

# The Intentionality of Logos, the True Transcendence of Dasein: A Dialogue on Heidegger's Ontology in Father D. Stăniloae and J.-L. Marion

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## Abstract

This approach focuses on a convergence point between father Stăniloae's theology and Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology, as concerns Heidegger's ontology. The German philosopher launches a challenge as to the role that the Embodiment of Logos actually plays in human existence. According to him, the Incarnation event is for man only a corrective to the ontic, while father Stăniloae and the French philosopher consider that we are facing a true ontological reconfiguration of human existence. This is because the One who has stepped into the ontological field of the human being has the power to take man out of the *being-toward-death* paradigm and give him the opportunity to become *being-toward-resurrection*. Both father Stăniloae and Marion resort to Areopagitic thinking, in which God is above the being, i.e. supra being, so He cannot be considered a being among others, even if He were considered a supreme being. At the same time, God is love because He is the Trinity of People and it is only through this reality that the human being gains more in terms of existence.

**Keywords:** ontology, being, supra being, *being-toward-death*, Logos, love

OUR PAPER WILL FOCUS ON a convergence point between father Stăniloae's theology and Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology. Their comparison was pursued within the context of Heidegger's philosophy. The two thinkers attempt, each with his own tools, to elucidate what role the Embodiment of Logos actually plays in the world. Is it only as a corrective to the ontic, as the German philosopher claims, or are we, in fact, in the presence of an ontological reconfiguration of human existence?

According to the Christian Revelation, God has created the world *ex nihilo*, so that the being of the world, in which we can include the human being, or the being of the act of being, as Heidegger would call it, cannot be confused with the being of God that precedes and founds it. In his book *The Idol and Distance*, Marion asks an open question, to which however he suggests an answer: "Do the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ affect the ontological destiny or do they remain only an ontic event?"<sup>1</sup> The question is in line with how Heidegger sees "Christianity" by merely bringing an ontic correction to philosophical ontology. This question opened towards Christian Revelation is answered by father Stăniloae, according to whom man is on the "verge of non-being" and, in order to avert this threat,

it is not in the world where we are that we keep our life, as we seem to think, but by leaving it, by losing what we think is life. Life in the present form of creation is a disfigurement of life, it is a life that implacably progresses to death. Only by coming out of this state of illness, by placing ourselves on the edge of being, in front of God, do we regain our life.<sup>2</sup>

Here the Romanian theologian partially supports Heidegger's idea of *being-toward-death* in the sense of the limit of existence, but he also definitely contradicts him on the way in which the human being, the *Dasein*, can transcend itself, not only in temporal epectasies, on the horizontal, but it can even transcend the very horizon of the being. Not only can it transcend it, but it needs it urgently, in order to save itself from the "verge of non-being." Through his Incarnation, the Christ

placed himself between humanity and death, or between the core of all human beings and the death that surrounds them and penetrates them as a darkness of non-being. Through sin [...] the world has leapt again into nothingness<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, Jesus placed Himself between the being of the act of being and nothingness. God created the world out of nothing, but not to plunge back into nothing or nothingness, but to make it part of divinity, through man. Consequently, the Incarnation event brings about the change and renewal of the ontological destiny<sup>4</sup> of human being. According to a Greek theolo-

<sup>1</sup> Marion, Jean-Luc, *The Idol and Distance*, trans. Tinca Prunea Bretonnet and Daniela Pălășan (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 296 [In Romanian].

<sup>2</sup> Stăniloae, Dumitru, *Christian Love*, postface by Sandu Frunză (Galați: Porto-Franco, 1993), 32 [In Romanian].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> As father Schmemmann puts it, the renewal of man's ontological destiny is seen in the acceptance by the world of his own self, since, according to his words, "The world con-

gian, "the Incarnation of God the Word laid the foundation of the freeing of the human being from the hold of the devil, of sin, of degradation and of death, while through the Resurrection of Christ the ontological liberation of man was sealed."<sup>5</sup>

Hypostatic union has precisely the role of bringing man out onto the edge of his finite being, so that from here he can begin to abolish the limits of his existence, by participating in divinity. In opposition to Heidegger's concepts on the void, "boredom, anxiety and acedia," Marion suggests three other concepts that abolish it: "the call, the gift and existence."<sup>6</sup> *The being of the act of being* abolishes its limits because the One who is above the being and existing before it becomes the true Shepherd of the being, by turning it from *being-toward-death* into being-toward-resurrection. This view is also shared by father John Behr:

the whole divine oikonomia was aimed at extending the inter-trinitarian life of glory to the disciples, by their contemplating the Son of God in His body, glorified with the glory that He had with the Father before all eternity, and through this contemplation, by participating in His glory.<sup>7</sup>

Heidegger's idea about *the only corrective to the ontic* when referring to Incarnation is very much in line with Saint Iustin Popovici's criticism of the Arianism of western culture of protestant origin. According to him,

Christ is descended to the status of a simple man. God-the man is continually stripped of what He really is; Arius' work is continuously accomplished. Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* is nothing but the new edition of Arianism<sup>8</sup>.

To Heidegger, the distinction between theology and philosophy meant placing himself in the wake of ancient ontology and embracing a form of methodological atheism, since, from an ontological point of view, the "analytics of Dasein has a pre-Christian content and datum, to which

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demned itself when on Golgotha it condemned the One who was its true self," in Pr. Prof. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, trans. Pr. Prof. Ph.D. Aurel Jivi (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2001),. 24 [In Romanian].

<sup>5</sup> Dimitrios Tselenghidis, *Grace and Freedom in The Patristic Tradition of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century*, trans. Pr. Ph.D. Daniel Pupăză (Iași: Doxologia, 2015), 55 [In Romanian].

<sup>6</sup> Xavier Tilliette, "Phénoménologies autonomes: Michel Henry & Jean-Luc Marion," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, T.60, Fasc.2, Filosofia & Cristianismo: I – Aspectos da Questão no Século XX (Apr. – Jun. 2004): 480.

<sup>7</sup> Pr. John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, trans. Adela (Iași: Doxologia, 2016), 79-80 [In Romanian].

<sup>8</sup> Archimandrite Iustin Popovici, *The Man and the God-Man*, trans. Pr. Prof. Ioan Ică and deacon Ioan Ică jr., (Sibiu: Deisis, 1997), 153 [In Romanian].

'Christianity' only confers an ontic corrective."<sup>9</sup> In Heidegger's opinion, this ontic corrective does not affect in any way the primacy of *Dasein* and its situation in temporal finitude. *Temporal epectasies* are its only transcendence. According to Marion, by narrowing theology down to a mere ontic variable, Heidegger achieves "God's first submission to the being. Secondly, this means that God only intervenes as a being among the others that the being of the act of being reconciles according to the ontological difference." In this sense, God "only intervenes as a supreme being, and this makes Him appear even more clearly as an insignificant being. Under this second condition, 'God' submits entirely to an idolatrous prerequisite."<sup>10</sup>

Marion will react to Heidegger's identification of God with the idea of supreme act of being, by strongly claiming that "God is not an act of being preceded, governed and distributed by the being."<sup>11</sup> He will pursue his demonstration by showing that the event of the Incarnation was so much more than acquiring a human nature, as it is not only the ontic aspect "of a particular being, but the fundamental constitution of *Dasein* that God takes on and renews." Therefore, the French phenomenologist wonders whether

*kenosis* may [...] be summed up as an ontic event [...], an event which subsequently modifies certain ontic determinations of *Dasein*, without affecting its entire inner structure. Or whether Christ invests with a new dimension [...] not only a particular being (His own humanity), but the very being of the act of being.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, the Incarnation of Christ implies God's entering the ontological field of the human being. The One who is, according to Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, above the being, i.e. *supra* being, enters the ontological field of the human being. Therefore, according to Dionysian theology, God cannot be identified either with the one, or with the being, or with goodness, or with existence because:

existence itself originates in the pre-existing One. And existence is His and He does not belong to existence. And existence is in Him and He is not in existence. And existence has Him and He has not existence. And He is eternal and He is the beginning and He is the measure of existence, existing before the being and before existence and beginning of being a doer and means and end of it all.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 289.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>13</sup> St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Complete Works*, trans. Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae (Bucharest: Paideia, 1996), 160 [In Romanian].

Therefore, in theological terms, God is above the being. What Heidegger does in his philosophy is to define the conditions of human possibility for divinity. But the conditions of possibility of the *Dasein* are limited to its strict temporality and worldly horizon, so that, in its turn, this heideggerian prerequisite shapes conceptual idols.

The conditions of possibility, the prerequisite of Heidegger's *Dasein*, are abandoned by the Incarnation of Christ. He does not expect man to prepare Him "abode," to allow Him to manifest Himself according to human rules, but He comes to this world announced by old prophecies, in *the fullness of time*, yet – as Marion puts it in biblical terms – "His own did not receive Him" (John 1,11). The manifestation of God in history is paradoxical, because one would expect that this incarnation of Christ would be well received, prepared, cherished. The love of God is manifested irrespective of this prerequisite of man. Let us remember that the prophecies placed the birth of the Messiah in the Bethlehem of Judea, while Jesus is known as the Nazarene, and that He will later be crucified. He is asked to leave the country of the Gergesenes after He restores a demon-possessed man. So, "His own did not receive Him," they did not prepare Him "abode." He came into this world in a manger, which

not only does not limit and prohibit manifestation, but becomes its prerequisite (as the destruction of any idol prior to the unthinkable), its characteristic feature (God alone can reveal Himself, when and where no other divine being can wait) and even its highest stake (God reveals Himself by outpouring His divine glory).<sup>14</sup>

Kenosis reveals Christ's unconditional love. There is a clear suspension of reciprocity. God does not condition His gift of man's receiving Him, of his respect or of his love, but He gives without withdrawing, even embracing death on the cross. For Marion, love goes before the idea of being in philosophy, because:

God is not because He must not be, but He loves, therefore, by definition, no condition can continue to restrict His initiative, amplitude and ecstasy. Love loves unconditionally, simply because it loves; He loves without limit or restriction.<sup>15</sup>

In phenomenological terms, love takes precedence over the concept of being, because love is the giver. To be love, love involves experiencing a direct relationship. Trinity love fulfills all the conditions of phenomenology to constitute the donation, because the love of the Father is given in with-

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<sup>14</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 297.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God without being*, trans. Thomas Carlson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 47.

drawal, the love of the Son phenomenalizes the love of the Father, and it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us the way to the Father because He teaches us to pray with “groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8, 26).

The French phenomenologist titled one of his books *Dieu sans l'être* (*God without being*) and by this title, confusing at first sight, he is in fact seeking to go beyond ontology, as a confinement of man in his strict temporality, stating at the same time the theological difference between created and uncreated. *God without being* means that “He cannot be measured by any *a priori*.”<sup>16</sup> In philosophy, the being remains an abstract general and purely operative concept, which cannot be imposed as a sufficient horizon of appearance for God. The Son of God, through His Incarnation, enters the ontological field of the human being, which He saturates, exceeds and opens to eternity. Incarnation offered man the possibility of deification, which is why Father Stăniloae claims that through our contact with a saint we share into “a transcendence far superior to all other objects and principles.”<sup>17</sup>

According to the French thinker,

God moves away from the idol offered by the ontological difference, but also simply from the being. God withdraws in the distance – unthinkable, unconditional, yet infinitely closer. The distance is distanced from the ontological difference and from the being that it manages among others.<sup>18</sup>

Classical ontology was concerned to overcome the eternal flow, through the general concept of being. The whole becoming seemed a flow in which everything passes and fades away, and this general concept of being could not be exhausted, as matter was eternal. The closeness in which Christ comes through His Incarnation deprives the philosophical concept of being of its “eternal sovereignty” and confers divine Hypostasis to the human being in the hypostatic union and through this the human specificity, i.e. the human face, the person becomes eternal, is removed from the *being-toward-death* paradigm. Now the general and the particular coexist in eternity, the human nature and the hypostasis or the person are eternal, participate in the imperishable One and through man the whole creation receives the power of transfiguration, that is of an imperishable life. Christ operates in the ontic dimension of the world a modification on the human existence, so that the ontological effect spreads not only on the human nature, but also on the hypostasis, on the particular, on man as a hypostatic nature as a companion and friend of God.

Classical ontology is deconstructed by the French phenomenologist on the basis of theological arguments that result from the hypostatic union

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<sup>16</sup> Turcan, Nicolae, *Apologia after the End of Metaphysics. Jean-Luc Marion's Theology and Phenomenology*, (Bucharest: Eikon, 2016), 166 [In Romanian].

<sup>17</sup> Stăniloae, *Christian Love*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 298.

and then reconfigured in accordance with the Christian Revelation. In an interview with Richard Kearney, Marion states that

many theologians, if I may say so, have not taken the end of metaphysics and deconstruction very seriously, which is why they miss these opportunities. It is surprising that philosophers are much more aware of new possibilities for theology than theologians (or at least some of them).<sup>19</sup>

When commenting on Kant's approach to overcoming metaphysics, Merold Westphal claims that:

what needs to be overcome is *a priori* knowledge, knowledge through concepts alone without intuitive content or confirmation of the supersensible world, or, concretely speaking, what we call God, freedom and immortality.<sup>20</sup>

Marion tries to "turn the idol into an icon," i.e. to transform the philosophical concept of being into an

icon of distance as an Easter distance (kenosis, death, resurrection). From the point of view of love, everything appears in a different light: the acts of being, the being itself appear, of course, not annihilated, nor deprived of value (for *nihil* and value come from metaphysics), but empty of love and inept because they are distance inadequate, in short, vain. Vain in the sense of *vanity of vanities, all is vanity*.<sup>21</sup>

The erotic reduction applied to the ontological discourse gives priority to love, (*ἀγάπη*), so that Heidegger's *Dasein* is urged to leave the *vanity of all vanities*, i.e. the *being-toward-death* paradigm. Marion's effort is "an attempt to go beyond ontology, to talk about God, himself, and the other after and against Heidegger while remaining deeply indebted to the latter."<sup>22</sup>

The French phenomenologist does not reject, nor does he overcome Heidegger's ontology by abandoning it, but seeks to integrate it into a horizon of love because: "The ontico-ontological vanity reveals such poverty compared to love (distance), that love can only spare it: to spare this futility, that is to forgive it, by supra-determining it."<sup>23</sup> For a Christian, the whole being remains indifferent because he cannot have an existential relationship

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<sup>19</sup>Richard Kearney, "A dialog with Jean-Luc Marion," *Philosophy Today*, Volume 48, Issue 1, (Spring 2004): 25.

<sup>20</sup>Merold Westphal, "The importance of overcoming metaphysics for the life of faith," *Modern Theology*, 23:2, (April, 2007), 254.

<sup>21</sup>Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 350.

<sup>22</sup>Cristina M. Gschwandtner, "The neighbor and the infinite: Marion and Levinas on the encounter between self, human other, and God," *Continental Philosophy Review*, 40, (2007): 232.

<sup>23</sup>Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 351.

with it. He seeks a relationship with the One who is at the origin of his existence. The Christian loves his otherness, his neighbor, but he needs absolute transcendence to remove him from the world of *being-toward-death* and of nothingness. This transcendence cannot be the totality of the being, because it is a mere abstraction of human reason. It requires absolute transcendence, an imperishable being, capable of giving man endurance before death and the nothingness of non-being. According to the French phenomenologist based on Christian Revelation, love is the most genuine form of dialogue with the Persons of the Trinity, but in order to manifest itself, love needs that the partners establish a dialogue. Father Stăniloae argues that, because we humans die, absolute transcendence that has entered history

must also show its absolute character by revealing itself to us as master even beyond death, by overcoming death [...]. In this case, death no longer appears as a natural end in nothingness, but as a gate through which we pass for an even more obvious encounter with Christ.<sup>24</sup>

In the face of death, man, as a being of love, feels that his spiritual depths cannot find a satisfactory answer in the nothingness beyond death, nor hiding in human solidarity, because death is an individual event; not even relying on the transcendence of his fellow men, because they too are stricken by death. His only option is the loving transcendence that has not remained indifferent to the destiny of man and has descended in history to grant him eternity, in other words, the everlasting love for his fellow men and for the Trinity-love.

The French phenomenologist's suggestion to open monist ontology to an ontology of love is confirmed by Father Stăniloae when he argues that:

another brings us some more being, love means placing us closer to the core of existence, to its center, while selfishness is our exile at the periphery of existence. This is why sacrifice is [...] experienced as a path to enrichment. [...] More being means more love, more good.<sup>25</sup>

Being cannot be made known without the openness of love. Love does not have sufficient power without the depths of being, so that an equidistant approach to the relationship between being and person avoids the polarization of essentialist and existentialist philosophy between essence and existence. The being and the hypostases coexist within the Trinity, whereas in the ontological plane of human existence, although these two coexist, the intensity of the hypostasis of the human being depends on the reality of love. Without the openness of love, the potentialities of the being

<sup>24</sup> Stăniloae, *Christian Love*, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or the Restoration of Man*, Second Edition (Craiova: Omniscop, 1993), 266 [In Romanian].



remain unknown. The Christian revelation, which has at its core the event of Christ's sacrifice and its Eucharistic re-enactment, shows us that it is only the path of the cross that opens the depths of existence. Only in this openness does the human being discover the abysses of the Trinitarian love.

In the eyes of Marion, the being of the act of being as an icon of distance acquires an acceptable appearance only in the light of the Christian Revelation, i.e. in the image of the humble and unthinkable authority of the Father<sup>26</sup>. A similar idea is supported by the Greek thinker Yannaras according to whom

the Orthodox churches should assert an ontology – that is, a mode of existence – at the antipode of individualism and objectivism, an ontology that recaptures the truth of the Being, the truth and the genuineness of existence, in the Eros of Trinitarian communion.<sup>27</sup>

The philosophical concept of being gains a theological value, not in the sense of the idolatrous overlap between being and "God," but in the sense of the theological distance in which the person of the Father remains.

This section considered the relationship between ontology and theology, in which we could note that the monist ontology of ancient Greek philosophy, not knowing the idea of person, influenced European philosophy to such an extent that the elements of Trinitarian theology were never truly assumed either by scholastic theology or by philosophers such as Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, etc. Heidegger's denunciation of onto-theology does not make him less idolatrous in his thinking than in what he denounces, because his *Dasein* is a topic before which the gap of nothingness opens. Marion tries to reinterpret Heidegger's thinking, by suggesting not the overcoming but the opening up of the finite horizon of the *Dasein*, since the Embodiment of the Logos does not prove to be *only an ontic corrective* of European philosophy, but has profound ontological implications. This abandonment of Heidegger's methodological atheism is also shared by Father Stăniloae, who argued that Christ stood between the human being and the precipice of nothingness and prevented man from slipping into nothingness.

These elements of Heidegger's ontology are deficient precisely in the matter of human finitude. It lacks the help of true transcendence. Love demands immortality, intentionality towards communion implies an abyssal dialogue between man and God. Therefore, only the transcendence of the Personal Infinite can allow the human being the possibility of endless dialogue. Only the incarnated Hypostatic Infinite can look the man in the

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<sup>26</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 352.

<sup>27</sup> Christos Yannaras, *The Truth and the Unity of Church*, trans. Daniela Cojocariu, (Iași: Trinitas, 2008), 65 [In Romanian].

face and promise him his immortality. Death, nothingness, void cannot allow an abyssal dialogue to the *being-toward-death*. The intentionality of the human being remains closed in finitude, thus becoming tragic and absurd. Only the Embodied Logos is the true dialogue partner.

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