PIERO CODA'S THEOLOGY OF HISTORY AS ONGOING MEMORY OF HUMANITY'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TRINITARIAN KENOSIS



This essay was originally delivered as a paper at a symposium on the topic of Translatio Imperii *at the University of Hong Kong in February 2010. After the ideological horrors of the 20th century, participants were asked: 'Can one still speak in any legitimate way of a divine providence in history?' Piero Coda's work, particularly his* Evento Pasquale, Il negativo e la trinità, *and* Il logos e il nulla, *could be read as a development of a humanism expanded to the dimensions of a participation in the Trinitarian kenosis. His grappling with Hegel shows the centrality of Jesus' forsakenness and of the Trinity to contemporary culture, while his* Il Logos e il nulla *indicates how the intra-Trinitarian kenosis becomes the context for dialogue with the great oriental religions. Finally, his 'Towards a Theological Foundation for a Political Category of Fraternity' develops a Trinity-based understanding of fraternity as an experience overcoming religious, social, and anthropological divisions in contemporary culture. Shining through Coda's work can be discerned a profound rethinking of divine providence in a history however deeply scarred by evils such as the Holocaust.*

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Perhaps Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's most powerful single response to the Bolshevik coup d'état and consequent ideological revolution in Russa was his novel, *In the First Circle*[1]. His answer to the *Inferno* of Stalin's anti-world of betrayal is the *Paradiso* of Nadya's and Gleb's faithfulness, all the more heroic when neither are aware of the other's fidelity overcoming the temptation to be unfaithful. The novel focuses on those good souls – who despite being externally bound by hell's "first circle" – have yet achieved a spiritual freedom allowing their participation in the mutual love that is the key to Dante's *Paradiso*. As we know, Dante's journey from Inferno through Purgatorio to Paradiso culminates in his vision of the mutual love of the Trinity.

My exploration of a key strand in the Italian theologian Piero Coda's work will suggest that the theology of history he articulates takes a direction similar to Dante and Solzhenitsyn. Eric Voegelin wrote of "the community of suffering"[2] brought about by ideological "power and revolution" in the 20th century, and the Italian and Russian literary echoes of the mystery of the Trinity indicate its relevance at the beginning of this third millennium after Christ for every human being attempting a genuine transfer of authority from the apparently imperious and unassailable demands of power and revolution: firstly in themselves, then in their societies.

This essay, while clearly an exploration of works in theology, does not presuppose belief in the Trinity or in Christianity. When the Russian film director Andrei Tarkovsky noted the meaning of the Trinity in his directions for *Andrei Rubilev*, his film about the painter of the famous Russian icon of the Trinity, he aimed his remarks at an audience who would resonate to the appeal the Trinity can make to any human being open to the value of an interpersonal communion based on uniquely different persons united by love:

> «here at last is the "Trinity", great, serene, completely penetrated by a shimmering joy from which human brotherhood pours out. The concrete division of one alone into three and the triple union in one alone offers a tremendous perspective for the future spread out however throughout the centuries»[3].

Eric Voegelin made a similar point, underlining his philosophical rather than theological concerns in his *History of Political Ideas*:

> «let us stress that in this study we are not concerned with theological issues. The doctrine of *fides caritate formata* is relevant for us as a differentiating analysis of the experience of faith, regardless of its theological merits, it is a masterpiece of empirical type construction…

1) Recently published in English in the restored text, tr. Harry T. Willets (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009).
2) E. Voegelin, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in «Review of Politics» 15 (1953): pp. 68–85, at p. 68.
3) A. Tarkovsky, *Scénario littéraire du film André Roublev*, quoted in: Olivier Clement, *L'espirit de Soljénitsyne* (Paris: Stock, 1974), p. 299.

> There is no parallel in Hellenic civilization to the passage in 1 John 4: "Who does not love, does not know God; for God is love...We love him because he first loved us". The development of these experiences of Johannine Christianity (which, it is my impression, were closest to St. Thomas) into the doctrine of *fides caritate formata*, and the amplification of this doctrinal nucleus into a grandiose, systematic philosophy of man and society, are the medieval climax of the interpenetration of Christianity with the body of a historical civilization. Here perhaps we touch the historical raison d'être of the West, and certainly we touch the empirical standard by which the further course of Western intellectual history must be measured. This further course, as we shall see, has as its main theme of the disintegration of the doctrinal nucleus of the *amicitia* between God and man. In the nineteenth century, in Comte and Marx, this process of disintegration reaches its formal end in the doctrinal counter-formulation of the revolt against God as the basis for the world-immanent order of society; the dogma of human self-salvation, in hermetical closure against transcendental reality, marks an end of Western civilizational history beyond which, at the moment, nothing is visible but the bleakness of imprisonment in human nature without grace»[4].

In his preparatory remarks for our conference, and in the light of the many profoundly inhuman events of the last century, Wayne asked the leading question, "Can one still speak in any legitimate way of a divine providence in history?". I'll be suggesting here that the kind of extended meditation I've found in three of Piero Coda's books, *Evento Pasquale: Trinità e Storia* [*Paschal Event: Trinity and History*] (Rome: Città Nuova, 1984); *Il negativo e la trinità: Ipotesi su Hegel* [*Negation and Trinity: Hypotheses on Hegel*] (Rome: Città Nuova, 1987); *and Il logos e il nulla: Trinità, religioni, mistica* [*Logos and Nothingness: Trinity Religions Mysticism*] (Rome: Città Nuova, 2003), along with a few other writings of his, give some useful indications of how divine providence may still be found at work, perhaps most obviously in what can seem to be a time undergoing "the dark night of culture"[5].

From his *Paschal Event: Trinity and History* book we'll draw out his understanding of the relation between the forsakenness of Jesus on the cross and the inner life of the Trinity. Coda's *Negation and Trinity: Hypotheses on Hegel* through his grappling with Hegel will widen out that meditation to the relevance of Jesus Forsaken and the Trinity to contemporary culture, and *Logos and Nothingness: Trinity Religions Mysticism* further expands that experience to the dialogue with the great religions. Then we'll take up his application of these theological insights to a politics of fraternity, and conclude with some remarks on the centrality of suffering in his theology of history. Behind Coda's whole project can be discerned,

4) E. Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas, Vol. IV: Renaissance and Reformation: Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 22*, eds. David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), pp. 250–51.
5) Cf. G.M. Zanghí, *Notte della cultura europea* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2007).

I believe, an attempt to develop a Christian or trinitarian humanism highly relevant to our topic of "*translatio imperii*".

I. Evento Pasquale: Trinità e Storia [=EP]

For Eric Voegelin, the "turn" in his *Order and History* series which occurred in the fourth volume was his movement away from a linear and chronological sequence to a sharper focus on the core relationships which constitute history. While Coda does not directly address the problems in the same way, it's clear that for him that there's been a core event – the paschal mystery of Christ's suffering, forsakenness, death and resurrection – by participating in which every human being can enter into history in that deeper sense Voegelin spoke of as History II: where living in the presence under God, while occurring within the conventional chronology we know as History I, is yet also oriented beyond it. But this topic is amply explored both in the papers by David Walsh and Glenn Hughes[6].

Coda opens this brief study with a question regarding the book's topic – the paschal event and the trinitarian mystery – is this a mere theological *quaestio disputata* or does it rather provide a hermeneutical perspective on the entire Christian mystery?

His first chapter prepares for the discussion, by tackling the genesis and significance of the new theological perspective. Coda sees the crisis of Western culture as a crisis within European Christianity, sketching a phenomenology of the absence of God which he will bring into contact with the revelation of the God of Jesus Christ, which itself has an experience of the absence of God at its centre. So he writes that

> «a long and complex historical-cultural process has led to the "cultural death" of God in the West... [T]his final result of modern thought *can* provide us with a new point of departure to deepen [our understanding] of the mystery of Jesus crucified and forsaken as the reply also, and especially, to the absence-of-God experienced by humans today» (EP, p. 48).

The second chapter works through the various theologies, Lutheran (Moltmann, Jüngel), Hegelian (Küng), and the range of Catholic theological approaches founded on the analogy of being (von Balthasar, Rahner, Kasper, Galot, Mühlen). Coda has devoted a separate study to the Orthodox theologian, Bulgakov, in his *L'altro di Dio: rivelazione e kénosis in Sergei Bulgakov [The other of God: Revelation and kenosis in Sergei Bulgakov]* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1998). Despite differences of emphasis, Coda indicates a common kenotic[7] focus in a wide range of Christian theology.

6) E. Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974, p. 173.

7) The use of St. Paul's term for Christ's 'emptying' himself, *ekénosen* (*Phil*. 2, 7) has given rise to nouns like "kenosis" and adjectives like "kenotic" which are frequently used in contemporary theology.

Coda's third and final chapter discusses "The paschal horizon of a trinitarian ontology", where he quotes Hans Urs von Balthasar, «the ultimate presupposition of the *kenosis* is the altruism of the Persons (as pure relations) in the intra-trinitarian life of love» (EP, p. 159). This explosion into human space and time of the intra-divine kenosis, of the divine not-being in order to be of the divine persons, occurs in the paschal mystery of the crucifixion-forsakenness-death-resurrection of Christ.

The book goes on to deal with the dimensions of this paschal mystery in its relation with the mystery of the Trinity, where Coda writes of the intersection of the divine and human in the paschal event revealing the trinitarian perichoresis[8]:

> «if, in fact, in the divine dimension of the paschal event, the Son's self-giving to the Father in the Spirit implies an ecstasy of love of his person who "loses" himself to rediscover himself in unity, while the human dimension of the same event implies an "annihilation", in the death of his human nature so that it can be transfigured into the new divine condition belonging to the Risen one» (EP, p. 167).

On this basis, Coda develops his project of what German theologian Klaus Hemmerle called a "trinitarian ontology":

> «the paschal event, then, by fully revealing the meaning of freedom as an act of being opening into the love-gift of self, can show us finally the way by which the "not being", as creaturely limit – and even as creaturely limit intensified by the "break" represented by sin – is assumed and transmuted in the fundamental analogy which is trinitarian: "in the kenosis of the Son all limitedness and all contradiction are taken up into the event of the divine self-giving. In the cry of Why on the cross and in the silence of the Sheol the Son descends to, all is integrated yet not cancelled out"» (EP, p. 174, quoting Klaus Hemmerle, *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie*, Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976, p. 66).

This trinitarian ontology of charity is participated "vertically" through grace by human beings and also "horizontally" between human beings through their unity in Christ – in fact, for Coda, the two dimensions are inseparable: an inseparability we will see him later invoke to propose a trinitarian humanism (EP, p. 179).

Participation in the life of the trinity means that each human person in some way is both distinct from yet one with God. As Coda expresses this:

> «if the being of the divinized man is defined in charity as a relation actuated, *in* God and *to* God (that relation that is based on creation), ontologically speaking the person will not be able to begin *only* from

8) "Perichoresis" is a standard theological term for the mutual indwelling of the divine persons and a key term in Coda's theology.

> his being distinct from the Creator, but – *co-originarily* – also from his vocation (actuated in Christ through the Holy Spirit) to be 'one' with and in Him while remaining distinct from Him» (EP, p. 179).

This amounts to a huge affirmation of human freedom, where it mirrors exactly the trinitarian not-being-in-order-to-be:

> «at the centre of an ontology of charity in a specifically trinitarian perspective is…the person defined *analogically* as perichoretic. But it must be noted that the trinitarian perichoresis, revealed in the paschal event, shows itself to be penetrated by a dynamic "not-being" – the "losing one's own life' for and in the other" that unites together unity and distinction...This relative and relational "not-being" as the dynamic of the gift of self is in some way interior to being – as love-perichoresis – and is actuated as such by freedom» (EP, pp. 180–181).

And the human person's love in freedom underlies our historicity, and also the possibility of our being redeemed from sin is understood as our failure to actualize our capacity for freedom. Coda notes how

> «the ontology of charity seen from a trinitarian perspective, and elaborated in the light of the paschal horizon…shows itself to be the adequate foundation of historicity as the constitutive dimension of creaturely existence, which is open to the possibility of sin and the gratuity of redemption» (EP, p. 181).

> «But the history of freedom which is the human person is open not only to the abstract possibility of negation, but is permeated by it due to its finiteness and especially because of the history of sin, where each single freedom is intertwined with the others, both synchronically and diachronically…The effect of freedom – that "not-being" that is the relative contradiction intrinsic to freedom itself because it is finally resolved in the brute factuality of death as end (in the nothing) of the history of freedom – is assumed into the real analogy of Being that knows only the "not-being" of Love. The death of Christ in this way becomes the end (as fulfilment of being) of the history of freedom» (EP, p. 182).

Finally, Coda concludes, a trinitarian ontology of the human person in perichoretic relationship with the divine pesons is both intrinsically eschatological – its vertical dimension, and also intrinsically ecclesiological or communional – its horizontal dimension:

> «if the created person is analogically perichoretic and as such is historical, he/she can only be defined completely *with* the other persons created in God-Trinity. When the historic interval between the Father's offer of love in Christ through the Spirit is consummated, along with

> each created person's reply of love, then "God will be all in all" (*1Cor* 15,28). So, a trinitarian ontology of the person as perichoretic is radically eschatological insofar as it is radically ecclesiological. And this does not exclude the person's freedom to refuse to become him- or herself in God with the other created persons, since God is the inexpressible Fulness of Love who in Christ crucified has filled every emptiness by calling "non-existence" into being (cf. *Rom* 4,17[9])» (EP, pp. 182–183).

Coda ends his study by repeating his theological anthropology as simultaneously open to the divine and to the human:

> «at the centre of a future trinitarian ontology is the person understood and lived, as analogically perichoretic, that is as reciprocal gift – received and offered in an ever new and ever open unity-in-distinction – of self to God and to the brothers and sisters in ecclesial *koinonia*» (EP, p. 192).

It's probably no harm to conclude this theological reflection with a reminder of remarks Eric Voegelin made, again from a strictly philosophical perspective during his Hitler and the Germans lectures, where, perhaps surprisingly, he refers to the centrality of a trinitarian understanding of human history:

> «in the insight into the nature of man's existence under God there are developments from relatively compact conceptions of this order of existence of individual men and of society under God to the highly differentiated ones. And the unfolding of this problem of existence under God as the central problem of order, that is history. Please note this definition; it is very carefully considered. The problem of history lies here, not anywhere else. So there is history insofar as the presence under God and the knowledge of such presence under God runs through phases of compactness and differentiation.
> In this historical process of increasing transparency for the central problem of order, Christianity takes a special place, insofar as in it, through the symbolism of the incarnation, the presence of God in man in society and in history is thoroughly formulated. That happened nowhere else. Only in terms of this problematic of incarnation, which then had as a consequence the whole problematic of the Trinity and the dogma of the Trinity, is it unequivocally said what man is. That is to say, man is man insofar as he is *imago Dei*, and insofar as he is *imago Dei* are all men equal as participating in the reality of God and thus united with God, who historically has become flesh in the process of history. This is precisely what is characteristic of Christianity, its unique achievement. Every attempt to withdraw from this achievement is a regression in dif-

9) «…God, who gives life to the dead and calls the things that do not exist [*ta me onta*] into existence [*ós onta*]».

> ferentiation and an attempt to reintroduce more compact ideas of the existence of man and of his order»[10].

However, it's in the second of his books, on Hegel, that this specifically historic dimension in Coda's application of the inner dynamics of trinitarian theology takes place.

II. Il negativo e la trinità: Ipotesi su Hegel [=NT]

Coda's Hegel book is prefaced by two quotations highlighting Hegel's view of the centrality both of the death of Christ and of the Trinity for an understanding of history:

> The death of Christ is the central point around which everything hinges (*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*).
>
> Whoever does not know that God is trinity, knows nothing of Christianity. This new principle is the axis around which the history of the world turns (*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*).

We'll touch on five topics in Coda's examination of Hegel, 1) intersubjectity and negation; 2) the Christian origins of Hegel's *Denkform*, as Coda calls it, and its unfulfilled promise; 3) the specifically Christian understanding of person in trinitarian thought; 4) Hegelian negation and its Christian equivalent in the 'not' of love, sin as unlove; 5) a trinitarian humanism?

Intersubjectivity and negation

In his section on "The Dialectic of Recognition, Ethicity and Language" (NT, 140ff), Coda writes:

> «what characterizes Hegelian metaphysics: in the first place it is a metaphysics of intersubjectivity, that is, of *being in relation*» (p. 142).
>
> «In the *Ph.G*, with a more precise notion of *Geist*, he attempts a deeper and more attentive phenomenology of intersubjectivity itself» (p. 143).

10) E. Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans: Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, *Vol. 31*, trs., eds., Detlev Clemens & Brendan Purcell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), pp. 204–05. His remarks on the rejection by the Greek Fathers of Eusebius' attempt at a monotheistic foundation for an imperial politics can be found in his *The New Science of Politics*, in *Modernity Without Restraint: Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, *Vol. 5*, ed. Manfred Henningsen (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), pp. 170–74.

> «Negation, then, is the soul of the process of reciprocal recognition… to rediscover its unity-identity each selfconsciousness has to project itself outside of itself, that is, put into play its own life; on the other hand it has also to negate the otherness pure and simple of the other's selfconsciousness to lead it to itself» (p. 145).

Which, he continues, requires

> «a paradoxical necessity: impelled to death (of self and of the other) every selfconsciousness sees the failure of its own objective at the moment in which it actuates the factual negation of the other or succumbs to the same negation on the part of the other» (NT, p. 145).

Commenting on the Master/Slave relationship in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Coda says:

> «it seems important to note, even if only by the way, that it is not difficult to recognize in this Hegelian phrase [ie., where Hegel speaks of how true recognition is lacking in the relation between the slave and the master, since it is unilateral and unequal] an echo of the evangelical love of the others "as" oneself» (NT, pp. 146–147).

And he writes of Hegel's remark that «the individual who has not risked his life can well be recognized as a *person*, but has not reached the truth of this recognition as recognition of an independent selfconsciousness that here too one can read between the lines an echo of "he who loses his own life will find it"» (NT, p. 147).

Christian origin of Hegelian Denkform and its unfulfilled promise

Coda's study has focused not on all of Hegel's work, but on those moments which brought his *Denkform* most clearly into view. Having made his criticisms of its limitations in the fourth chapter, the final chapter takes on a twofold task: [a] to ask why Hegel's thought has had such influence on 19th and 20th century philosophy and theology – in terms of the truth underlying the ambiguity of his *Denkform*, and [b] to outline an initial reply to the hidden requirements which can be discerned in the *Denkform* (NT, p. 348).

[a] Regarding what Coda signals as Hegel and his (and our) time: the phenomenology of a decisive historical emergency, he writes:

> «Hegel wanted to understand Christianity in the light of modern culture and society and wanted to understand the modern world […] in the light of Christianity […]Why did Hegel – it is Pannenberg […] who notes this – recognize in [Christianity], and in particular in its central event (the Incarnation of the Word, his death on the cross and his resurrection) "a positive value as the adequate expression of the change

produced in universal history", particularly in terms of the Christological event?» (NT, p. 350).

> «What Hegel, then, wishes to overcome is dualism […] in order to re-establish the fullness of truth and the historical effectiveness of the Christian principle of reconciliation between God and man in Christ» (NT, p. 351).

For Coda, «Hegel […] has keenly grasped the exigence of *his* time, but if we wish, of *our* time» (NT, p. 353):

> «Hegel's first, and more authentic influence in fact has been to have clarified the basic exigence of modern culture: the reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) with Christianity as key to a renewed theoretic and socio-political reconciliation based on the Christological principle of unity in freedom, that is, in the end, on the "Trinitarian" principle» (NT, p. 354).

[b] On what Coda sees as "Hegel and Christianity: a genial intuition and a fatal betrayal", he comments:

> «the fundamental fact is that, for Hegel, Christian revelation remains the horizon for the understanding and development of Western culture, along with being the fulfilment of the religious journey of the whole of humanity (cf. the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*)» (NT, p. 356).

Expanding this, Coda sees Hegel's genial intuition as his grasp, from a logical and ontological viewpoint of what's specific to Christian revelation:

> «looking at Christ, and at the crucified Christ, he has defined "the speculative intuition" of love that by negating itself in the other is preserved, or – that is the same thing in different words – of love capable of uniting the "opposites" of God and the world, the infinite and the finite, the I and the you: the principle […] of unity in freedom-diversity» (NT, pp. 356–357).

Hegel's strong focus «on trinaritarity as form of God's existence, and so also by participation, as form of created existence – rests on the centrality of the moment of the *not*, of the negation of self out of love, in relation to otherness». So, for Coda, Hegel has grasped what von Balthasar has called the specific form (*Gestalt*) of Christian revelation (cf. NT, p. 359).

Nonetheless, there are limits to Hegel's understanding: Coda speaks of Hegel's "haste" in his approach to Christian revelation:

> «without a constant, persevering and humble deepening of his appreciation, an attitude of genuine listening: the Christian truth is above all a You who meets me and an invitation» (NT, p. 362).

And notes how from early on in his career, Hegel preferred to use *Geist* rather than *Liebe*. Coda quotes Wolfhart Pannenberg on how Hegel «was not aware of the structural difference between the idea of love and the monological structure of self-consciousness» (NT, p. 363). What's involved is

> «a betrayal of the originary and original personalistic-communional "form" of Christian revelation in an objectively impersonal schema, and thus a betrayal of the Christian principle of unity in freedom» (NT, p. 363).

Coda also writes of Hegel's

> «unclear distinction between God and history – especially between the eternal generation of the Word and creation (one of the crucial points in Hegelian speculation), and also that between the individual in society and the whole – due to the intrinsically impersonal and monological style of the Hegelian *Denkform*» (NT, p. 367).

The specifically Christian concept of the person at the centre of trinitarian thought

Coda moves on to the actual content of the Hegelian *Denkform*, pointing out that what's specific to it is

> «its having developed the intrinsically trinitarian structure, or of unity in freedom, of the Christian mystery. Its betrayal is to have reduced what is specifically personalistic-communional in this structure to the iron necessity of the absolute spirit's monologue with itself […] the Hegelian forgetfulness of the genuine Christian concept of the *person*» (NT, pp. 367–368).

Asking if there's a specifically Christian notion of the person, Coda – in disagreement with, for example, Karl Barth and Karl Rahner – sees the persons of the Trinity not only in terms of distinctly subsisting subjects, but also, «co-originarily, their constitutive relationality towards the other. Did not Thomas speak already of the divine Person as *subsistens relativum* or *relatio subsistens*?» (p. 371). In this context, Coda quotes the 11th Council of Toledo, 675 AD:

> «*Quod Pater est, non ad se, sed ad Filium est; et quod Filus est, non ad se, sed at Patrem est; similiter et Spiritus Sanctus non ad se, sed ad Patrem et Filium relative refertur: in eo quod Spiritus Patris et Filii praedicatur*» (NT, p. 371n31).

He continues on the following page:

> «God is One and Triune, because his existence is constitutively tripersonal; and on the other hand, the mystery of the divine Person is included

specifically in the mystery of the intrinsic trinitarity of divine existence!» (p. 372).

Coda agrees with von Balthasar that the notion of subsistent relation was not formulated by classic Greek thought, which proved inadequate for expressing the radically interpersonal dynamic of the Christian event (NT, p. 374). He goes on to quote Canadian theologian Jean Galot who makes the point that if the formal constitution of the person in God is relation, then relation should also be constitutive of the human person created in the image and likeness of God (NT, p. 374).

However, Coda goes on to note:

> «what Hegel adverted to deeply and effectively and incisively expressed is that dialectic of the self-realization of the subject by which he is himself only in relation with another, a relation that then becomes constitutive of his existence as a subject, and for the unfolding by which he is enabled radically and freely to put into play his own specific existence (up to the point of being in danger of death). We have noted, in the Hegelian phenomenology, the evangelical 'losing one's life in order to find it» (NT, p. 376).

Further on, he writes that

> «Moreover, Hegel […] was the first in the context of modern thought to decisively advert to the necessity of understanding the face of God and the vocation of man in a trinitarian way» (NT, p. 384).

Hegelian negative, with its Christian equivalent as the 'not' of love and sin as unlove

Coda recognizes Hegel's grasp of «the centrality of the moment of *non-existence* – in biblical terms of the *kenosis* – in the event of God's self-revelation» (NT, p. 387). He goes on, «what is specific in his speculation on the negative is formally in his never thinking of not-being as a contradictory alternative or in each case external to being, but in having introjected it into being as the condition of the possibility of its immanent trinitarian structure» (NT, p. 388).

He quotes Lutheran theologian Ernst Jüngel on this insight of Hegel's:

> «Hegel has conceived the trinitarian dogma as an explication of the meaning of the death of Jesus. The philosophy of religion developed by Hegel represents…a culminating point from the viewpoint of the *history of theology*, to the extent that here the *theologia crucis* and the doctrine of the Trinity reciprocally stimulate and ground each other» (NT, p. 392).

Expanding this, Coda says:

> «if Christ crucified and risen reveals the trinitarian mystery to us, this is because, in the abyss of the emptying out represented by the death on the cross, He reveals the deepest mystery of the being-Person of the divine Persons. This also comes to mean – reciprocally – that the mystery of the being-Person of the divine Persons lies in their mysterious *not-being* of love» (NT, p. 397).

Commenting on Christ's giving of his life on the cross, and his experience of being forsaken by the Father (cf. *Mk* 15,34; *Mt* 17,46), Coda writes:

> «it is in fact the Word become flesh who "loses" himself, who "is emptied" of self (the *ekénosen eautón* of *Phil* 2,7), and precisely through this he "rediscovers" himself in full unity with the Father, in the sanctifying power of the Spirit – and gives salvation to men.
> From an evangelical perspective, particularly Johannine, the resurrection in this sense is the exact correspondence and fruit of the crucifixion: the Crucified One *is* the Risen One, and the Risen One *is* the Crucified One – this identity contains the historic-salvific "definition" of the mystery of the divine Person of the incarnate Word […] In the coordinates of history and of the creaturehood assumed by the Word, the moment of the forsakenness and death of the crucified Christ reveals to us…the deepest secret of the divine life: that moment of "death", of *not-being* in love that each divine Person lives in being all with, through, in the Other two, in what the Greek Fathers called the perichoresis or mutual indwelling of the Three in the Unity of divine Being as Love. It is only in the dynamism of this perichoresis, intrinsically interpenetrated by a moment of *not-being* that we are shown the meaning of the deep identity of the divine Persons St Thomas called *relationes subsistentes*» (NT, pp. 398–99).

Coda continues:

> «statically, *not-being* expresses to me the mystery of unity in distinction; dynamically not-being expresses to me the deepest act of the being of the divine Persons. Each divine Person, precisely *because he is not, is*: because he is not a subsistence closed in himself, but a subsistence that is gift of self without remainder (and thus, in some way, renouncing self, he "is not"), precisely because of this he is himself, he is a divine Person in unity-distinction with the other divine persons, in the unity-unicity of divine Being as Love» (NT, p. 402).

Coda goes on to reflect on the role of sin in all of this, as not-being, which he differentiates from Hegel's intensification of the negative of difference:

> «on the other hand, in the Christian vision, the *not-being* of sin is the negation of the created subject's vocation to live in a relationship of unity-distinction with God: and therefore in the first place to exi-

> stentially respect the ontological structure of the "not" of distinction between God and man; and in the second place to live the freedom of the authentic vocation of the person to lose his or herself […] in order to find him or herself "outside self" in God, and in Him, in communion with the brothers. The not-being of sin, more precisely, is the "no!" to the human person's vocation to love as the fullness of their own being, that is, to the vocation to "not-being" in love in order authentically to be» (NT, p. 407).

To deepen this reflection on the "no!" of sin, what he sees as in fact *not-being* in the negative sense, which drives the created subject in the direction of his or her non-realization,

> «we must also look at Christ crucified and forsaken. In fact, on the cross he not only brings to completion …the dynamism of the created person, but takes on himself the consequences of sin; even more, by assuming "sinful flesh" (cf. *Rom* 8,3), He himself becomes since, accursed, as St Paul paradoxically describes it (cf. *2Cor* 5,21; *Gal* 3,13), and as such feels "forsaken by the Father" […]in order to definitively conquer the sin of humanity and recall the negative *not-being* of sin to the being of love.
> In this specific sense, the "not" of the distinction and love between the Father and the Son in the Spirit is not only the archetype of the unity in distinction between the Creator and the creature, but also the condition of the possibility of redemption from sin» (NT, pp. 407–408).

In this regard, he quotes an interesting comment from the International Theological Commission: «however far sinful man is from God, this is always less than the distance of the Son from the Father in his kenotic emptying […] and in the misery of the "forsakenness"» (NT, p. 408).

The necessity of a trinitarian humanism

This is the title of the last subsection in the book, which Coda sees as the "final task" for fulfilling the unfulfilled Hegelian promise. Certainly Hegel tried to apply his *Denkform* to the ethical-political field, and in 1987 Coda saw that application both in liberal and Marxist regimes, along with the central role of intersubjectivity in contemporary thought, even if in the limited and deformed character it has received from Hegel (NT, p. 418):

> «all this has still to be transformed into a precise challenge and a great task for contemporary thought: to project an integral humanism, authentically Christian, which […] could be called a *trinitarian humanism*, which could be seen as a positive reply to the ideological proposals whose roots can be found in Hegelian thought: first of among them, Marxism» (NT, p. 418).

Coda is looking for a different relation between the Transcendent and history than what for him lies at the basis of Hegelian reflection. Such a different approach, rather than counterposing theocentrism and anthropocentrism, would seek «to join them together in human history» (NT, p. 419).

> «As a result, "intersubjective relationships are forged on the model of trinitarian relationships", and human beings will see that they are called to realize God's integral plan for humanity: "as you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they too be one in us" (*Jn* 17,21)» (p. 419).

Thus they will be not only one in God, «but also genuinely free» (NT, p. 419). He concludes by suggesting a trinitarian model of unity in distinction for relationships between different social classes, societies, states, cultures and religions, which would fulfil «the trinitarian vocation of history» which would adequately respond to Hegel's project in terms of what Paul VI called a "civilization of love" (NT, p. 421).

III. Il logos e il nulla: Trinità religioni mistica [=LN]

> «For it is the Christ of the Gospel of John who says of himself: "before Abraham was, I am" (8:58); and it is Thomas Aquinas who considers the Christ to be the head of the *corpus mysticum* that embraces, not only Christians, but all mankind from the creation of the world to its end. In practice this means that one has to recognize, and make intelligible, the presence of Christ in a Babylonian hymn, or a Taoist speculation, or a Platonic dialogue, just as much as in a Gospel»[11].

While Coda would not go as far as Voegelin's "just as much" in the above comment, both at an experiential level his public engagement in interreligious dialogue over more than quarter of a century[12], and at a theological level, writings like *Il Logos e il nulla* have led him to carry out the very quest Voegelin found lacking 'in theologians and philosophers «in their work on the process of revelatory experiences in history»[13].

And particularly in LN, he expands the basic kenotic-trinitarian context he began with in EP and developed in wrestling with Hegel in NT, to a heuristic for reaching out to all of humanity. Voegelin explored Xenophanes' experience of «the "one god who is the greatest" as a common god for all men, correlative

11) E. Voegelin, *Response to Professor Altizer's "A New History and New but Ancient God?"* in: *Published Essays 1966 – 1985*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp. 292–303, at p. 294.
12) Cf. his *Nella Moschea di Malcolm X* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1997; *Il tappeto del Sufi: Viaggio in Iran tra gli Ayatollah* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1998); *L'amore di Dio è piu grande del nostro cuore: Il dialogo interreligioso* (Casale Monferrato, AL: Piemme, 2000).
13) Id., *Response to Professor Altizer*, p. 294.

to the identical humanity in all human beings»[14]. Similarly, Coda's exploration of the experience of the trinitarian God is inseparable from his consciousness of the whole of humanity's kenotic relationship to that God. There can be no such thing as a "vertical" relationship with that God without a "horizontal" relationship with all humanity which exists in God.

Coda is well aware of the need for a theology of history:

> «the question of the theology of history as a natural and necessary presupposition and context of a relevant understanding and actualization of the identity and mission of the Church is, with all probability, one of the more important acquisitions of Vatican II» (LN, p. 90n177).

And it's interesting to see him go about the elaboration of such a theology of history with a heuristic framework – while I believe it is enormously deepened by its kenotic element – in a way that seems recognizably equivalent to Voegelin's own dynamic context of "Question-Mystery" as he formulated it in his *The Ecumenic Age*[15]. This leads to our first topic from LN.

"Mysticism-revelation" as equivalent to Voegelin's question-mystery

In LN, for Coda "revelation" refers to what's from God, while "mysticism" (*la mistica*) has to do with what's occurring on the human side in the divine-human encounter. «Revelation […] focuses on the movement of God towards the creature: but it cannot be defined as revelation except in the moment in which God's self-manifestation/self-giving is received by the human person». Similarly with mysticism, which involves the ascetic preparation of the creature for God's illuminative and transformative action, «but it too becomes what it is only in the movement where God freely offers himself to human knowledge and freedom» (LN, p. 9).

And he notes that the revelation/mysticism encounter structures the rest of the inquiry (LN, p. 9). The first part of the book deals with revelation in general as a universal religious experience, in the light of the singularity of Christian revelation, and the third part with a historical and theoretical examination of mysticism, including its postmodern context. The central part of the book focuses on the event of Jesus Christ and the revelation/experience of the Trinity in the context of contemporary pluralism. (LN, p. 10).

The book's title is *Logos and Nothingness*, where "logos" in the Old Testament is the word of revelation, a meaning which is heightened in the New Testament, where that Word is God who became flesh. "Nothingness" is the quality in the seeker becoming nothing to encounter the divine, but also of Him who

14) Id., *The World of the Polis, Order and History, Vol. 2* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 178.
15) Id., *The Ecumenic Age, Order and History, Vol. 4* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 316ff.

becomes Nothing to be experienced by creation. In Christian revelation, Jesus is not only the definitive word of God, but he who "empties" himself as a fulfilment of revelation. In Him, Logos and Nothing coincide. The Word made Man, giving all of himself, including God in himself, reveals the Agape that is God, so he's the All and Nothing of Love. For Coda, this is the basis for a theological understanding of religious pluralism, a spiritual key for the dialogue of encounter between religions. Living out this experienced nothingness, Christianity, instead of hindering, is the means by which such open interreligious dialogue can take place (LN, p. 11).

Coda asks if we're moving towards a new epoch, and refers to the opening remarks of John Paul II's *Fides et ratio*, where he says of the great and perennial questions characterizing human existence throughout history:

> «we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the preaching of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle» (§1); in such a way that «the answers which gradually emerge are set within a horizon which reveals how the different human cultures are complementary» (§3, quoted in LN, p. 124).

Coda continues:

> «today it seems as if we are in the presence of something new, which in the future could perhaps be understood as the beginning of a new epoch, which does not contradict the preceding history of humanity, in whose various modes were present the illuminating action of the Spirit of God, but which impels us, on the basis of the journey already made, towards an important qualitative leap. The different religious identities, starting with those on the trunk of Abrahamic monotheism, are entering into relation with each other. They are moving from an exclusivist conception of the revelation of God (God revealing himself to us, excluding the others) to a timidly relational one (the God who is for me is also for the others, precisely because he is the One God)» (LN, p. 124).

He notes a double movement

> «coming to characterize the principal religious traditions, at least among their significant prophetic avant-garde: a movement backwards to rediscover the inspiration of God that is at their origin; and a movement forward in their opening to a "new" advent of God[…]that cannot but involve the other religions, through their experience of new relationships reciprocally agreed upon, in the common service of the one human family and in faithfulness to the divine plan of salvation» (LN, p. 124).

Again he quotes John Paul II, speaking in April 1999 on the interaction between divine invitation and human response:

> «in interreligious dialogue it is not a matter of abdicating the message, but *of responding to a divine appeal*, because the exchange and sharing lead to a mutual witness of each one's religious vision, a deeper knowledge of the respective convictions and a shared understanding of fundamental values» (LN, pp. 124–125)[16].

16) Although it's a long quotation, from the Address of John Paul II to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Alice Springs, 29 November 1986), I think this fleshes out what precisely John Paul II means in the context of interreligious dialogue Coda is discussing:
«at the beginning of time, as God's Spirit moved over the waters, he began to communicate something of his goodness and beauty to all creation. When God then created man and woman, he gave them the good things of the earth for their use and benefit; and he put into their hearts abilities and powers, which were his gifts. And to all human beings throughout the ages God has given a desire for himself, a desire which different cultures have tried to express in their own ways…
But for thousands of years you have lived in this land and fashioned a culture that endures to this day. And during all this time, the Spirit of God has been with you. Your "Dreaming", which influences your lives so strongly that, no matter what happens, you remain for ever people of your culture, is your only way of touching the mystery of God's Spirit in you and in creation. You must keep your striving for God and hold on to it in your lives…
The rock paintings and the discovered evidence of your ancient tools and implements indicate the presence of your age-old culture and prove your ancient occupancy of this land.
Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost…
For thousands of years this culture of yours was free to grow without interference by people from other places. You lived your lives in spiritual closeness to the land, with its animals, birds, fishes, waterholes, rivers, hills and mountains. Through your closeness to the land you touched the sacredness of man's relationship with God, for the land was the proof of a power in life greater than yourselves…
Some of the stories from your Dreamtime legends speak powerfully of the great mysteries of human life, its frailty, its need for help, its closeness to spiritual powers and the value of the human person. They are not unlike some of the great inspired lessons from the people among whom Jesus himself was born. It is wonderful to see how people, as they accept the Gospel of Jesus, find points of agreement between their own traditions and those of Jesus and his people…
Take heart from the fact that many of your languages are still spoken and that you still possess your ancient culture. You have kept your sense of brotherhood. If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burned; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn. The time for this rebirth is now! …
The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human and, when necessary, it purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God».

Theology of history as human-divine kenotic relationship

In a section on the singularity of Jesus Christ in the light of the paschal event, Coda notes how the Nicene emphasis on Christ's *homoousias* with the Father resulted in putting in the shade his *homoousias* with man. Nonetheless, from the perspective of the incarnation, creation understood as a whole «in its diachronic development and in its synchronic convergence, is *Christiform* or, to use Teilhard's phrase, *Christofinalized*» (LN, p. 217). He asks how to interpret this correctly, and answers:

> «the event of Jesus Christ – both his forsakenness on the cross and his death reveal this *eis telos* (to the end) – it is an event of relation…*It is in the intertwining of this double relationality* [i.e., the free relation of love/devotion between the Father and the Son, both the eternal Son and in him the multitude of adopted sons, and consequently, in the relation between Christ and the brothers and sisters, in and through him, between them in the world] that creation finds the space of its meaning and its destiny» (LN, p. 217).
>
> Christ, then, is the personal and personalizing event of the universal *enosis* between human persons in Him and, through Him, in the Father. «As you, Father, are in in me and I in you, may they too be in us…I in them and you in me, so that they may become perfectly one» (*Jn* 17,21-23). Paschal soteriology unfolds the relational ontology of freedom as reciprocal *agape* in which God and his many sons, in the only-begotten Son, are called to become one in order for each one to be him- or herself» (LN, p. 217f.).

So we should see a theology of history primarily in terms of relation – between the Trinity and each human person, as a unique incarnate freedom, and also between the Trinity and the communion of persons in society. That communion must expand out to the relation to earlier communions of persons in society, and in open anticipation to those human inidividuals and societies to come. It's in this light that the contemporary work both of philosophy and theology of history is a continuous remembering of the human-divine kenotic relationship, along with of course the many retreats and withdrawals from it. This is where an understanding of what Coda speaks of as 'the ontology of evil' becomes relevant.

The Crucified/Forsaken One and the ontology of evil (LN, 218)

Since he explains this notion both of the refusal to love and how in Jesus forsaken, that very refusal can be transcended in an overcoming of unlove, I'll leave Coda's discussion to speak for itself:

«it is not by speculating "a priori" on the self-origination of the Absolute that the "a posteriori" meaning of the Cross of Christ can be understood in a Schellingian way; rather, it is by letting ourselves be grasped by the unheard of freedom of love expressed in the forsakenness of Christ that we are able to contemplate, in the *metanoia* of intellectual faith, the mystery hidden in God.

Christ, in the unity of his person as Son of God made man, experiences not only the suffering of the innocent, but the contradiction of the advent of the kingdom of God that he has announced and realized…. He experiences, in himself and through himself, the "death of God". *In himself*: because he is Son of God (God the Son) who dies tragically. *Through himself*: because the Father leaves him die like that. Now, if it is true that He is Son of God made man, that means Christ lives absolute meaninglessness: and he gives it meaning, because he lives it in faith as love. Revealing in Himself – through the resurrection, work of the Father in the power of the Spirit – that God makes the dead to love and calls into existence what is not (cf. *Rm* 4,17). This happens… in the originary and permanent act of creation through which the reality other than God comes into existence, for which there is the well-known formula *creation ex nihilo*.

But the fullness of truth – through which Paul can say that from the paschal event there flows the *kaine ktisis* (the new creation) – is to be found in the unheard of fact that God can recreate the freedom of love where it has been undermined by failure and sin, in and through the freedom of man, the being of the "first" creation: it had blocked off transcendence towards the fullness of the divine plan. Now, instead, He freely leads it towards its fulfilment.

But, let us consider for a moment how Forsakenness is the key to all of this. Certainly, on the one hand, everything depends on God's salvific act […].

However, this requires further clarification, and indeed starting from the centre of the paschal event of freedom. In the sense that this effectiveness is mediated only and always by human freedom: of Jesus Christ and, in reference to Him, of all. Only God can realize the new creation in and through Christ crucified: I could not become a new creature of myself, without the action of Christ in me. But God would not operate as God in me, uniting me to Christ, without my freedom. The Forsakenness, then, is the womb of the new creation […].

In Jesus crucified and forsaken, sin, death, the not being towards which freedom is destined in its aversion from God, are overcome insofar as assumed by the Son of God. But they are thus revealed eschatologically…in their reality: insofar as the extreme and definitive event of the love of Christ can be rejected. Which indicates the paradoxical nature of evil faced with its resolution by the grace of Jesus crucified and forsaken: it has a reality, and a tragic one, but it is eschatologically reduced to unreality by God, because it does not pass, through the

> Cross of Christ, into the full and definitive Reality of God, "all in all"»[17] (LN, pp. 219–221).

Coda doesn't explicitly deploy his key paradigm of human participation in trinitarian kenosis to interreligious and intercultural dialogue from the viewpoint of a theology of history faced with the question of power and revolution at the beginning of the third millennium. Still, we must take seriously Voegelin's expansion of Plato's dictum "society is man written large" with his own "History is Christ written large"[18]. And Coda's intrinsically relational understanding of history means that whenever we actualize our capacity for self-sacrificing love, we are overturning the depersonalizing forces of power and merely external revolution. It's interesting how frequently Voegelin returned to Augustine's saying, that "they begin to leave who begin to love", concluding his essay on "Eternal Being in Time" with the comment: «the Exodus in the sense of *incipit exire qui incipit amare* is the classical formulation of the substantive principle of a philosophy of history»[19]. So that, sometimes even for Voegelin, the focus for a philosophy of history is on love. Then every human society, in its difference – certainly requiring both individual and social *metanoia* in the specific participation in the experienced nothingness of the forsaken Jesus that Coda has been speaking of – belongs to the one human family, which in its oneness and difference is a created image of the interpersonal kenotic communion of the Trinity. And in that truly Divine-Human Comedy lies the *trasumanar* or transhumanizing of humanity in time into eternity that Dante gave us a language for.

We'll next refer to just one applications of this kenotic theology of history, to contemporary politics.

IV. Political fraternity and Trinitarian kenosis

In a collection entitled *The Forgotten Principle: Fraternity in Contemporary Political Reflection*, Coda contributed "Towards a Theological Foundation for a Political Category of Fraternity" [here TF]. It's preceded by Antonio Baggio's exploration of "The Idea of 'Fraternity' among Two Revolutions: Paris 1789–Haiti 1791"[20] which examines the vicissitudes of the "liberty, equality, fraternity" triad during the French Revolution, with a certain hollowness exposed by the refusal of

17) Coda in a footnote here remarks that «the definition of evil (hell) as "reality of unreality" is Chiara Lubich's. But Simone Weil too defines hell as "the nothingness that has the pretence and gives the illusion, of being"» (LN, p. 221n130).
18) E. Voegelin, *Immortality: Experience and Symbol*, in: *Published Essays 1966–1985*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp. 52–94, at p. 78.
19) Id., *Eternal Being in Time*, in: *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, ed. David Walsh (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), pp. 312–37, at p. 337.
20) A.M. Baggio, *L'idea di "fraternità" tra due Rivoluzioni: Parigi 1789–Haiti 1791: Piste di ricerca per una comprensione della fraternità come categoria politica*; and P. Coda, *Per una fondazione teologica della categoria politica della fraternità*, in: A.M. Baggio, ed., *Il principio dimenticato: La fraternità nella riflessione politologica contemporanea* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2007), pp. 25–56; pp. 101– 08.

Revolutionary France to concede that these values might be enjoyed by the African slave population of Haiti.

Coda indicates the clearly Christian origins of the political notion of fraternity, including the frequent use of *adelphos* (brother) for the disciples of Christ, with the substantive, *adelphotes* (brotherhood – cf. *IPt* 2,17; 5,9), «not referring to an ideal to achieve but to a reality acquired» (TF, p. 101). He notes how, in the Gospels, «the root of fraternity is […] indicated in […] the universal fatherhood of God […] since the love of God, [when] received […] becomes the most formidable agent of transformation in [humans'] existence and relationships with the other» (TF, p. 102).

In the essay preceding Coda's in *The Forgotten Principle*, "Fraternity: The Reason for its Eclipse", Rocco Pezzimenti, in his conclusion notes why, of the three principles proclaimed by the French revolution, fraternity has been the hardest to achieve actualization: «because it is the one that costs the most»[21].

So it's not surprising that Coda entitles a section of his essay, "The cross: foundation of fraternity" (TF, p. 103). He sees Jesus on the cross identifying both with the just brother Abel, but also with Cain, one who is "outside the plan of God", with the accursed of Deuteronomy 21,23: «cursed be the one who hangs from the wood» (TF, p. 103). Coda notes in Jesus' forsakenness the overcoming of every barrier, and finds this expressed in Ephesians, «which sees in Jesus the reconciler, even more, peace itself personified», since he has made Jews and Gentiles «both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh» the cause of enmity, «that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two» (*Eph* 2,14–15). As a result, no one can regard themselves as strangers or simply guests, but fellow-citizens (*sym-polites*) and of the household (*oikeíos*) of God (*Eph* 2,19) (TF, pp. 103–04). Coda considers this as leading to the rich interrelationship of universal humanity both with itself and with the Triune God:

> «now, in Christ, the relation of fraternity – of communion, that is, and of distinction – emerges as the grammar of human relationship in all its universal extension…Not for nothing does Jesus' last prayer to the Father in the Gospel of John contain the meaning and aim of his passion and death: "Father, that *all* may be *one*, even as your, Father are in me, and I in you" (*Jn* 17,21)» (TF, p. 104).

Then Coda examines three sociopolitical consequences of Christian fraternity:

> «Paul articulates the first, in his letter to the Galatians, where, on the basis of the event of Jesus, he declares: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal* 3, 28)».

For Coda, Paul sees Christian fraternity as overcoming the three separations visible in his own time – religious, social, and anthropological. Paul isn't saying

21) R. Pezzimenti, *Fraternità: il perché di una eclissi*, in Baggio, *Il principio dimenticato*, pp. 57–77, at p. 75.

they are abolished, rather that what's negative in them, through fraternity, can be turned into human reciprocity (TF, p. 105).

The second consequence for Coda is that Jesus forsaken alone can articulate an authentic praxis of fraternity: sharing with whoever in whatever way is emarginated and excluded:

> «expressions like "blessed are the poor…" and "whatever you did to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" are not generic expressions. Rather, they indicate that fraternity begins only *from below*, *from making oneself one* with the least, because that's where Christ placed himself» (TF, p. 105)[22].

A third consequence is that Jesus in his forsakenness

> «overcomes forever the category of the enemy in the political definition of interhuman relationships…Jesus – there is no reason to undervalue this – speaks positively of *agape* towards enemies: which means that the love he preaches is not a mere sentiment…but a determination of freedom which decides to wish well to the other, even to the enemy».

An instance of this third application is of course the notion of just war in its Christian version, first emerging in St Augustine, who asked how should the enemy be treated, and replied that since each enemy was still a brother in Christ, they could not be hated. In a later secularized version, in terms of respect for each enemy combatant, this was adopted for international law by jurists like Grotius[23].

Coda concludes by noting that Christ's salvation isn't only for individuals but also for societies. Each individual is open to dialogue with the other, in quest of truth and justice as an expression of the fraternity grounded in Christ's *agápe*: «this makes clear to the believer's conscience the radical lie/injustice […] of every attempt at integrism or millenarianism». The social no less than the individual consequence of Christian fraternity for Coda derives from

> «the event of Christ crucified and risen. So it's only by the extreme openness required by allowing the other to live in me and the extreme outgoingness required for me to live in the other that can be realized Jesus promise that "where two or three are gathered in my name, the-

22) I'm reminded here of Annette Flynn's illuminating discussion, where she writes of one of Jorge Borges' last poems, "Cristo en la cruz", he sees Christ hanging in the place of the good thief: «With "Cristo en la cruz" there seems to occur a slippage from saviour (*Cristo en el medio*) to saved (*el tercero*, the good thief)». (*The Quest for God in the Work of Borges*. Continuum: London, 2009, p. 170). Borges somehow experienced in Jesus' forsakenness his identification with all who were excluded, including those like Borges himself, who desired, but seemed to lack, faith.

23) Cf. J.T. Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

> re I am in the midst of them" (*Mt* 18,20). […] Through this, the quality of the relationship of fraternity lived in Christ can have a real analogy that is no less than what the Son lives with the Father in the Spirit, and reciprocally» (TF, p. 108).

V. Conclusion

But to return to Wayne's question "can one still speak in any legitimate way of a divine providence in history?", it seems to me that an approach towards history that is genuinely kenotic (recalling Voegelin's calling Herodotus and Thucydides the "tragic historians") must be able to bear the weight of the most horrendous ruptures that have defaced the previous century and continue to debase the first decade of the present one. Manfred Henningsen rightly warns us off focusing exclusively on the Holocaust or those genocides closer to the "West", while ignoring equally horrendous slaughters in Asia and Africa, and suggests using Rudolf Rummel's universal term of "democide"[24].

But since it's the Holocaust I have the most literature on, Hans Jonas' concluding remarks to his "The Concept of God after Auschwitz" come to mind. Jonas contrasts himself to Job, who

> «invokes the fullness of the divine creative power, while mine is the renunciation of that power. And still – strange to say – both are praise: since renunciation is what makes it possible for us to be. This too, it seems to me, is a reply to Job: to know that in him, God himself suffers»[25].

In an essay in a collection entitled *Religions and the Crucified: God's Compassion and Human Suffering in the Monotheistic Religions*, Coda focuses on suffering as the primary locus for human-divine encounter. Like Jonas, he draws on the book of Job as a key reflection, aimed by its author at every human being

24) Cf. M. Henningsen, *Die Regime des Terrors*, «Merkur», 575, February 1997, pp. 105–116. For Henningsen, only individuals with backbone and civil courage, prepared from time to time to carry out actions of civil disobedience and resistance will be required to ground the democracy that for Rummel is the only antidote to democidal terror. It seems to me that those who are not Christians as well as those who are should be able to find in the self-sacrifice required by kenotic existence an ally in this tough democracy Henningsen proposes. George Weigel's *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Barbara von der Heydt's *Candles Behind the Wall: Heroes of the Peaceful Revolution that Shattered Communism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993); Etty Hillesum's *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum*, ed. Klaas A.D. Smelik, tr. Arnold J. Pomerans (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), are only a few of the many accounts of the relationship between belief and resistance, where the believers' priority is to serve others and God rather than themselves, accepting if necessary the loss of their own lives.

25) H. Jonas, *Le concept de Dieu après Auschwitz: Une voix juive* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1994), pp. 39–40.

who has known suffering. He mentions Islamic and Buddhist traditions which also respond to suffering, including Masao Abe of Kyoto (with his writing on the relationship between the "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata"). Coda quotes Simone Weil's remark from *Gravity and Grace*: «the greatness of Christianity comes from the fact that it doesn't seek a supernatural remedy for suffering, but rather a supernatural use for suffering»[26].

To return to Wayne's question, it would seem that the only adequate answer to the question of divine providence in the history of, at its worst the sequence of democides Henningsen lists in his "Die Regime des Terrors" article, has to be the same as that of Jonas – that in our suffering, in the suffering of hundreds of millions of innocent victims of 20th century political murder already spilling over into the 21st, God himself suffers too. Solzhenitsyn, who has borne the weight of 20th century power and revolution on his back, placed just before the key section of the entire *Gulag Archipelago* entitled "The Soul and Barbed Wire", a spiritually strategic passage from St. Paul: «behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed» (*1Cor* 15,51). The forsaken Jesus may just be a glimmer in the direction of a light beyond that pitch darkness of historical evil.

I'll conclude with a fragment of a meditation by Chiara Lubich, on this experience of divine forsakenness as the point of contact with the forsakenness of human history:

> «Jesus is Jesus forsaken […] he redeems when he pours out the divine upon humanity through the wound of his forsakenness, which is the *pupil* of God's eye upon the world: an infinite void through which God looks upon us: the window of God opened upon the world, and the window of humanity through which we see God»[27].

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26) P. Coda, *Linee per una prospettiva sistematica*, in *Il Crocifisso e le religioni: Compassione di Dio e sofferenza dell'uomo nelle religioni monoteiste*, eds. Piero Coda & Mariano Crociata (Rome: Città Nuova, 2002), pp. 347–59, at p. 356.
27) C. Lubich, *The Cry* (London: New City, 2001), p. 136.