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The Human Person and the Structures of Presence and Absence

The notion of presence, of something being before us and revealed to us, underpins our experience of the world. This article delves into the phenomenology of presence in terms of the human person seeking to illuminate the structures of presence and absence in things, ourselves, and our world.

The first part examines the dynamics of presence and absence through intentionalities such as perception, memory, imagination, and anticipation. Furthermore, the article explores three terms of identity in the invariant structure of a phenomenon, the structure of relationships within the limits of the phenomenon, and the unfolding of capacities over time to manifest inherent qualities of action. The article will discuss the “thisness” or “isness” of a person, which is the very act of existence of anything that exists, and how it cannot originate from that phenomenon but must come from God Himself. The unique role of the human person as a transcendent self-ordering free agent, the one to whom presence and absence is revealed and who presences, that is, actively engages in the unfolding of the presence and absence in freedom, highlights the interplay between the human person and the structures of presence and absence.

The second part will continue the examination of the relationship between God and humankind through Exodus 3 and the burning bush to illustrate how God declares Himself as the source of all life and existence, as He is Life and Existence Itself. God is the foundation of all existence and His presence to us, which establishes us both from the start of our lives as well as maintaining our “thisness” at every moment, is a pure free gift for our sake.

The third part will examine St. John of the Cross’s first mode of God’s presence phenomenologically to uncover truths about God’s presence in relation to human persons. We aim to deepen our understanding of presence and

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absence, the implication of both for human experience, and the relationship between each human person and God.

The Human Person and the Dynamics of Presence and Absence

When any phenomenon is present to us as human persons, we turn our awareness to the gradual and temporal unfolding of that presence¹. During the gradual unfolding of the presence of a phenomenon, we perceive sides and aspects of that phenomenon manifested through profiles. These profiles, as temporally distinct subjective experiences of the sides and aspects of a phenomenon, disclose the truth about the unfolding of the phenomenon's capacities over time to manifest the inherent qualities of action from the perspective of the subjective dimension of the human person. These temporally distinct experiences unfold the given presence both in the subjective dimension of the person and the objective dimension through the thing's correlation with the human person.

The objective and subjective dimensions of the human person are essential for understanding presence and absence as a formal structure of existence. When we encounter any phenomenon, we engage in presencing, an intuition directed toward the phenomenon's ultimacy. This presencing correlates the human person and the phenomenon. In the objective dimension, we perceive sides, aspects, and profiles manifesting the phenomenon's identity through these presentations. In the subjective dimension, we experience the unfolding of the phenomenon's presence, moving from initial awareness to deeper understanding and appreciation. This dynamism utilizes various intentionalities, such as perceiving, remembering, and anticipating. For example, structure and words constitute the objective dimension of a conversation. Our understanding of the conversation, any emotional responses to the conversation, and the impact of the conversation on the personal relationship constitute the subjective dimension. *Presencing* is the active and continuous engagement by which a human person unfolds the presence of a phenomenon in a blend of presence and absence through intentionalities like knowing, understanding, remembering, and anticipating.

The human person is given the phenomenon through a blend of presence and absence, which manifests the object's identity. Each unfolding, that is, each empty unfolded intention, attunes the person in presencing the phenomenon. At each stage of unfolding the presence of the ultimacy, the phenomenon is sought as present through penultimate intentions; each intentionality could be different but still related to the ultimacy. Absence here is a positive phenomenon; it is not something lacking there.

While anticipation and imagination share similarities with remembering and perceiving in presencing a phenomenon's ultimacy, both also have differ-

¹ I am indebted to Fr. Robert Sokolowski for his explanation of phenomenological terms in his book *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Many terms used throughout this article are used according to his explanations in that book.

ent senses. When a person remembers, the person has experienced at some point in the past the intuition of the ultimacy and its unfolding presence, but this experience can be subject to subtle distortions due to emotions, lack of power of memory, passage of time, and subsequent experiences. All of these factors can also shape anticipation and imagination, but in a different manner. In this case, they condition the creation of potential future ultimates. For example, a person who anticipates some future event may be conditioned by emotions such as fear or anxiety in a negative manner than what may actually occur once the person intuitively feels the event in actual presence. In the case of imagination, the person may imagine a future that is framed by the person's past experiences that inform the person's aspirations and expectations about what that future could be. Absence is not identical to nothingness; absence positively frames our experience and understanding of the phenomenon.

The attunement to the phenomenon through absence increases and emphasizes aspects of the phenomenon somebody can know through reporting and remembering. Attunement here means what is vague in absence becomes more structured to the person such that the unfolding of the presence has more impact on the person and demonstrates a deeper relationship of the person to the phenomenon. While intentionality causes the person to become attuned to various aspects and capacities of a phenomenon as they are revealed over time, presencing occurs in the process of unfolding of these various aspects and capacities in a blend of presence and absence; in this way, presence makes absence more clear just as absence makes presence more clear.

For example, imagine reading a novel. The words that are on the page are being read as present, while the words already read are remembered as past in your reading, but may or may not be present in the context of the story. Yet, these absent words in reading contribute to the experience of the novel. We anticipate how the plot will unfold as more words are read, and we remember preceding words that give more context to what is presently happening in the plot. This interaction between presence and absence forms our understanding of the novel and how we experience the world being presented to us through words. Through presencing the novel, founded on the associated underlying intentionalities such as seeing and imagining, we become attuned to the writer's style, word choice, and emotional cadence as the elements of the novel and the novel as a whole unfolds over our time reading it.

This analysis brings forth another important point about presence and absence in seeking the ultimacy: the phenomenon-sought-as-present. For example, if we seek the presence of a friend, we call that person on the phone, text the person, or try to remember whether the person is available before doing either of those activities. It would be confusing to express a desire to speak with someone specific and then converse with another person as if they were the intended recipient. In such a scenario, the speaker mistakes one person's

presence for another and misguidedly pursues the wrong person. Any seeking has a correlated point of completion in the sought presence.

The preposition “by” is important for understanding presence and absence in its usage in English in its active sense, such as “I swam more laps in the pool by using fins”, that is, by use of some means, and also in the passive sense of letting go of things and removing obstacles through a free choice and action. Both these active and passive dimensions of presence and absence show that it is only through personal presence correlated to phenomena that this formal structure of existence shines forth. The world is only present to those who can presence the world; a person is present to him or herself and God, but also to other persons who are correlatively presencing that person in a qualitatively greater or lesser degree, such as one person concentrating on a conversation that adds to the person’s intuition of the other while another person may be saying words, but distracted by his or her imagination by thoughts of watching TV after this conversation is over.

Memory as a human power is also important in a discussion of presence and absence. Earlier, when discussing intuition, we saw that the bodily presence of something involves intuition as presencing towards the thing’s ultimacy. However, intuition is not restricted simply to bodily presence. When we remember something, that thing is experienced *as past*. We are not experiencing something else, but seeking and bringing to presence the ultimacy, which here is the thing experienced as past. Yet, while the memory engages the thing as past, this intuition is analogous to the intuition of a filled intention, that is, the actual present phenomenon. The identity of the phenomenon is identical in perception and memory, however the ultimacy of the phenomenon intuited through memory may not always align with the ultimacy of the phenomenon as originally experienced or even the identity of the phenomenon as such. Our recollection of past phenomena is shaped by emotions, subsequent experiences, and the passage of time, potentially leading to subtle distortions and blends in our remembered intuition of the phenomena’s ultimacy.

While the degree of trust or doubt in memory may vary based on the strength or weakness of a person’s memory, memory recalls an absent phenomenon and makes it present to the person. Even though a recollection is an empty intention, it is distinct from other empty intentions, such as anticipation. A person who remembers has experienced the phenomenon, while a person who anticipates has not. The noematic form of the phenomenon *must be* distinct from the noematic form of a sensory perceived phenomenon as present since the noetic activity of memory differs from the noetic activity of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching. The human person, the *ego* or I, freely and correlatively not only revives the phenomenon as past but also who he or she was at the time of presencing that phenomenon. Again, any presence requires the correlation of the person and that which is presenced, and the person as past is brought with the phenomenon as past through the power of memory.

The remembered self and the remembering self are the same person. Therefore, the self may engage in presencing something at a given time, but that underlying intentionality transcends time since memory brings forth what the person was conscious of at some present time as past to the present time. Again, the subjective dimension of the human person (my present self remembers myself as past, perceiving this phenomenon as past) and the objective dimension (the phenomenon as past as perceived by myself as past remembered by my present self) manifest the identity of a single, irreducible human person whose activity in its very unfolding transcends time. Remembering is still as much of an intuition as seeing the phenomenon despite the distinctness of remembering as an empty intention and seeing the sought phenomenon as a filled intention. This act of remembering, therefore, allows us to transcend the limitations of time and access past experiences and aspects of ourselves. Memory, therefore, becomes a witness to the dynamics of absence and presence, where absence is made present, shaping our understanding of current experience.

Despite being revived into the present, the absence of the past phenomenon helps form our present identity and how we respond and relate to the world and ourselves. For example, if I remember that something on my desk is missing, something was present that ought to be but is absent, that object may be missing in its presence, but it affects my present self to immediately search for where the object on my desk may have gone, or who may have removed it, and for what reason somebody removed it.

The human person focuses his or her awareness on the presence and absence of different sides, aspects, and profiles of the phenomenon, either past, present, or future. All our awareness is primarily founded on perception through the intentionalities of sense experience and other intentionalities like remembering and imagining. The human person's understanding of identity arises from a blend of the experience of the phenomenon as present over time, manifesting itself in its invariant structure, the structure of the relationships among sides and aspects of the phenomenon as a blend of various presences and absences, and the unfolding of the phenomenon's capacities over time manifested through inherent qualities of action.

To the first point of the invariant structure of the phenomenon, we engage ourselves in various intendings that blend presence and absence to unfold the identical predicates of each experienced thing of this type. For example, imagine we have a friend named Bill, an apple, and a computer, and place them all next to each other. I point to our mutual friend Bill and see his body, his hair, and his clothes. I notice how tall he is compared to the apple and computer, and I also know that Bill is kind, but I cannot materially see his kindness, but I intend, emptily at this moment and therefore a phenomenon as absent, through memory, Bill's kindness last week at the barbecue, which was present when he graciously stopped eating and went out of his way to pass me the ketchup. However, none of these phenomena are identical to "Bill" but are sides, as-

pects, and profiles of Bill. The same holds true for an apple and a computer. All three phenomena have their own invariant structure despite sharing features with other phenomena we experience over time that manifest an identical invariant structure but do not share an identity (e.g., Bill is not Sarah, despite both being human persons).

To the second point about the structure of the relationships among the sides and aspects and profiles of the phenomenon as a blend of presence and absence within the limits of the phenomenon's identity and category, consider the three phenomena of Bill, an apple, and a computer again. For example, a computer has a structure of relationships such as a processor, a motherboard, RAM, and some method for giving input and receiving output, but a human person has a body with hands, feet, a brain, eyes, ears, a heart, and other parts. A person focuses on the blend of the presence and absence of these parts as perceived to see the patterned structure of these interconnected relationships united by the phenomenon's identity.

To the third point about the unfolding of the phenomenon's capacities over time to manifest the inherent qualities of action, the human person intends aspects of the phenomenon's behavior both in its presence, that is, the appearance and actions performed by the phenomenon in relation to the human person and the world, and absence, that is, any capacities that are not yet fulfilled in the phenomenon and require different conditions or more activity to come to fruition. We must understand that these capacities as absent are real; they are not simply a lack of presence. They are absent in manifestation due to the person not developing them through the proper intentional activity associated with that capacity. Through intuition, we grasp the phenomenon's present qualities and recognize its capacity for change. These capacities, while founded on identity, are not intuited directly as separate entities, but rather understood as integral aspects of the phenomenon revealed through the unfolding of its presence.

The foundation of these three aspects of a phenomenon's identity requires also perceiving that a phenomenon is a phenomenon at all. In other words, we cannot experience identity through the manifold of presentations without the "thereness" or "isness" made present through the noetic activity of perception. This "thereness" or "isness" of the human person is not the invariant structure of the person, nor is it the structure of relationships, nor is it the unfolding of the person's capacities over time to manifest inherent qualities of action, nor is it the identity of the person nor the person as a person. On the other hand, absence is not simply a lack of *esse* or identity since absence gives us the space to focus and emphasize specific aspects of a phenomenon. Furthermore, for the human person and through our transcendent power of how we can intend the structures of things, we can recognize and respond to what is absent, that is, the limitations, and then imagine what can be, bringing this potential future into the present, and transcending present limitations based on absent phenomena. The invariant structure of the person, the structure of the person's relationships as

such, and the person's capacities found their identity. The person's identity unfolds in intentional activity through experiences and relationships with phenomena and also founds the person as such.

The person, as such, is the subjective self, the I, that includes the transcendental ego as the source of responsibility, freedom, self-awareness, and intentionality. Declarations are important for understanding the human person's appropriations in their relationship to the world due to how the person's "articulation that is achieved... is appropriated by the one who achieved it"². Any statement where the person points to the intentionality about him or herself about what is articulated presents the reality as "explicitly appropriated as being articulated, and the one who articulates declares himself, and he declares himself with the appropriate modality"³. Not only is the person present in his or her "thereness" or "isness" and identity, but the person reveals his or her personhood, identity, and the three aspects of identity through appropriation in declarations. Therefore, the person is a transcendent self-ordering free agent, who dynamically and actively participates in influencing their experience of reality by completing or degrading their identity, thus expanding or constricting themselves in correlation with the objective world. The person achieves this through the development of the subjective dimension of self, via intentionalities, appropriations, and actions. The inherent dignity of the human person shines forth in our capacity for self-order and the freedom to effect order or chaos since we can participate in the world on our own terms and be responsible for the outcome.

As a transcendent self-ordering free agent, the human person's active participation requires the gift of "thisness" bestowed by God who is the source of all existence. God, through his creative act, graciously grants to every human person the gifts of self-awareness, intentionality, and freedom, empowering them to presence the world and themselves. God, as a Triune Community of Persons, transcends limitations while remaining present to each human person. The Exodus 3 narrative demonstrates this dynamic of the divine presence and absence when God reveals Himself to Moses through the burning bush. God's conversation with Moses and the burning bush act as a bridge which connects the divine and human through personal presence. God's self-declaration of who He is manifests His personal presence and His relationship with humankind.

Exodus 3 and the Revelation of God's Presence

Exodus 3 uses symbols to manifest the enduring presence of God to the world and human persons and God's declarations about himself and humankind. St. Augustine, when talking about this revelation of God, says,

² R. Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 32.

³ Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of Human Person*, 32.

The flame which appeared to Moses in the bush...that column which followed the people in the desert... the lightnings and thunders which were produced when the Law was given on the mountain... the material form of those things came into being for this purpose: to signify something and then pass away⁴.

All these aspects of the fire in the bush as non-consuming, light-bringing, personally relating, sanctifying the ground, and speaking words characterize aspects of the Trinity's identity through action concerning creation and humankind. The fire of God will appear again on Mt. Horeb, where this theophany is taking place, in another theophany where the God gives the Mosaic law to the people of Israel in Exodus 19:18: τὸ δὲ ὄρος τὸ Σινα ἑκαπνίζετο ὅλον διὰ τὸ καταβεβηκέναι ἐπ' αὐτὸ τὸν θεὸν ἐν πυρί καὶ ἀνέβαινεν ὁ καπνὸς ὡς καπνὸς καμίνου καὶ ἐξέστη πᾶς ὁ λαὸς σφόδρα (Ex 19:18 LXX) (And the whole of Mount Sinai smoked on account of God coming down upon it in fire both the smoke ascended as smoke of an oven and all the people were completely besides themselves to the utmost)⁵. In the next verse, 19, the LXX says, Μωϋσῆς ἐλάλει ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἀπεκρίνατο αὐτῷ φωνῇ (Moses spoke and God took up the conversation by his voice). St. Jerome says, *Moyses loquebatur et Deus respondebat ei* (Moses began to speak and God was responding to him) (Ex 19:19 Vulgam).

The symbol of fire, from the burning bush on Mt. Sinai to the present day, represents creation's connection, in particular humankind, with God and His presence. The burning bush also signifies the absence of Baptism, serving as a prefiguration of this sacrament that would be revealed through Christ. While Moses could not have perceived this absence at the time nor predicted the presence of Baptism, as the reality of Baptism was not yet instituted by Christ, we being familiar with the fullness of revelation in Christ now recognize the burning bush as pointing beyond its limits towards this absent yet present reality. This absent reality, though not presenced by Moses, is present to those of us who encounter the Scriptures with an understanding of salvation history and the revelation of God in Christ.

The one and triune God as a Triune Community of Persons holds and enlivens creation through His presence, that is, God's "thereness" and "isness" concerning creatures, in particular humankind, to change us to be more like him *while persisting in our identity and personhood so that neither are annihilated but instead unfold at a higher level with God than without God*. God, as a Triune Community of Persons, is free, just like human beings are free to respond through a self-ordering agency. God does not need to self-order Himself because he is eternally self-ordering as Order itself, and everything exists simply to God in eternity. Therefore, God does not require any fulfillment. Self-ordering for God does not involve any potentiality being realized because, as

⁴ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, II, 7, 13 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 67.

⁵ All Greek and Latin translations are the author's.

St. Thomas said, God “is the actuality of all acts, and therefore, the perfection of all perfections”⁶. However, God mysteriously responds to our transcendent self-ordering free agency, giving us the dignity of making ourselves more or less like Him. God’s declarations report his responsibility for humankind in the conversation within Himself where it says καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν... καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτὸν ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς (Gen 1:26-27 LXX) (And God said Let us make man according to our image and likeness... And God made humankind; he made him according to the image of God male and female he made them). This declaration of God reveals that the plurality of God’s divine inner life roots our existence as an image of that very life. This plurality does not mean God is male and female; however, plurality itself is somehow mysteriously part of the one God, and the image of that plurality comes out in man and the complementarity of male and female for one humankind towards generating life, just as God of himself creates life and is Life itself. St. Augustine confirms this, saying, “In respect to Himself, however, and not to the other, each is what He has; thus, in respect to Himself He is said to be alive, for He has life, and He is Himself the life which He has”⁷. God’s image in us grants us our inherent worth and dignity.

Exodus 3:4 starts the conversation between Moses and God when God says, “Moses!” and Moses responds with an injection saying “Here I am”, which St. Jerome writes as *adsum*, which follows the Hebrew. The Greek here is τί ἐστίν (Who is it?). Moses declares his presence to this mysterious voice calling his name, like a roll call, and the LXX Greek conveys the confusion of precisely *who* is saying Moses’s name. Now God identifies himself through four relationships of origin, much like within the Trinity itself about generation and procession in God’s identity: first, as the God of Moses’s father, who was a Levite; second, as the God of Abraham; third, as the God of Isaac; fourth, as the God of Jacob⁸. Already, God manifests something of His identity through the intentional activity of *creating*, forming an unalienable relationship between Creator and creature as well as *caring* through his original relationship with these four men. He declares he is responsible for Moses’s father, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God may not be bodily present, but his absence highlights his divinity as only God can make and speak through fire that does not consume that which is on fire. God’s absence here highlights the power of his presence beyond what is manifested in the burning bush.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad. 9, at Aquinas Institute, <https://aquinas.cc>.

⁷ Augustine, *The City of God: Against the Pagans*, XI, 10, trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 462.

⁸ Cf. “It is the Father who generates, the Son who is generated and the Holy Spirit who proceeds, so that there be distinctions between the persons but unity in nature”. Fourth Lateran General Council, Chapter II: The Error of Abbot Joachim (1215), §318, in *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Jacques Dupuis, 7th rev. and enlarged ed. (Staten Island, NY: St. Pauls, 2001), 153.

In Exod 3:14, God declares himself, saying ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν in Greek (Ex 3:14 LXX) (I am who presently and actively always is) and *Dixit Deus ad Moysen: Ego sum qui sum* in Latin (Ex 3:14 Vulgata) (God said to Moses: I am who I am). We see something important here that the LXX brings out: the second I am is a statement of *what* about God (ὁ ὢν). On the other hand, the first three words, *I am who*, is a Trinitarian symbol in three ways: first, the word *I* taken alone symbolizes source, beginning, free unity, the ultimacy of personhood, and the irreducibility of the person, and the foundation of what is manifest to us as transcendent self-ordering free agents, *from whom*, which is symbolic of the Father; second, *am* as a verb speaks of the Word, *by whom and through whom*, which is symbolic of the Son; third, the *who* founds all the love and mercy of God *in whom*, where the foundation of personal relationship is itself personal as the love between Two Persons, Father and Son, and the agent of sanctification and personal relationship for human persons, who is the Holy Spirit. *I am who* breaks down into *from whom* (Father as “I”), *by and through whom* (Son as “am”), and *in whom* (Holy Spirit as “who”), and taken together, symbolizes the mutual indwelling of God, the *perichoresis*, which reveals and manifests God’s inner life as a Triune Community of Persons. Here, God as a Triune Community of Persons declares Himself as the source of existence and life to all things. All of us through presencing declare ourselves as an “I”, all of us act through our identity and freedom determining our “am”, and all of us are ultimately responsible as “who”.

This Trinitarian understanding of God’s self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 3 aids in investigating the structures of presence and absence since God, while objectively and symbolically manifest in the burning bush, also transcends our comprehension by reason alone. The human person’s experience of presence and absence mysteriously mirrors how God reveals Himself to us. Yet, God does not reveal himself only in the objective dimension but also in the subjective dimension of the person. St. John of the Cross’s mystical theology provides insights into how God maintains our existence through what he terms the “presence by essence” and how we can explore God’s presence to the human person in this interior mode.

St. John of the Cross and the First Mode of the Presence of God

In his commentary on Stanza 11 of the *Spiritual Canticle*, St. John of the Cross tells us how God’s presence has one mode, which he calls presence by essence:

The first is his presence by essence. In this way, he is present not only in the holiest souls but also in sinners and all other creatures. With this presence, he

gives them life and being. Should this essential presence be lacking to them, they would be annihilated. Thus this presence is never wanting to the soul⁹.

St. John also mentions this mode of presence of God in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

This union between God and creatures always exists. By it he conserves their being so that if the union should end they would immediately be annihilated and cease to exist¹⁰.

Here, God presencing the human person, and all other things, gives them life and being. The “thereness” of the person is a pure gift from God due to his awareness of an “I”, an image of Himself (cf. Gen 1:26-27), which founds the person as a person who, through his or her personhood and identity, experiences things and the world itself (objective dimension) and themselves (subjective dimension). The union is intentionality; that is, God is always conscious of us and, therefore, permanently related to all things, including us. God’s noetic act is one from the dimension of eternity, but for us in time, it is experienced as ongoing and active in that he maintains and creates continuously as we experience phenomena, that is, things, ourselves, and the world. God’s awareness, His intentionality, to persons is not simply sustaining the “thereness” of the person but also acknowledging, affirming, recognizing, and respecting the person’s identity and the gifts He gave as capacities that the person may freely use for the good of others and God or abuse for the sake of him or herself at the expense of others and God. Evil in the world is not inherent to the world *per se*, but comes from the actions of human persons who decide to not love others, themselves, or the world, which either enhances or diminishes reality. The presence and absence of an “I”, the being as an image of God, not only is an “I” due to God’s intentionality, which founds reality itself, but also human persons participate in the creative quality of God’s intentionality in our free choices in reality; our intentionalities shape reality in participation with or against God’s Will.

God’s intentionality in this first mode of presence is not that of a passive observer; he did not wind our clocks and let them run while he maintained us watching the outcome. God does not simply know us through some detached scientific method. God’s awareness goes down to the smallest details ἀλλὰ καὶ αἱ τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς ὑμῶν πᾶσαι ἡρίθμηνται. μὴ φοβεῖσθε πολλῶν στρουθλ-

⁹ St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 11, §3, in: *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2017), 511; cf. J.M. Long, *The Human Being as Body and Soul*, „Studia Elckie” 22(2020), nr 3, s. 313-324.

¹⁰ St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, 5, §3, in: *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2017), 163.

των διαφέρετε (Lk 12:7 NGT) (But also the hairs of your head have been all counted. Do not be afraid. You are far superior than many sparrows). The “I”, as known and loved by God, is the metaphysical foundation for self-ordering and freedom of the human person. The acknowledgment and recognition by God of the other as “I” founds the person’s existence in God’s gift of Himself imaged in each human person. As St. John the Evangelist says in his first letter καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχει ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν. Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει (1 Jn 4:16 NGT) (And we have come to perceive in faith the love that God has within us. God is love, both whoever remaining in love remains in God and God remains in him.) Since in this first mode of presence, God supremely values and appreciates us as human persons in His presence in his love, that inherent worth and respect from God imbues us with our dignity as human persons. God’s first mode of presence in all things, particularly human persons, is founded in God’s love since that *is who he is*. Therefore, His love for us, by virtue of his Divinity, founds our dignity in that we are infinitely valued by God, and therefore must be infinitely valued by others; this love also founds our freedom, since love cannot exist without freedom lest it become slavery. The presence of God Himself as love blends dignity and freedom giving us the opportunity to transcend our limitations by saying “yes” to his love and ultimately sharing in the divine nature.

Conclusion

We have gone through presence and absence in perception and intentionality in the human person. We explored the revelation and implications of God’s presence, as revealed in Exodus 3. Presence is not simply an abstraction but an experiential reality that exists in all things, God, and in the intentionalities of transcendent self-ordering free agents, that is, persons, especially in the intentionalities of knowing and loving. The act of presencing, the encountering and acknowledging the presence of phenomena as revealed, lies at the foundation of meaningful human connection. Absence is the perception of what can be, the negative space, capacities, and the background of the focus of the human person’s awareness. We anticipate and change our lives in the present based on what we perceive the future could be; we remember what was past, which changes our present. Both of these absences affect our present selves despite transcending time. Finally, the human person’s experience of absence aids in understanding ourselves as free. We can self-order ourselves and order things based on what is absent to transcend limitations and actively shape our present reality through our intentionalities.

The human person, the perceiver, and knower of this blend of presence and absence, is the core of our world and the pivotal link of this exploration from which we explore the presence of things and then explore God’s presence in human persons and the world. Presence and absence allows us to look beyond

the limitations of being to He who is Infinite, God, and establish that personal relationship through His self-revelation and our free cooperation. The journey into presence and absence is an ongoing one, a mystery, a continuous unfolding of meaning that invites us to engage more deeply with the world around us and the divine within us.

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Summary

This article explores the phenomenology of presence and absence through the philosophy of the person. The human person is central to this dynamic interrelationship of presence and absence, intentionality, and identity, which shapes our understanding of ourselves, others, and God.

Presencing is the active and continuous engagement by which a human person unfolds the presence of a phenomenon in a blend of presence and absence through intentionalities such as perceiving, remembering, imagining, and anticipating. Through intentional acts, the person focuses on the unfolding presence and absence of phenomena in their various aspects and capacities. Intentionality allows human persons to transcend the present moment and its limitations through remembering past experiences and anticipating and imagining new possibilities. Absence is not merely a lack of presence but instead frames limitations and provides the foundation for new possibilities of what can be. Presence and absence only exist by an “I”, the person, the foundation of all intentionality.

Presence and absence applies not only to human persons but also to God. God’s presence is the foundation of all reality, yet God remains hidden from us as absent. While this may seem paradoxical, in fact, it shows his immanence not as in pantheism, where He and creation are identical, but that He, through his love, freely created us in that love, which gives us our dignity, freedom, and personhood.

The human person is a transcendent self-ordering free agent who shapes reality through intentions, appropriations, and actions. This freedom underscores our inherent dignity and capacity for self-determination, empowering us to shape our experience and meaningfully impact our world.

Keywords: presence, absence, intentionality, identity, God, human person.

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