sacrifice in anticipation of the marriage feast: the flesh is also bread, the blood is also wine. Those who participate in this ritual emerge more than ever as both I and we, as both limb and body. Yet the realisation of I-we, the true *imago Dei* transformed, cannot be brought fully about before the cosmic consummation.

Thus, the trinitarian cult’s conception of the human self is not entirely untragic. But it is not tragic in the sense that humans are doomed to exist in basic disequilibrium—that the one and the whole are tragically woven together; that I and we are ontologically distinct, so that realising one frustrates the other. For the trinitarian cult, I-we is ontologically fundamental. The tragedy is that humans cannot realise the I-we because humans rejected participation in the mutual and absolute gift-dynamics within the Trinity. In order to do so again, humans must come to know who they are, which is contingent on knowing who the Lord God is. And therefore, revealing this knowledge, the Lord God gives godself to humans, archetypically realising mutual and absolute gift-dynamics, so that humans can participate in the singularity of the Trinity by being drawn into it by the Lord God godself.

The Lord God gives godself to humans, therefore, so that humans can give themselves back. Indeed, clinging to oneself is to throw oneself into annihilation. But by giving oneself back to the Trinity, one is drawn into the singularity of the Trinity, wherein the paradox of human becoming is resolved: the I-we is fulfilled.

Notes

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- ¹³ Masvie, 'The Emergence of I', 97.
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86. See also: Masvie, 'The Emergence of I', 97.
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- ²⁷ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 477.
- ²⁸ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 462.
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- ⁴⁰ Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given?', 132.
- ⁴¹ Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given?', 125.
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⁸⁵ Balthasar, 'Eucharist: Gift of Love', 140.

⁸⁶ See John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015).

⁸⁷ E.g. Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Epitome of Book LXXX, Vol. IX, *Loeb Classical Library*, trans. Earnst Cary (Harvard University Press, 1914–1927), 15.4.

⁸⁸ See Davidson, R. M. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 38.

⁸⁹ See Masvie, 'The Emergence of I', 100.

⁹⁰ See Masvie, 'The Emergence of I', 100.

⁹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 257.

⁹² Balthasar, 'Eucharist: Gift of Love', 140–143

⁹³ See Masvie, 'The Emergence of I', 94.