Divine Disclosure and Concealment in Bach, Pascal and Levinas

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We have always known that Johann Sebastian Bach's music is deeply informed by theological concerns, but its extent always surprises us: recent research by Helga Thöne into the six sonatas and partitas for solo violin suggests that here Bach has given us a striking analogy for the way in which God relates to a creation that does not exhibit unambiguously the signs of his presence. She proposes that this sequence of works progress thematically in pairs according to the great feasts of the Christian year:

Christmas:	Sonata no 1 (G minor)	Partita no 1 (B Minor)
Passion/Easter:	Sonata no 2 (A minor)	Partita no 2 (D Minor)
Pentecost:	Sonata no 3 (C Major)	Partita no 3 (E Major)

In addition, this corresponds to a Latin Trinity formula found on tombstones: *ex Deo nascimur* (from God we are born); *in Christo morimur* (in Christ we die); *per Spiritum Sanctum reviviscimus* (through the Holy Spirit we live again). Her argument that a religious structure underpins these instrumental works is based upon the large number of chorale quotations in the movements, their relationship to the liturgical calendar and the numerological analysis of notes and letters in the works. In particular, she judges that the Chaconne of the D Minor Partita was Bach's musical epitaph for his first wife, Maria Barbara, who died suddenly aged thirty-six after thirteen years of marriage. Appropriately, the Chaconne, one of the *In Christo morimur* pairs, evokes chiefly the melody and text of Luther's Easter hymn, 'Christ lag in Todesbanden/Für unser Sünd' gegeben' as well as other chorales.

Thöne proposes that the score of the Chaconne was composed against a template of religious melodies and thematic echoes which Bach devised first and then concealed; they come to light only when the inaudible template is restored to the music. The instrumental music for violin springs from coded religious meanings and represents a transcription into music of teachings about Christ, sin and death that remain concealed from the ordinary listener. Thöne's reconstruction of the template has been dramatically presented on *Morimur*, a recent CD by the Hilliard Ensemble and Christoph Poppen: singers intone the

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single verses of the hidden chorales and hymnic fragments alongside the virtuoso violin part. It is an astonishing experience, hearing music that was heard only once before in the mind of Bach as he composed it.[1]

Once the elements of its underlying religious structure are restored, the music is then heard and understood in relation to the creative mind which produced it and hid itself within it. Like God and the creation, one might say: the world, like the Chaconne, does not give irrefutable signs of the divine presence which structures it: it has a fully intelligible structured coherence that does not obviously bespeak dependence. The world's template is not a fact in the world because God creates (composes) the world in such a way that God's action is not a fact *in* the world: the operation of primary causality is not at odds with the manifold secondary causality that is clearly observable in the world's operation. Although the world is dependent on God, God is not in the world any more than Bach's template is in the violin score, and yet God's act is the template against which the autonomous, free score of the world is composed. (If we were to pursue this in a Trinitarian way, the template would of course be the processions of Logos and Spirit, the exemplars of the world's dynamic distinction from God.)

Learning how to hear the music against its template may be how we might think of revelation. If ever a word deserves careful use it is 'revelation'. I will make two remarks: firstly, we should not think of revelation as an event or a series of events. It properly designates not a thing but a cognitive activity: God comes to be known in ways that originate in God (and nothing else). The category of salvation history, especially its Hegelian offshoots (Pannenberg and Moltmann), leads us to think either of a particular series of events that reveal or of the whole of history in its climactic unfolding as revealing God. I venture to suggest that the only 'event' luminously revelatory of God is the resurrection. Theology is on much surer grounds if it thinks of the mind of Jesus as the focus of revelation, as the locus where God is supremely known; the Church comes to share in that understanding. My second remark is that we should not use the word revelation in a way that suggests a progress in knowledge. We do not know God any better by being born later than others: nothing gets easier as time goes by and as God's action unfolds.

I want to approach this latter point through a consideration of one of the most remarkable writings of Blaise Pascal: in his fourth letter to Mlle Charlotte de Roannez (October 29, 1656), Pascal presents the history of God's revelation as *a progressive divine disclosure in direct proportion to the degree of divine concealment*: the more God is disclosed, the more obscured God becomes. As God intensifies his

[1] *Morimur*, ECM New Series 1765 461 895–2. The accompanying booklet introduces Thöne's theories outlined here.

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revelatory and saving action among human beings, culminating in the union of the divine Word with created reality and Christ's presence in the life of the Church, it does not become easier for human beings to see and know him. Quite the reverse: the more God discloses himself, the more hidden God becomes; revelation does not remove, but increases, the hiddenness of God. For Pascal, this descent of the *Deus revelatus/absconditus* culminates, neither in the Incarnation nor the crucifixion, as in the Lutheran tradition, but in the Eucharist: the sacred species is 'the last hiding place he can be'.

Some remarks about its circumstances before we read the letter: after Pascal's conversion (November 23, 1654) recorded in his *Mémorial*, he began the spiritual direction of persons *de grand esprit et de grande condition* who came to him for advice.[2] Among them was Charlotte de Roannez, the sister of his friend, le Duc de Roannez; she had begun to feel drawn to religious life at Port-Royal after 'the miracle of the Sacred Thorn' had healed Pascal's niece of an ulcer/tumour of the eye. Pascal's fourth letter to Charlotte was written to her in Poitou, where she had withdrawn because of family opposition to her religious vocation, and after the Vicar General of Paris had verified 'the supernatural and miraculous healing' by the Sacred Thorn and approved an official mass of thanksgiving at Port-Royal.[3] The healing miracle, referred to in the letter, was seen by Pascal and the supporters of Port-Royal as an extraordinary instance in which God emerged from the obscurity which normally characterises his presence to signal his approval of the reformed Cistercian convent and its spirituality. After a brief introduction, Pascal writes:

> There are so few people to whom God makes himself manifest by such extraordinary acts [the miracle] that we should profit from these occasions, since he comes out of the secret of nature which covers him for no other reason than to stir up our faith to serve him as ardently as we know him with certainty. If God disclosed himself continually to human beings, there would be no merit in believing him; and if he never disclosed himself, there would be little faith. But usually he hides himself, and he only rarely reveals himself to those whom he wants to draw into his service.
>
> This strange hiding place, in which God withdraws impenetrable to our sight, teaches us that we should take ourselves far from the sight of others. He remained hidden under the veil of nature which conceals him from us until the Incarnation; and when he had to appear, he hid himself even more by covering himself with humanity. He was even more recognizable when he

[2] 'La vie de Pascal' in *Blaise Pascal, Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. J. Mesnard, Desclée de Brouwer, 1964-, *I*, 584. In subsequent references: *OC*. References to the *Pensées* are to the Sellier edition (S), Classiques Garnier, 1991 and to the Lafuma edition (L), L'Intégrale/Seuil, 1963.

[3] *OC, III*, 967.

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> was invisible than when he made himself visible. And finally, when he wanted to fulfil the promise he made to the Apostles to remain with human beings until his final coming, he chose to remain there in the most strange and most obscure hiding place [*secret*] of all, the species of the Eucharist. It is this sacrament which St John calls in the Apocalypse 'a hidden manna' (*Vincenti dabo manna absconditum* 2.17); and I think that Isaiah saw him in this condition when he said in the spirit of prophecy, 'Truly, you are a hidden God' (*Vere tu es Deus absconditus* 45.15). That is the last hiding place where he can be. The veil of nature which covers God has been pierced by several non-believers, who, as St Paul says, 'have recognized an invisible God by visible nature' (Rom 1.20). Heretical Christians have known him through his humanity and adore Jesus Christ, God and man. But to recognize him under the species of bread, that is the distinguishing mark of Catholics alone: we are the only ones whom God enlightens to that extent.
>
> We can add to these considerations the hiding place of the Spirit of God hidden also in Scripture. For there are two complete senses of Scripture, the literal and the mystical, and the Jews, stopping only at the first, do not think there is another sense and do not dream of looking for it. Similarly, the impious, seeing natural effects, attribute them to nature, without thinking that there is another agent; and, like the Jews, seeing a perfect man in Jesus Christ, do not think to look for another nature: 'We did not think that it was he', as Isaiah says (*Et quasi absconditus vultus ejus et despectus, unde nec reputavimus eum* 53.3). Similarly and finally, heretics, seeing the perfect appearances of bread, do not think to look there for another substance. All things cover some mystery; all things are veils which cover God. Christians ought to recognize him in everything. Temporal afflictions conceal the eternal goods to which they lead; temporal pleasures conceal the eternal evils which they cause. Let us ask God to make us recognize him and serve him in all things. And let us give him thanks for the infinite graces that, being hidden in all things as far as others are concerned, he has revealed himself in all things and in so many ways for us.[4]

The drama is envisaged from the side of God, in a downward movement of continuous, partial, selective, hidden disclosure, from God's presence as Creator to his Incarnate presence, culminating in the Eucharistic species, and the consequent restriction of those who come to know God. The pattern of divine revelation identified by Pascal can be summarised:

- God hides himself and discloses himself in nature where a limited number of pagans have known how to discover him.
- God hides himself and discloses himself in Scripture in which Jews were able to discover him, but not pagans.
- God hides himself more deeply in the Incarnation and discloses himself there; neither Jews nor pagans have recognised God in the humanity of Christ: this only Christians (both heretical and orthodox) can do.

[4] *OC, III*, 1037–8.

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- God hides himself and discloses himself in the species of the Eucharist; Christian heretics do not recognise him there: that is proper to Catholics alone.[5]

Text, creation, Incarnation and sacrament are isomorphic, sharing the same pattern of ambiguous, partial interpretation.[6] How interesting that Pascal, after outlining the historical pattern, cannot resist relating it to the meaning and interpretation of the Biblical text: it is simply not meant to be understood by all. It is important also to note the date of the letter: the last week of October, 1656. Nine years earlier, on October 24, 1647, the convent of Port-Royal had established itself as an Institute of the Blessed Sacrament, remembered every year with a solemn Mass on the nearest Thursday; the Sisters adopted the title of 'Filles du Saint-Sacrement', wore a white scapular with a red cross and undertook Perpetual Adoration, Sunday Benediction, daily commemoration of the Blessed Sacrament after Vespers and recitation of the Office of the Blessed Sacrament every Thursday. Pascal's letter is in part, then, a Eucharistic meditation commemorating the consecration of the convent to the Blessed Sacrament. This contemplative, Eucharistic piety flows into the theological themes Pascal advances in the letter. Surely behind the whole letter is the *Adoro de devote latens Deitas/quae sub his figuris vere latitas*. This Eucharistic theme comes through also in the vow formula pronounced by the sisters of Port-Royal which expresses a spirituality of hiddenness, veiling, visibility/invisibility, derived from the perception of this pattern in the Incarnation and the Eucharist. When Pascal's sister Jacqueline was professed on 3rd June 1653, Pascal heard this prayer made over her:

> Lord Jesus, hidden God, who wanted your glory to be covered under the veil of weak flesh and under the humble signs of this adorable Sacrament, and who, in the days of your mortal life, suffered your adorable Face to be covered with a veil by those who insulted you, pour an abundant blessing on this veil, so that your servant who wants to be covered with it as a consecration to you, becoming invisible to all creatures and visible only to you alone, may merit to be hidden in God with you who, as God, lives and reigns for ever and ever.[7]

It is while writing to Charlotte in terms consonant with her desire to adopt the spirituality of Port-Royal that he advances an original hermeneutic of history of astonishing simplicity and conciseness.[8]

[5] Gouhier, *op. cit.* p. 188f.

[6] Henri Gouhier speaks of Pascal's sense of 'an essential ambiguity in created existence resulting from the very finality which gives meaning to creation. Thus it [the ambiguity] is everywhere: in nature, Scripture, history', Gouhier, *op. cit.*, 196.

[7] *Constitutions du monastère de Port-Royal du Saint-Sacrement*, Mons 1665, 350; quoted in P. Sellier, 'Jésus-Christ chez Pascal', *Rev. Sc. ph. th.* 66 (1982), 505–21, 516. CF., P. Sellier, *Pascal et la liturgie*, P.U.F., 1966, 13–15, 68–70.

[8] H. Gouhier, *Blaise Pascal: Commentaires*, Vrin, 1984, 220ff.

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Rarely, one feels, has a letter of spiritual direction attained this depth of theological originality and clarity; you have the sense of tapping into some cold, underground stream. Pascal's initial argument is familiar from the *Pensées*: the intermittent appearance of God is a positive feature of his action because if God appeared continually, faith would be easy and our relationship with God would be without merit, and if it never happened, how could we believe at all? 'But the fact that he appears sometimes, and not always, removes the ambiguity. If he appears *once*, he is always. Thus the only possible conclusion is that God exists *and* that human beings are unworthy of him'. (S690; L449) And both truths are inseparable. What Pascal describes in the letter are the aspects, the 'multiple secrets'[9] within the dynamic of this 'once', the single, unitary self-disclosure of God.

For Pascal, the world cannot manifest God unambiguously because the context in which the interpreter stands is distorted by the history of sin: spiritual and intellectual sight is impaired, and the divine presence is a hieroglyph we can no longer read. Hence the futility of approaches to God through 'natural theology'. Instead, what we perceive of God as creator 'signals neither a total exclusion nor a manifest presence of divinity, but the presence of a God who hides himself. Everything bears this character.' In relation to this cosmic presence, a person catches tantalising glimpses of God – by squinting, as it were: 'He must not see nothing at all; he must not see enough to make him think that he possesses it. For to know that he has lost [something], he must see and not see: and that is precisely the state that nature is in'. (S690; L449)

This dialectic of 'seeing and not seeing', or what I have called 'squinting', in relation to God's action as creator arises from the fissure caused by the present frailty of the human mind: God is hidden because we cannot see properly. But there is more: if our perception of God's presence within the created order is conditioned by the fissure of concupiscence, there is an equally dark mystery at work, namely, the election of some to sight and others to blindness. In relation to God, human beings are in partial shadow because of sin, but the light that God casts on this *chiaroscuro* world is also partial and selective, dividing between those enabled by grace to see and those who are left to their own devices. God's action in relation to the world is characterised by a *caesura* deriving from the mystery of election and predestination. Pascal puts it in deliberately Scriptural terms: 'There is enough light to enlighten the elect and enough darkness to humble them. There is enough darkness to blind the reprobate and enough clarity to condemn them and make them without excuse'. (S268; L236)

[9] The phrase is Sellier's; *art. cit.*, 518.

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This dialectical pattern of disclosure and hiddenness in creation, related to the effects of sin and a division within humanity of the elect and the reprobate, extends to Pascal's parallel account of God's revelation in Christ: the casual theological thinker might judge that God's revelation in Christ makes things clearer to everyone. By no means: Pascal is clear that if God had wanted, in the coming of Christ, 'to overcome the obstinacy of the most hardened, he could have done so by disclosing himself so openly to them that they would not have been able to doubt the truth of his essence'. But

> it would not be right that he should appear in a way which was manifestly divine and absolutely able to convince everyone. But neither was it right that he should come in a way so hidden that he could not be recognized by those who seek him sincerely... Wishing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart, and hidden from those who flee from him with all their heart, God tempered the way he would be known (*il a tempéré sa connaissance*) so that he gave visible signs of himself to those who seek him and not to those who do not seek him'. (S182/L149)

Why does not God appear to everyone including the most hardened? Pascal says it is because God *does not want to*: God's hiddenness is the way in which God determines his being in relation to humanity's sinful freedom in order to disclose himself to some and not others, a process which occurs at all the stages of the unitary self-disclosure of God: always a small group are enabled to see. Pascal interprets God's hiddenness as the consequence, not of the mystery of God's transcendent essence, as it is in Gregory of Nyssa, John of the Cross and the great tradition, but of God's decision deliberately to withhold himself from some and to temper the form of his presence accordingly. Pascal holds that libertines profess a *Deus ignotus*, but that Christians adore a *Deus absconditus*, which is a very different notion. 'La théologie du *Deus absconditus* explique la conduite de Dieu en tout'.[10]

So, in the Pascalian narrative, the ambiguity of created existence in relation to God derives from two related *caesurae*: the first derived from concupiscence (we cannot see properly) and the second deriving from the partial light cast by divine grace and election (God does not want to enlighten all). For Pascal, whatever truth we come to about God is not antecedent to the historical dialectic of sin, election and healing grace but is disclosed only within the chasms of this history: '...without Scripture, without original sin, without a necessary mediator, promised and arrived, one cannot absolutely prove God, nor teach good doctrine nor good morality' (S221; L189). Pascal handles these traditional themes not as conclusions to be reached at the end of a process of reflection, but as universal axioms which

[10] CF., H. Michon, 'Deus Absconditus', *XVIIe siècle*, 1992, pp. 495–506; p. 498. Quotation from P. Sellier, 'Jésus-Christ chez Pascal', p. 519.

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enable you to think properly about God and human beings, grounding his account of God's hiddenness.

I want suddenly to switch contexts and take you into consideration of how a very different, but no less astringent writer, Emmanuel Levinas, wrestles with the same issue of divine disclosure, concealment and the difficulty of recognising God and the divine purposes. The issue for him is the possibility of a God who veils his countenance so strikingly in permitting devastating evil to be done to his people in the Shoah, and yet who can be recognised as present and intimate. Levinas' article was written in response to 'Yossel Rakover's Appeal to God', a work purporting to be written by a Jew in the Warsaw ghetto, but in fact a work of fiction.[11] In the story, in the midst of the horrors of ghetto life, Yossel finds God deeply problematic but finds God's Torah much more trustworthy than its divine source:

> I believe in you, God of Israel, even though you have done everything to stop me from believing in you. I believe in your laws even if I cannot excuse your actions.... I love him, but I love his Torah more, and even if I had deceived myself in his regard, I would nonetheless observe his Torah. God means religion, but his Torah means a way of life, and the more we die for such a way of life, the more immortal it becomes.

Levinas agrees with Yossel that the innocent suffering of Israel implies the absence of God, but God's absence is not without purpose because it evokes religious and moral maturity from human beings called to witness to justice in a world where evil is pervasive:

> God veiling his countenance: I think this is neither a theologian's abstraction nor a poetic image. It is the hour when the just person has nowhere to go in the outside world; when no institution affords him protection; when even the comforting sense of the divine presence, experienced in a childlike person's piety, is withdrawn; when the only victory available to the individual lies in his conscience, which necessarily means: in suffering. This is the specifically Jewish meaning of suffering – one that never takes on the quality of a mystical expiation of the sins of the world. The condition in which victims find themselves in a disordered world, that is to say, in a world where goodness does not succeed in being victorious, is suffering. This reveals a God who, while refusing to manifest himself in any way as a help, directs his appeal to the full maturity of the integrally responsible person.... The just person's suffering for the sake of a justice that fails to triumph is concretely lived out in the form of Judaism.[12]

[11] The story, Levinas' article and van Beeck's response are given in F.J. van Beeck's *Loving the Torah More than God: Towards a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism*, Loyola University Press, 1989.

[12] *Op. cit.*, 38

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The condition of the Jewish people, Levinas suggests, is one in which God precisely does not deliver them from suffering; the burden of suffering is a consequence of their witness to God's as yet unrealised justice. (One must be very careful in saying this; these words should not come readily from Christian lips.) How then is God present to Israel and how should Jews relate to this God? It is as though God withholds the completed form of the divine presence in order to establish a form of presence which brings humans to responsible maturity. Levinas' answer is partly and deliberately framed as a polemic against an indulgent Christianity whose key ideas, he suggests, are bad for humans. By encouraging belief in a revealed incarnate Word of forgiveness capable of resolving all the dilemmas of evil and suffering by bearing them, and thereby freeing us from final accountability for our conduct, Christianity's claim that divine revelation culminates in the Incarnation is a bad message for human beings. As he puts it, 'A world in which forgiveness is omnipotent becomes inhuman'.[13] In van Beeck's words:

> Seen in this light, God's infinite compassion with sinners, revealed in the Incarnation so ardently professed in Christianity, may in reality mask a God of radical injustice – a God who delivers an immature humanity up to its own evil in the very act of assuring it of indulgence, mercy and love.[14]

This is a serious critique of Christian faith: you do not help human beings by telling them that God loves them no matter what they do because then there is no need for them to face the seriousness of what they do. But by giving Israel a Torah that stands over against human beings and presses them to live lives of demanding moral integrity, God establishes a form of evocative presence that brings his people and humanity to maturity. For Judaism,

> the relationship between God and the human person is not an emotional communion within the context of the love of an incarnate God, but a relationship between minds that is mediated by teaching, by the Torah. *The guarantee that there is a living God in our midst is precisely a word that is not incarnate* . . . the spiritual becomes present, not by way of palpable presence, but by absence; God is concrete, not by means of incarnation, but by means of the Law; and his majesty is not the felt experience of his sacred mystery. His majesty does not provoke fear and trembling, but fills us with higher thoughts. (my emphasis)

Torah is given almost, we might say, in the absence of a fully present God, in order to give us both the incentive to press on towards God and to fill us with a sense of the sacred majesty of

[13] 'The severe God who makes demands on a humanity capable of [doing] good is covered up by an infinitely indulgent deity who locks humans up in their wickedness and who delivers up to those humans, wicked yet saved, a defenceless humanity.' Levinas in *Difficult Freedom*, quoted in van Beeck, 47

[14] *Op. cit.*, 47

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God who does not come but who presses us to come to him and to seek the righteousness that will be his completed work. God's revelation is to be sought, pursued, demanded from a position of abiding incommensurability between us and God. Only when we know God's concealment from us, and are matured by his ethical guidance, can we demand complete disclosure of God:

> Capable of trusting in an absent God, Man is also the adult who can take the measure of his own weakness. . . . Matured by a faith derived from the Torah, he blames God for his unbounded majesty and his excessive demands. He will love him in spite of every attempt to discourage his love. . . . God must unveil his countenance, justice and power must find each other again, just institutions are needed on this earth. But only the person who recognized the veiled God can demand his revelation. How vigorous the dialectic by which the equality between God and Man is established right at the heart of their incommensurability. And thus we are as far removed from the warm, almost palpable, communion with the divine as from the desperate pride of the atheist. An integral and austere humanism, coupled with difficult worship.

This is a form of religion that takes seriously the need to trust in an absent God, living a faith derived from Torah and expressed in compassion and justice, with the realisation that only if human beings undertake this demanding task of bearing witness will God reveal himself. Until the completion of divine justice, the hidden God is known only in the difficult freedom and ethics of Torah-observance: an austere vision, indeed. We are helped only in ways that bring the best out of us and not in ways that deflect us from maturity.

I find this a serious challenge to Christian thinking, but at the same time I wonder if we are so far from Christian truth. For Christians too, an engagement with God that is not lived out and enacted eucharistically, practically, lovingly, through virtue, sacrifice and dedication to the needs of others, is flawed and misconceived. Levinas' critique of indulgent Christianity can and should be made from within Christianity's own resources: practical love and action, not self-serving religious evasions, are the appropriate mediations of divine life. God, after all, is not mocked by a humanity that finds its ambivalent complexity so fascinating it loses the capacity to repent. For Levinas and the Jewish tradition, the great sign that is given to the world of the mystery of God is the living out of Torah, divine guidance, law and teaching. Israel is to be a light to the world by the 'way' (*halakhah*) of Torah-fidelity, by its way of life conducted before the justice and mercy of the divine Name. The Torah is the Word of God in its modality of forming Israel to be a partner in the covenant and the light to the world.

Drawing imperfectly on Levinas, let me formulate an axiom of great importance for the question of the disclosure of God. *The only words capable of expressing the divine mystery are the meanings that*

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are enfleshed in human living and ethical responsibility and so the truth of God can only be lived: it cannot be thought. And for Christians the truth of God is lived out in the life of Jesus of Nazareth: his religious Torah-fidelity is the performative act that declares and renders the divine mystery among us. Christ's life is how God is enacted among us as self-emptying love, and it is also how the human mystery is fully enacted when we locate ourselves in God. Christ comes, as Paul says in that evocative phrase in Romans 15, as a 'servant of the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God' (Rom 15.8). Can we paraphrase this formula which has been ignored almost completely in the Church's account of Christ? The Catechism's little comment, 'His [Christ's] religious life is that of a Jew obedient to the law of God,' (531) goes part of the way towards showing how Jesus reveals God. In a striking phrase in his address in the Rome Synagogue, Pope John Paul II said, 'Christ carries to its extreme consequences the love demanded by the Torah,' and in that way lives out the truth of God. He reveals God by enacting what human life looks like when no part of it stands outside God's unitive self-gift. His life is the enfleshment of divine Word and Torah.

At this point, a better theologian would integrate the three readings under consideration, Bach, Pascal and Levinas, and effect an *aufhebung* of astonishing prestidigitation. I will not do so because I think this paper ought to be ragged at the edges if it is to take divine concealment seriously. I will simply make some comments on the three figures I have discussed. I find myself thinking of Bach's music as the eighth sacrament of God because it is the musical analogue of the creation in its ultimately simple complexity: it is what the world sounds like as it comes from God, and that Bach concealed his compositional template in order to let the Chaconne radiate its wordless glory delights me because I think that is what God does with the world.

On Pascal: it is very difficult to refute his account of the partial, selective character of God's self-disclosing action. I know one should be more optimistic and be filled with an expansive universalism because that is what all religions are expected to exhibit now, but God does not act equally in relation to all, and we have no way of altering this. The dispensation of grace is unequal and only a strong doctrine of the communion of saints in which a single stream of mercy is mediated throughout humanity by Christ and holy men and women can avoid an Augustinian division of humanity into the chosen and the discarded. The way God has chosen to deal with the world is profoundly problematic and it remains problematic even after Christ and the grace-filled wonders of the Church: is it not significant that the Little Flower is perhaps the first doctor of the Church to understand and feel atheism as part of her spiritual reality?

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Finally, Levinas. One aspect of his argument can be quickly refuted: he's talking about an easy liberal Christianity that is self-indulgent and leaves the self exactly where it was before. What is missing is an account of the cost of Christian discipleship. But as so often when one listens to the Jewish tradition, one hears something important: let me go back to the axiom I proposed, an axiom that I think has been lost sight of in the rationalisms that have seduced Christian theology since the Enlightenment: *the truth of God can only be lived: it cannot be thought*. Christian theology is always transgressing the boundaries it sets for itself by devising conceptual schemes of astonishing sophistication and projecting them onto to the life of God.

Levinas and the Jewish tradition point us towards a chastening agnosticism and the primacy of the category of witness. Christ is both the primordial witness to God and teacher of God. How? Go back to my discussion of the phrase in Romans 15: *Christ's Torah-observant service within the life of Israel is declarative of the truth of God*. That, I suggest, is the disclosure of God: Christ reveals God by living out in all its consequences the obligation to love God with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind. The disclosure of God takes place in what Jesus knows of God and is enacted in his lived fidelity to the God of covenant and Torah. Does this 'revelation' extend beyond Christ's mind to us? Yes, but the condition of participating in his knowledge of God is that we live according to his pattern: the *halakah* of discipleship, a thoroughly eucharistic discipleship in which we shall be spared nothing, is integral to the reception and extension of revelation. Only steps on the same path as Christ enable us to know God; theology, especially the ragged sort offered here, is no substitute for that knowledge.

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