

The Principle of the World and the Call to Faith
Philosophical Commentary on
1 *Corinthians* 7 and *Matthew* 27

Jeffrey Bloechl

...ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ. (Eph 1:4)

...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (Eph 1:4)

1.

When Husserl defines phenomenological method by a commitment to the principle that every originary intuition is to be taken as a legitimate source of knowledge (*Ideas I*, § 24), there inevitably arises the question of knowledge of the divine. Would the primal presencing that occurs in originary intuition pertain even of the absolute God? From a certain distance, this cannot be wrong, since as Husserl makes plain, the notions of originary intuition and primal presence are meant finally to affirm the centrality of the living present, in which what we find to be meaningful has already entered consciousness as given. If God is God and we exist *coram Deo*, then God will have been in some form present in human experience already before reflection brings this to light. These proposals are enriched greatly by the so-called ‘genetic’ turn in Husserl’s phenomenology beginning in the 1920s. The various features of perception, we learn, are themselves a part of an anterior system of disposition and association in which the material of originary intuition has always already begun even before coalescing in meaning. Phenomenological inquiry foregrounds the living present against the schema of these dispositions and associations which, moreover, are discovered in the active unity of a process that is spontaneous and dynamic (what Heidegger later calls “movement,” and Husserl describes in terms of potentiality and actuality). The horizon for this unity—for the very coherence of meaning through time, as distinct from a free play of subjective acts—is what phenomenology calls “world.” And since meaning is not only coherent but also at the same time mutable, it

is necessary to understand that the world itself, in the phenomenological sense, is constantly subject to revision no less than affirmation. Indeed, this feature of the world would seem to be a necessary correlate of the objectivity of objects. Without denying the remarkable sophistication of Husserl's position, let us take from it a single point of considerable importance: it is ingredient to the very possibility of meaning and thus also to the knowledge that consciousness apperceives a world together with the things themselves.

Heidegger remains substantially in this same line, even after proposing to affiliate phenomenology with fundamental ontology. *Being and Time* finds Dasein to be as always already in one or another mood, and thus always already attuned at the heart of its mood. Most famously, anxious Dasein is Dasein attuned to the inescapable possibility of its own death, as the concrete form of not-being. And moreover, it is with a view to not-being that anxious Dasein, in its underlying care for itself, simultaneously comprehends (Husserl would say "apperceives") things as tools and world as environment. Since, however, for Heidegger Dasein's relation with its own not-being constitutes the truth of its being in the world, he necessarily considers inauthentic any inclination to suppose that this or that being grounds our existence and therefore serves as the proper criterion for what things and the world can mean. In some of the most well known passages of his later works, Heidegger associates this inclination to project a single being as the criterion for what counts as real and as true with a commitment to what he calls "onto-theology." The term is notoriously, if not unambiguously, critical with respect to theological conceptions of being and meaning.¹ If faith in the one God entails an understanding of oneself as being toward a first or greatest being, then for Heidegger faith has deployed a thinking that fails to achieve proper metaphysical probity, and indeed has almost constantly turned us away from any sense of the abyss that that probity would otherwise require us to face. The existence of God, in short, would be part and parcel with the mistaken belief—projected by a will to believe that there is an ultimate ground for the meaning of the world and everything in it. A somewhat less strident formulation of essentially the same point appears in Heidegger's essay "On the Essence of Truth," where Dasein's world, whatever its particular configuration, is interpreted as a set or area of relations (*Bezugsbereich*) organized around a basic affirmation of some first or ultimate being.² Especially in this latter text, we recognize an important clarification of what Husserl had already proposed when grasping the unity of meaning within the horizon of a world apperceived with each thing. After all, the world, precisely as world, can serve as horizon only if the world itself entails some inner defining principle.

¹ As will become clear, it is uncertain to me whether the fact that onto-theology is *existential* before it is *conceptual* is more useful as a reminder that fundamental ontology leaves little room for philosophical justification of faith in God, or instead as an approach to Dasein that actually supports genuine respect for such ineluctable elements of faith as worship of God as a being or even as an idol. The same question hovers over theological responses to Derrida, who also understands onto-theology to be existential before it is conceptual. See Derrida's response to Merold Westphal in J. Caputo and M. Scanlon (eds.), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 164.

² Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 141-142.

2.

We find an account of the Christian relation to things and to the world in which they appear in Paul's letters to the faithful in Corinth and Rome. 1 *Corinthians* 7 is perhaps most familiar to readers for its suggestion of a puzzling sexual and conjugal morality. If the text is to be taken at face value, those who are unmarried might do well to remain unmarried, yet if they are not capable of "self-control" it is best for them in that case to enter into marriage. And as for those who are already bound to another in marriage, there is no compelling reason to seek a way out of it (7:8-9, 27). Of course, as many biblical scholars have reminded us, the very fact that this comes up at all is due in some great degree to the fact that Paul had heard that the licentiousness for which Roman Corinth was infamous had already begun to contaminate the Christian community he had just founded. But this account of the situation itself says little about the specifically Christian morality that Paul invokes in response to it. And there one encounters what certainly appears to be a tendency to elevate the unmarried state over the married state, as when for instance he writes that "in my opinion she [a widow] is happier if she remains as she is [i.e., does not marry again]" (7:40). Yet the matter cannot be settled even here, since one must still contend with passages in this same chapter that indicate a powerful eschatological concern: "the time is short" (7:29); "the form of this world is passing away" (7:31); and if this is so one almost reaches the conclusion with Paul himself "I think that on account of the present distress [*ἀνάγκη*], it is well for a person to continue as he is" (7:26).

We might do well to pause over this word "distress." The Greek word itself refers only to a sense of constraint over free decision, and in that general sense may signal the influence of Stoicism on Paul's thinking. For Christians, however, the only distress that impedes true freedom, and indeed the only constraint that truly matters would arise from within our relation to the world itself insofar as that relation may not know God and therefore threatens to restrict the life of spirit that seeks God. The manner and extent to which Paul defines this life in *Romans* 8 is so well known that it will suffice here only to invoke that chapter. Before that, already in 1 *Corinthians*, he approaches the matter as a question of how to resist temptations and distractions that are, after all, both real and constant. For even as the promise voiced at the Last Supper opens a horizon beyond this world and its concerns (a horizon that is no longer a horizon at all, if by definition a horizon coincides with the farthest reach of our power to see), the believer remains susceptible to grasping the world as first and final word on our condition. This, then, would be our distress: one must eat, and the community requires bonds of marriage and commerce, and yet whatever attention we give to these concerns at the very least flirts with rooting us that much more deeply in the world in which we meet them. Such a conclusion leads easily toward the notion—and in truth it is not entirely absent from all of Paul's thinking—that the believing Christian must reject out of hand every concern arising from the world, in favor of an unreserved readiness for divine salvation. Anything less, it would seem, abandons one to the sort of restlessness (*inquietudo*) that Augustine would depict three centuries later, in his *Confessions*.

Perhaps these conceptions received their proper meaning from the simple fact that Jesus did not soon return in historical form. What simple theology defines for us as a tension between the “already” of a promise accepted in faith and the “not yet” of the fulfillment always still to come, early Christians had to gradually learn as a defining feature of their being in the world. And this in turn has significant implications for how they relate to the world and everything in it. We are led back to the startling proposals found in Paul’s preaching: “Let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world [live] as though they had no dealings with it” (7:29-31). Evidently, the crucial words in this passage are “as though not” [ὡς μὴ]. And there can be little doubt that they are to be understood from a perspective that is robustly eschatological, but in the distinct form of looking to the future according to a commitment (i.e., to a promise) rooted irrevocably in the past. Bearing this in mind, Paul’s “as if not” indicates a practical attitude, if not indeed a practical exhortation: the believing Christian is to know that this world is not yet and never could be the world which only the second coming will make possible. She cannot but live in a world and among things that will appear considerably less important than the preeminent relation with a Christ from whom every fulfillment is to come. Hence does Heidegger write of Paul’s distress that “[i]t determines each moment of his life” until the second coming that is, as Paul well knows, without the worldly “when” that would enable us to grasp it in simple expectation.³

3.

Do these determinations about Christianity stand up to the particular scrutiny developed by the phenomenologists? With a view to understanding Christian experience, we have until now restricted ourselves to some features of Paul’s understanding. At the same time, and out of deference to phenomenological method we have accepted the conception of “world” proposed to us by Husserl and Heidegger. In Paul’s letters to fledgling Christians, we find a formative account of the region within which all possible things have their meaning for believers. Paul’s account can be found at the antipode of Heidegger’s position in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. It is well known that the latter work argued that each of us projects a relation to the world and everything in it with a view to his or her own death. This claim needs no ulterior reference to the fundamental ontology that leads Heidegger into the analytic of Dasein, where a reflection on death is of capital importance. According to Heidegger, as beings in the world we sense our own mortality, care for our own existence and thus engage the world with a concern that serves that care: we grasp things first as *tools* and it is our spontaneous, irresistible tendency to make of the world a home. For Paul, for whom we are driven by a desire for salvation,

³ Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. M. Fritsch and J. Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 67-68, 74.

things are to be grasped instead as what might better be understood as *provisions*, understood in two senses:

1. They are encountered in the mode of the provisional grasped by Bonhoeffer when he refers to the world as the “penultimate.” Inhabited with a view to final salvation, the world itself is precisely the second-to-last. So, likewise, do the things of the world have a value only along the way toward a moment when they are no longer necessary.
2. Things are available according to a materiality that sustains the subject in the corporeality that is its primal contact with them. One lives from the things of the world in a movement within it that proposes to go beyond it. If being in the world takes the form of pilgrimage, then the world and everything in it are enjoyed while restlessly afoot.

Perhaps it is useful to contemplate an especially vivid expression of the way of life that this entails. The Orthodox tradition preserves the vision of certain ascetic hermits whose commitment to the Pauline call to pilgrimage goes so far as to prohibit settling in any single place for more than a night or two. Refusing any form of lasting domicile or possession, the so-called “Invisibles” embody a near-perfect relation to the world as penultimate and to the things of the world as mere sustenance.⁴ Whether or not they have ever truly existed, their image makes vivid the difference between being in the world with a view to one’s own end and being in the world with a view to an overcoming of that end and its power over us. It is true, of course, that the believing Christian must make spontaneous use of things that are found ready to hand, but to the extent that that readiness to hand fits with the use that is served (*Being and Time* § 15: the hammer agrees with the hammering) it may well tempt her to address things and the world as if sufficient comfort for her inchoate spiritual longing. Of course, for Heidegger no less than for Paul this would be a mistake, but whereas the one would remind us that at the end of our striving for satisfaction there awaits a necessary reckoning with death, the other insists that not even mortality is the first or final word on our condition as beings in the world.

All of that said, there can be no doubt that Paul recognizes the possibility for the world to appear godless for any length of time even within the life of Christian faith. The very notion of a struggle between flesh and spirit necessarily implies that the world can feel godforsaken at any moment. To commit oneself to Jesus Christ is not simply to leave such a possibility behind once and for all, but also to embark on a struggle to fully realize what it may mean that the world is in fact seeded with the divine will. For Paul, the whole of creation “waits with eager longing . . . [and] has been groaning in travail together” (Rom 8:18, 20) until the coming of the Son makes possible an awakening to the truth. And so the realization of this truth does not strike

⁴ The tradition is mainly oral, and holds that a lineage of seven (some say twelve) such Invisibles has remained intact for several centuries. Anecdotes appear in the *Athonite Gerontikon* compiled by Archimandrite Ioannikios and published in English by the Holy Monastery of Gregory Palamas (Koufalia, Greece: 1997).

out or reverse our prior condition so much as clarify and complete it.⁵ But again, for the believer this defines a task or an outlook much more than an accomplishment. One is to struggle against a fleshly tendency to immerse oneself in the things of the world or to take the concerns of being in the world as the necessary criterion for value. This of course requires vigilance, since as we have noted the world often does seem fit to the flesh that takes hold of it, and it requires discipline since it is likely that often enough one will have to set oneself against what might appear easiest or most evident. One must refuse the biases of what no one will contest is our more natural attitude, in order to see it and engage it in accordance with God's will— which is to say, for the Christian, to see it and engage it in its proper meaning.

Now it is the signature achievement of phenomenology to have developed a method for precisely this sort of suspension of natural bias in order to lay bare underlying conditions that too often go unrecognized. At most, Paul's notion is only an analogue to what the phenomenologists practice. Yet it is considerably more than incidental to his vision. Attentive readers especially of *Romans* come inevitably to Paul's difficulty articulating the relationship of faith in Jesus Christ to the obedience to Mosaic law that distinguished the community and the tradition in which Jesus himself was raised. Paul speaks of a faith able to "render inoperative" the law (the Greek is *καταργεῖν*; see also, e.g., Rom 3:31, 7:6). Careful study suggests that this means neither annulation nor destruction but something closer to fulfillment, so that the law would no longer be binding specifically because at heart one has already satisfied its essential demand. For present purposes, what is interesting about this is the manner in which it introduces a distinction between two ways of being in the world. Whereas previously, under Mosaic law, the people of God lived by a code which gave them reason to expect that justification before God was a matter of their own effort to obey, henceforth, with the proclamation of Jesus, justification was known to be given from beyond any question of effort and desert. To be justified by the law was to be justified according to an effort in this world to accede to a code that anticipates and stands over every exercise of one's freedom in this world. To believe in Jesus is to abandon oneself to the very principle of life itself, a principle by which justification is offered already from before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

⁵ This is missed or else underplayed in the recent interpretation proposed by Giorgio Agamben, inspired chiefly by Walter Benjamin and Jacob Taubes. For Agamben, when Paul urges on us a messianic vision of coming fulfillment, he implicitly commits us to an understanding of the world, viewed now in light of the parousia, as decayed. This would indeed suggest the translation of Paul's *δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς* (Rom 8:21) as "bondage to decay," which Agamben's English translator has adopted. But other translations propose "bondage to corruption," and the difference is entirely to my point. For Paul there is danger not in the world itself, but in the flesh [*σάρξ*] by which our desire may be corrupted into an undue attachment. When he exhorts believers to "deal with [the world] as if we have no dealings with it," he has in mind a prudent use of what seems good and necessary *for the time being*. To be sure, the world is not everything but it is also not nothing. Seen in the light of the parousia, it appears not as something irretrievably lost (Agamben), but instead as something whose proper limits only now become clear. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains. A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005).

Between these two ways of life, there is evidently also a difference in the manner in which the world itself appears to us. For Paul, faith in Jesus renders inoperative an entire way of life that would defeat the flesh without ever truly opening itself to a source of salvation that reaches us from beyond the world in which the flesh retains its power over us. Insofar as a life of justification by the law depends necessarily on our own capacity to conquer the flesh, it defines an approach to God that has not yet seen the glory by which alone the world can appear as provision and human existence as pilgrimage. In and by Jesus Christ, the flesh has already been defeated, and that defeat is extended as a possibility, which is to say offered as a proposal awaiting the free adherence of faith. As expression of a truth antecedent to human history, Jesus Christ is principle of the world. As the word by which that truth is proposed to us, he is also the call to the faith by which it is realized in human lives.⁶

4.

It is a commonplace of Christian teaching to center the life of faith on identification with Jesus Christ, and a commonplace of its spiritual tradition to concentrate on imitation of his humility as the way to overcome the power of the flesh. How better to oppose oneself to every bias rooted in the flesh than by the faithful practice of humility, in which one brings to stillness every impulse and every desire attuned to the world in favor of a radical openness to the higher grace of God? Paul has said it plainly enough: this defines the way of constant labor against temptation. Phenomenology provides us with a rigorous approach to the evident question: *by what conscious act (noesis) and in relation to what ideal content (noema) does the Christian believer experience Jesus Christ, victor over all temptation?*

At this juncture, it is not without some use to observe, first, that Jesus is available to us initially in scripture, and then second that he is found confronting temptation on at least two important occasions. In the gospel of *Matthew*, these are found in chapters 4 and 27. Chapter 4 depicts Jesus' encounter with Satan in the desert. Chapter 27 contains an account of Jesus' final hours, after having submitted his will to that of the Father (Mt 26:39-44).

The episode in the desert can be puzzling. In succession, Satan suggests that Jesus put his supernatural powers to the use of feeding himself after many days of fasting, proposes that he demonstrate his superiority even to the angels by casting himself from a great height in the certainty that they will save him, and finally offers

⁶ None of this is to deny the appearance of a historical shift between what the tradition calls the "old covenant" and the "new covenant." Indeed, nothing prevents us from accepting the interpretation of, for example, Ernst Kasemann, who considers Paul to oppose an old and a new *time*. See E. Kasemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). Yet strictly speaking, when Paul himself opposes the new and the old at *Romans* 7:6, he appears to be concerned essentially with a legal code and the possibility of freedom from it. Such a distinction is ultimately a matter of the disposition of every human soul whether or not the distinction itself also signifies a watershed in culture or society. This, I think, says something about the most profound meaning of our secularity: it is a dimension and a condition of our being before there can be any question of a historical period and orientation in which the forms of its expression have become prominent.

him dominion over every worldly kingdom should Jesus but bow in worship to him. We have little difficulty reducing these three temptations to a single challenge to side with the concerns of this world against fidelity to the God who transcends it. But just what will have been the nature of Jesus' refusal? The problem is unmistakable: if Jesus is truly divine he cannot have been tempted in any manner or degree commensurate with the temptation afflicting us, but if he is truly subject to temptation then it is difficult to suppose that he is truly divine. Arriving at precisely this point, Schleiermacher argues that the most satisfactory reading of the text requires us to receive it only as a parable. In effect, Jesus is presented to his followers at a level closer to their own. As attractive as this interpretation may be, it cannot prevent us from asking further about the meaning of the text. At its heart, evidently enough, is an encounter between a finite, albeit insatiable desire and the principle to which that desire must submit. What, after all, does Satan want if not purely and simply accession to a grandeur essentially denied to finite being? And where must that desire circulate so long as it insists on its powers, if not ceaselessly in the world of tangible, measurable satisfactions? Viewed in this light, the parable presents us with a Satan who is the pure form of what Paul calls "flesh," whereas Jesus appears as the living embodiment of spirit in its power over flesh. And in a manner that will be repeated in the Crucifixion narrative, Jesus exercises that power precisely by refusing the very logic in which his opponent would like to entangle him. Rather than directly engaging the argument of the opponent, he calls into question the entire vision from which it is delivered. In so doing, he exhibits the transcendent freedom that is the real theme of this passage.

Much of this returns in *Matthew 27*, where Jesus is once again threatened by the powers of this world. Just as in the desert he had answered Satan with the authority of one who possesses another, higher vision, so now in response to Pontius Pilate his indifference illumines the limited range of a power that is only terrestrial. Asked if he is King of the Jews, he only observes that it is his interrogator who has said so (Mt 27:11), and asked whether he has even heard or understood the many charges brought against him, he does not answer at all (27:13-14). Whether it is figurative or literal, Jesus' silence amounts in this case to a positive withdrawal from the most forceful grip of the world itself. One thus meets in these events a Christ whose sovereignty contrasts with the many other events in which he has been active in moral teaching, cultic practice and the politics of the region. Commenting on Dostoyevski's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," itself a penetrating reflection on these very matters, Rowan Williams has thus referred to Christ as "iconic in the sense that [he] plays no decisive public role, but is not passive or ineffective."⁷ The difference made by this attitude of sovereign freedom is of course eschatological, for it is the very presence by which the world and, more to the point, consciences in the world are opened to a possibility that surpasses every possibility contained within the world itself.

⁷R. Williams, *Dostoyevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008),

Needless to say, this will have been confirmed without ambiguity in the victory over suffering achieved on the Cross. The forsakenness that Jesus undergoes immediately before his death (27:46) defines the penultimate moments of an approach to perfect freedom and perfect sovereignty, in which there is still the anguish of isolation but not yet the joy that ensues when that isolation no longer seeks dependence on anything else. Above and beyond the vulgar depictions of Kazantsakis, there is nonetheless a last temptation in which, through a paroxysm of the flesh, the supreme victory of spirit is accomplished. In his dying, Jesus the God-Man reveals once and for all the profound meaning of his oneness with the Father, the sovereign God of all creation.

5.

It is one thing to affirm that Christian teaching presents this image of Jesus to each believer as the paradigm for her own efforts and development, but quite another to pretend that under ordinary circumstances a believer could fully understand it. The believer does not experience Jesus Christ in his fullness, but only Jesus in an inevitably limited form which, however, she is always ready to deepen and enrich. The spiritual ideal of perfect imitation thus does not reduce to the phenomenological ideal of perfect agreement between the believer's intention and the fullness of the object that presents itself to her. When phenomenology attends to experiences of Jesus Christ, it must ask whether or to what degree the intended object approaches the object as it gives itself to be seen. But in this case (there are surely others), there can be no question of intending the "object" fully as it gives itself to be seen since the meaning of Jesus exceeds the range of human consciousness. Moreover, this is the case necessarily, by definition, *and* because of a particular situation or circumstances. And the reflective believer certainly knows this. Christian experience thus presents itself as *a way*, and not merely in the form of discrete perceptions. It is a matter of striving, of measuring oneself by a transcendent principle that will very likely remain beyond one's reach but therefore also as a constant call to reach further.

We already know the aim of this striving, and some of the context that it would overcome. We may even propose with some confidence that in the life of faith the desire for salvation takes the form of seeking a positive freedom that Jesus has revealed to be invested in spirit. If there is any simple meaning in the notion that Jesus is God incarnate, it must be to make plain that we for our part, in faith, are to be "conformed to the image of the Son" (Rom 8:29) in whom the Father himself is well pleased (Mt 3:17). If it is in the practice of humility that the faithful conform themselves to the Son, and thus also to the will of the Father, then this conformity begins in a choice for the profound freedom that emerges only as spirit is loosened from the grips of the flesh.

We have already taken note of the fact that this freedom would be positive insofar as it chooses actively for a principle higher than any that is rooted originally in the world. We have also understood that in its perfect form it coincides with sovereignty over all desire and attachment. Let this then be the occasion to recognize

in it the possibility of loving the world without needing or expecting anything from it. This love, furthermore, would be formative of a distinctly Christian attitude. In an important sense, identification with Jesus Christ conducts the believer, in her freedom, to the margin of the world from which being in the world exhibits the capacity to address the entire world in a love that offers no pretense to have grasped it as system or a sum. One glimpses at least an approach to this attitude in the extraordinary prayers of those who are moved to intercede for each and all of God's creatures.

This is evidently a matter of an awakening to God that phenomenology, if it is to remain true to its own rigor, must endeavor to describe or interpret without submitting it to what it is not. As for the proper focus of such an exercise, one knows that it will be necessary to avoid starting exclusively from either the movement of our being in the world or the initiative of the God who transcends it. Christian life discloses itself in an ascent that is always and already underway in response to an anterior call whose proper meaning we cannot fully understand. If the language of ascent, of call and thus finally inspiration bring to mind the works of John of the Cross, then perhaps we will do well to reflect on a remarkable expression that appears in his poetry, as he attends to recognizably similar concerns. Daring to go beyond Paul's vision of a certain "conformity" of wills, the Mystical Doctor speaks of a transformation by which the soul is virtually assimilated to the Son. Unable to think either that the believer simply conducts herself to the Son solely by her own efforts or that she is brought to the Son exclusively by some other agency, he invokes a "spiration of the Breath"⁸ in which the two forces are unified. If, taken literally, this image collapses the distinction between our act or process of breathing and the air that is ready to be breathed, then it suggests an experience in which breathing is not only the work of a mortal heart, lungs and diaphragm, but also and at the same time finds itself necessarily immersed in the very principle of living: there is no act of breathing without air, and air is concretized, becomes tangible, precisely in the breathing. So likewise is there no act of faith without the available goodness of God, and the goodness of God is concretized, enters human lives and human history precisely in believing. Proposed at the pinnacle of mystical theology, these are plainly evocations of the Holy Spirit, who is to be recognized precisely in the passage between God and God that occurs in a striving that is at once human and yet more than our humanity could ever contain. This vision is hardly new to theological reflection, but it does underline the persistent difficulty that the phenomenology of religious life has had with the special category of *grace*. Yet at the same time, it also provides us with a name for the horizon within which we may expect a solution to appear: perhaps the phenomenology of being graced receives its proper definition as part of a more extensive hermeneutics of the Spirit.

⁸ John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, strophe 38, line 1. My free translation of "el aspirar del aire" contrasts with Kavanaugh's much more fluent "the breathing of the air" (*The Collected Works of John of the Cross* [Washington, DC: ICS Publishing, 1979], 717).