



LOVE IN THE NOTHINGNESS OF BEING: MUSINGS ON FERDINAND ULRICH'S TRANSNIHILATION OF BEING IN *HOMO ABYSSUS*

ELVIS P. BALLACAY JR.
ST. LOUIS UNIVERSITY, BAGUIO CITY
visballacay@gmail.com

*This paper aims to reflect on love in the light of Ferdinand Ulrich's transnihilation of being. It is described that transnihilation of being is the fullness given away of being to pour itself abundantly in the movement of finitization. It presupposes that love in the state of nothingness "transforms distance into intimacy" and hence calls the human person to love amid the nothingness of being. To think of love in the nothingness of being grants the human person the knowledge to emancipate oneself from the temptation of making love an absolute thing in a relationship that has been fixed with expectation, conditions, and reciprocity. Love in the nothingness of being seeks love unconditionally for love has nothing to give but love itself. The notion of being's transnihilation is the main theme of love in this paper as being draws its subsistence to God. Love in its manner of self-emptying gives being away so that another may come to be. In this metaphysical act of love being found its ultimate origin in the light of divine goodness. Thus, this paper hopes to contribute in the understanding of love as it partakes in the emerging discourse on the philosophical work of Ferdinand Ulrich's *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*.*

Keywords: subsistence, divine goodness, gift, human person, God

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INTRODUCTION

In his novel *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, Paulo Coelho wrote what should not be thought about love: “One does not love in order to do what is good or to help or to protect someone. If we act that way, we are perceiving the other as a simple object, and we are seeing ourselves as wise and generous persons. This has nothing to do with love.”¹ This reality that love offers never satisfies a person who intends to seek love in everything. People usually think that by doing all the means to express love will assure them to find love in its fullness. However, every good word and action has nothing to do with love. The meaning of love is not bound by expectations and conditions, which implies that love does not come with such limitations. Here, what love seeks to offer is a way where being can abundantly enjoy the limitless experience of love without the mandate of reciprocity.

To love in the nothingness of being is a way to realize that love does not need to prove everything in exchange. Here, love fulfills this reality when it is understood from the *transnihilation* of being.² In the *Homo Abyssus*, the understanding of Ulrich by the term transnihilation is equally important to his metaphysical notion of being as *gift*; although he did not explain further the meaning of this term, it becomes clear that in order to have a full understanding of the movement into subsistence, one must also understand what he means by transnihilation.³ He somewhat mysteriously connotes that transnihilation “transforms distance into

intimacy.”⁴ Here, transnihilation is the “fullness given away,” of being and the more we conceive it as such, “the more its nonsubsistence comes to light.”⁵ Being is given away in the act of love, and to love implies the openness to be received in the nothingness of being itself. Ulrich explores this idea from Aquinas: “Being is complete and simple, yet nonsubsistent,” as the central theme of being’s movement to finitization.⁶ Here, love in its manner of self-emptying gives being away so that another may come to be. This transnihilation of being allows one to experience love that “transforms distance to intimacy,” the distance between Creator and created, between infinite and finite!⁷ In this transformative act of love, being found its ultimate origin in the light of divine goodness.

Thus, to think of love in the nothingness of being is to see the paradox behind the mysterious giving away of being as a gift that radically empties itself into the *kenosis* or “self-emptying” of love.⁸ How does love can be realized in the nothingness of being? Is it possible for someone to love amid the experience of nothingness? This paper may not give absolute answers to these questions. Still, the task of philosophy “to reveal, interpret, and discern”⁹ love in the light of Ulrich’s *Homo Abyssus* is the closest way for us to understand this reality.

¹ Paulo Coelho, *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, trans. Alan Clarke, HarperCollins Publishers, 1996: vii.

² To further understand the meaning of transnihilation, Ulrich described that this term is the “crossing out” of the hypostasis of being, and so being’s “crossing through” to finitude and subsistence by way of the essence. Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*, by Martin Bieler, trans. D.C. Schindler (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018): 508.

³ Rachel Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being: Ferdinand Ulrich on Transnihilation,” *Communion: International Catholic Review*, (Spring 2019): 8.

⁴ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 31.

⁵ Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 11.

⁶ Ulrich described that the “movement” of being in the act of creation, in which God gives *esse* (which he *is*) to creatures; it is not a motus or a change from potency to act, but it is characterized analogously as a “movement” insofar as it implies a kind of “transition” from *esse* as infinite act to the finite substance. Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 501.

⁷ Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 16.

⁸ Ulrich understanding of the gift is that, “being is a gift, but one must be realized as a task. In making itself a gift, being lets itself go, or gives itself up and so approaches itself as something to which aspires.” Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 498.

⁹ Marine de la Tour, “The Light of the Gift in *Homo Abyssus*,” *Communion: International Catholic Review*, (Spring 2019): 28.





LOVE IN THE UNKNOWABILITY OF BEING

In Jean-Luc Marion's *Mibi magna questio factus sum: The Privilege of Unknowing*, he emphasized the notion that there are things that cannot be measured and defined for there are negative certainties, which he refers to the incomprehensible and indefinable nature of the human person. He postulated that one could not be reduced into an object of definitions and conceptualization of reason because the human person in nature is not reducible to any objectification of the mind. The human person is indefinable and incomprehensible in that "man appears to himself only beyond the field of every horizon and every system of categories" which means that "man appears to himself as the saturated phenomenon."¹⁰

These negative certainties of Marion are also seen in Ulrich's transnihilation of being. The human person's indefinable and incomprehensible nature is expressed in the nothingness and nonsubsistence of being. Here, the more finite beings desire to speculate, the more being obscure itself to finite beings. Likewise, the more that the human person attempts to define and comprehend love, the more love becomes unknowable to the human person. Both being and love share this reality of nothingness as the human person partakes in the movement of finitization. The negative certainties of nothingness are realized not because of its difficulty to grasp in the intellect but because the finite reason falls victim to the temptation of absolutism.

Ulrich discussed from the *Homo Abyssus* some of the consequences that arise when the human mind becomes a victim of absolutism. One of the consequences he elucidated is the dissociation of

possibility and actuality in one's indifferentiation of the necessary sense of being.¹¹ This indifferentiation of being is experienced when the human person defines being contrary to its necessary sense or primordial meaning. As the human person defines or absolutizes being in the logic of thinking, the more being becomes unnecessary to the mind, and hence the more that the necessary meaning of being withdraws to the human person. So, for Ulrich, that is the moment when being clings to itself in ideality. Thus, essence, too, seals itself up in its unity against being. That is why if being as the act of acts go against the essence and therefore potentiality, it can come into view only as an always already actualized reality, as an "actual thing" in the sense of pseudo-subsistence.¹² In other words, when the human person goes against his or her nature, that is when one goes against nothingness, he or she is being dissociated from the possibility and actuality of life, which might lead the human person to live in a pseudo-subsistence.¹³

It is unfortunate to think that a relationship can probably turn to a pseudo-subsistence when the human person attempts to absolutize love. When the human person confines the relationship into a love fixed with definitions and conditions that love tends to be indifferent. The substance of love to give unconditionally is never fulfilled because the relationship has already been absolutized when the human person thinks that he or she can prove everything in love. Love, in essence, is nothing. The human person goes against this essence of love if the finite reason substantialized

¹⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, "Mibi magna questio factus sum: The Privilege of Unknowing," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (January 2005): 23.

¹¹ Ulrich elucidated that "the phrase 'necessary sense of being,' accordingly, indicates the direction of being's 'movement'; insofar as goodness has the *ratio finis*, the sense of being is designated by the ontological moment of bonicity." In other words, the necessary sense of being is associated to goodness as the ultimate sense of being. Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 502.

¹² Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 177.

¹³ Being is complete and simple yet nonsubsistent, but for variety of reasons, Ulrich explains that the human intellect may mentally substantialize or hyposatize being, treating it as if it were something existing in its own right, and so granting it "pseudo-subsistence." Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 504.





love by attempting to fill this nothingness with definitions and conditions of reciprocity. For Marion and Ulrich, this is impossible because the human person who is the agent of love is indefinable and incomprehensible. Otherwise, by having the relationship be substantialized, “the act of being radically subsumed into the essence, and so any further actualization of the substance becomes something already over and done with.”¹⁴

Love never ends by substantializing being, for love has already been and is always given. What makes the nothingness of being unknowable to the human person is this act of absolutizing love closes its substance of giving in a fixed relationship. But, the truth is, being never closes itself to a relationship, no matter how the human person attempts to fill love with expectations next to itself. To understand that love is indefinable and incomprehensible means to accept that love is not something that can be added to itself since Aquinas says that “nothing can be added to being other than nonbeing.”¹⁵ Love is not a thing but a manner of being in which beings are made to perfection. This nonbeing of being is what makes love not a thing in itself because the *esse*, being, is the ultimate act, perfection of all perfections, first effect and likeness of God, and at the same time, that *esse* is not a thing in itself.¹⁶ Loving the unknowability of being is to accept the negative reality that being in nature is incomprehensible and indefinable to human understanding. However, it does not mean that the human person cannot describe and know being at all.

In fact the inaccessibility of the finite mind to know the human person and the irreducibility to any definition could indeed be understood as a

describable determination or even as a privilege that is more solid because it offers itself, first of all, negatively.¹⁷ The way how being presents love from its nonbeing opens the finite mind to be more receptive in the possibilities of unknowing. These negative certainties of Marion and the nothingness of Ulrich are manifestations of the reality that life itself is filled with unknown surprises that the finite mind cannot have total access in definition. It follows, then, that in the particular case of the human person, “philosophy would have task not to correct one’s incomprehensibility, as it were a defect to overcome, but to preserve it as a privilege to reinforce.”¹⁸ To think love in the nothingness of being is not a manifestation of a defect that the finite reason needs to overcome. Still, it is a way for love to preserve being to the movement of finitization and to reinforce the power of reason not to fall into the temptation of absolutism.

The transnihilation of being, as shown by Ulrich, offers a new horizon of thinking love in an uncustomary way of being, that is, to empty itself for the human person to realize more the perfection of love. To think of love in the nothingness of being presupposes the negative certainty that any relationship wherein love dwells unconditionally is not perfect because the perfection of love has already been in the nothingness of being. Love is itself perfect, yet nothing. This nothingness rendered to love is a perfection that love offers to the human person. In this way, one can realize that love has nothing to give other than to love itself. The reason to love in the nothingness of being lies essentially in the complete and simple yet nonsubsistent reality of being, where love in the perfection of nothingness is realized.

¹⁴ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 177.

¹⁵ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 28.

¹⁶ Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 2.

¹⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties*, The University of Chicago Press, (2015): 16.

¹⁸ Marion, “The Privilege of Unknowing,” 14.





LOVE IN THE PERFECTION OF NOTHINGNESS

To think of love in the nothingness of being gives an impression to the human person in *prima facie* that this idea entails the nihilistic view of existence. Love cannot draw its meaning in a condition where everything is empty. Love seems impossible to exist in a life where nothing is already there. Thus, how can love be possible in the emptiness of life? This nihilistic view of love presupposes the idea of annihilation, which is certainly not parallel to the transnihilation of being.

The nihilistic view of existence do not see the meaning of love in nothingness because the possibility of being is denied. The nonsubsistent nature of being is annihilated when the human person thinks already that nothingness is senseless. This idea of annihilation is not the way love means in the nothingness of being. Love never annihilates itself because “being must give itself up” in transnihilation unreservedly.¹⁹ To think love in the nothingness of being do not suggests that being’s nonbeing must be negated for the meaning of love to come true. Otherwise, love never arrives in its fulfillment to give.

Love always implies a sense of giving, which can be fulfilled when being empties itself. Being surrenders itself so that beings can come to be, which is to say that being is the intimate actuality of beings themselves; beings subsist! But not as such, rather, being subsists in beings.²⁰ Love exists in such a way that being empties itself into beings so that love can come into subsistence.²¹ For Ulrich, transnihilation

cannot equal annihilation because being manifests itself already in actualization.²² The emptying of being to itself actualizes being to welcome new possibilities that can emerge from the process of love. This grounds one’s reason to realize that being in nature empties itself so that beings may emerge in the creation of love. Since *annihilation* means that being must be overcome or negated for anything to be at all,²³ the transnihilation of being implies that the act of nonbeing is not negated but affirmed so that anything, including love, may come to be. It is because *transnihilation*, for Ulrich, is “fullness *given away*,” and the more we conceive it as such, “the more its nonsubsistence comes to light.”²⁴ Here, Ulrich explored the metaphysical understanding of nothingness by drawing the mutual relation of being and nothing to the principle of contradiction.

The basic argument posited in this principle is, “it is impossible for something to be at the same time and in the same respect or it is impossible to affirm and deny something at the same time in the same place.” So, it is impossible to deny and affirm the nothingness of being simultaneously in the same respect because being and nothing are never isolated to each other. The proposition “being and nothing are interchangeable with each other” has its ground in the truth that there is nothing external to being apart from nonbeing.²⁵ Thus, the perfection of nothingness is realize in this principle where the identity of being is supported and flourished in the kenosis of love.

As Ulrich tried to emphasize, the principle of contradiction cannot be isolated to being since it has already been linking to being. This principle allows love to draw its sustenance from the identity

¹⁹ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 70.

²⁰ Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 11.

²¹ To further understand the meaning of subsistence, this term comes from the Latin *subsistentia* which means “a standing under.” Ulrich refers this word to the *per se* existence of a substance, the mode of being by which a thing comes to completion in itself referring the substance to its concreteness and individuality and the actual exercise of its existence; the word is associated with hypostasis and person; here, we also correlate it with love. Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 506.

²² Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 70.

²³ Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 11.

²⁴ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 30.

²⁵ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 234.





of being. Love in the perfection of nothingness is shaped by this principle of contradiction, which helps the finite mind not deny but rather affirm the kenosis of love in being. The act of emptying oneself in a relationship manifests the perfection of nothingness. To be nothing means to empty oneself to be perfect in love. As one empties oneself in love, the finite mind emancipates itself from the temptation to fill love with the idealism of reciprocity. What can never be denied in the reality of love is this self-emptying of being that transcends the human person to live a relationship of unconditional giving. Thus, the perfection of nothingness comes into light when love does not need to presuppose a “fixed being” to manifest itself as such.²⁶

At times, the human person tends to fix love everything under his or her control. Love has nothing to prove in this way because it never demands someone to control or be controlled by the other. In a relationship, love is always free to decide its path for being always gives itself without restrictions. In truth, being is never measured because love is immeasurable. That is why the Sacred Scripture proclaims that “Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:8) for being has nothing to be measured that can be failed by presupposing someone in love. Love never fails because it unreservedly gives itself in the generous outpouring of being to beings. Love never fixes being in such a way that being is already perfect in its nothingness, which justifies the fire of an absolute love that can only be derived from God whose love is always complete, simple, and perfect.

So, love in its basic sense can never contradict itself. That is why it is contradictory to think that love conquers everything but fails in the end, for love never fails in conquering itself. Hence,

²⁶ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 230.

through love beings are created out of nothing and from this nothing the identity of being is constituted. The principles of contradiction and identity lead being to stand on the perfection of nothingness, which love resides abundantly in creation. Ulrich attested this claim by elucidating what Aquinas says, “The fact that created things have a particular nature and, in this nature, a determined act of existence, makes these things distinct from their negation; and upon this distinction is based the principle that affirmation and negation cannot be true simultaneously.”²⁷

Love in the perfection of nothingness entails that nothing can be negated in love because being is already nothing in itself, yet love is a nonbeing that can be added to being. Ulrich made clear that it is on this principle that the necessity of all other principles is founded. The positive reality that can be founded in this negative certainty of being is that through nothing, new possibilities and meanings emerge in love. In the emptiness of life, nothingness can still be found. So much so, “If nothing exists any longer, if all that has been, is irretrievably lost, and the beings as we used to know them are no more, then the only fountainhead from which the new values could possibly spring forth is, indeed, *nothingness* itself.”²⁸

Thus, the essential point one can elucidate when thinking about the nothingness of being is to realize that love is always possible even in the experience of emptiness in life. The principle of *creatio ex nihilo* is the beginning of possibilities where new meanings and values arise in the kenosis of love. That is why the nothingness of being and the self-emptying of love can never be denied and affirmed simultaneously because

²⁷ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 236.

²⁸ Lehel Balogh, “Nothingness, the Self, and the Meaning of Life: Nishida, Nishitani, and Japanese Psychotherapeutic Approaches to the Challenge of Nihilism.” *Journal of Philosophy of Life* Vol.10, No.1. (2020): 108.





being and love have been and always have nothing to give. In this sense, love draws its nothingness in the light of divine goodness.

LOVE IN THE LIGHT OF DIVINE GOODNESS

The relation of love to being is a suitable way to realize that love does not need anything in itself because it is already complete and simple yet nonsubsistent. Ulrich's elucidation of being from the perspective of *bonitas* (goodness) springs forth new realizations in love that the human person can contemplate as one draws the meaning of love to God. Here, Ulrich says:

Being is not an effective actuality in the sense of an efficiens, since it operates as "likeness of the divine goodness." "Goodness, however is described as self-diffusive in the sense that an end is said to move," and further, Thomas says, "Esse itself has the character of the good," for "whatever is found to have the character of an end also has the character of the good." Thus being is nothing other than self-diffusing actuality. But it does not subsist as a thing between God and the creature. Thomas therefore says, "Esse" signifies something complete and simple, but non-subsistent."²⁹

The completeness, simplicity, and nonsubsistence of being is fundamental to the understanding of love in the light of divine goodness for it allows the human person to participate the infinite actuality of God in creation. The reality of nothingness necessitates an act of creation where love gives away itself abundantly. Ulrich refers to this event of creation, which occurs through the pure mediation of created beings, as the movement into subsistence; being's movement into subsistence is not a movement from potency into act but as "God creates," it means that he gives being totally.³⁰ It is from this movement that the transnihilation of being happens, for the act of creation is God's given away of beings for

being to empty itself and receive the fullness of freedom it enjoys to live. "God gives everything when he gives *esse* and holds nothing back from creation, from the gift."³¹

The gift of being that the human person receives from God comes into fulfillment because beings are not clutched in creation, instead, they live, move, and have being. In every act of creation, the gift is given "without ceasing" and "without measure" because the gift gives itself unconditionally.³² This is how being lives in its freedom for God gives being as a gift that it deserves to receive the freedom to subsist. That is why the human person must also share the gift of being to everything given to him or her by constantly participating in the listening obedience of being into the movement of finitization. The sense of being pulls its necessary attribute in this listening obedience because it has already been the inner dynamism of being to communicate itself, to hand itself over, or to pour itself out into the subsistence of the human person.³³ Indeed, the gift of being makes love complete and simple in its listening obedience. It is the primary means for love to be heard as it calls being to listen to the voice of God who speaks in the manifold givenness of life.

Being is sheer obedience to the Giver; it is a pure gift and, at the same time, pure mediation.³⁴ To love the nothingness of being is the sheer obedience one can give to recognize the generosity of the Giver who created beings out of nothing. Being in love is to participate in this listening obedience to communicate itself back and forth to the generosity of God in creation. So, "in this obedience of being to the Giver, created being becomes a sheer 'letting proceed' of *all things*

²⁹ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 28.

³⁰ Coleman, "Thinking the 'Nothing' of Being," 5.

³¹ Coleman, "Thinking the 'Nothing' of Being," 5.

³² Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 83.

³³ Coleman, "Thinking the 'Nothing' of Being," 6.

³⁴ Stefan Oster, "Thinking Love at the Heart of Things: The Metaphysics of Being as Love in the Work of Ferdinand Ulrich." *Communion: International Catholic Review*, (Winter 2010): 680.





out of itself as fullness of love.³⁵ The incarnation of Christ, which brings forth the new image of love and elucidated the sense of being as pure mediation, manifested the fullness revelation of God's generosity through the listening obedience of Christ, "who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself... And for this, God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names" (Philippians 2:6-9). Ulrich refers this as the "mystery of glory and poverty."³⁶ The human person experiences this mystery of glory and poverty when being participates through listening and obedience to the kenosis of love, which is the self-emptying of being as it partakes the glory of God's goodness manifested in love.

Love in the nothingness of being is realized in this mystery of Christ, who brings forth the fullness revelation of the divine goodness through his listening obedience to the Father. As the Word of God became flesh, this mystery of glory and poverty is also participated in the history of salvation through the listening obedience of Mary, the Mother of Christ. The event of the Annunciation exemplified the sheer letting proceed or the pure mediation of being as Mary participates in the mystery of the infinite divine goodness of God. Her *fiat* or "Yes" is the noblest and the most suitable response that one can render to God, who is the Giver of life. It is described that the Yes of a person is not a fortune that can be grasped or passed on like an object; instead, as the fullness of pure poverty, it is life that is given-away, "the likeness of God's self-diffusive goodness," as Aquinas says in his *De Veritate*.³⁷ Mary is the embodiment of this Yes who gives her life away as she listens obediently

to the will of God, in which Christ was born and brought forth the goodness of life in this world. By saying Yes to the will of God and giving herself away to this calling, she did not lose her life in this world; instead, she received the greatest privilege for the human person, which is to become the mother of God, the Son whom she care and love from her earthly life to eternity. Thus, the Yes in the listening obedience of being is the groundless and unoriginate, overflowing self-communication of absolute freedom, and, therefore, an unconditional response, in which the freedom of being "comes-toward" itself "purposelessly", that is as an end in itself.³⁸

The Giver who is the ultimate source of love shares this divine goodness with being by coming down into the movement of finitization, and hence, being participates in this kenosis of love through listening obedience. As God empties himself to finitization, being gives away itself in transnihilation. God and the created beings necessitate each other in love, and it has always been already in love where God and created beings spring forth the newness of life. "The being of created things is itself created; this maintains God's transcendence and opens up the possibility of a relationship."³⁹ Love is the way for this relationship to be sustained as God gives himself in creation. The unity of the creative act is expressed totally in the gift-giving of being that love has fulfilled in its sublation to being. Thus, love is a gift given for being to be a gift proper to created beings. Here, "the light of the gift enlightens: the creative act is not the positing of being, but the gift of being. Being is really given, and this gift is fruitful."⁴⁰

God, who is love, desires all beings to be free, for love seeks another, which means it is love's

³⁵ Oster, "Thinking Love at the Heart of Things," 680.

³⁶ Marine de la Tour, "The Light of the Gift in Homo Abyssus." *Communion: International Catholic Review*, (Spring 2019): 35.

³⁷ Ferdinand Ulrich, "Once Upon a Time": Preserving the Past in a Presence Open to the Future. *Communion: International Catholic Review*, (Fall 2016): 508-509.

³⁸ Ulrich, "Once Upon a Time," 509.

³⁹ de la Tour, "The Light of the Gift in Homo Abyssus," 30.

⁴⁰ de la Tour, "The Light of the Gift," 30.





nature to give itself away so that another may be freely.⁴¹ The nature of God to love is totally fulfilled in the revelation of Christ, who gives himself away so that beings may be free to live in the light of divine goodness. Likewise, the nature of the human person to love is fulfilled when one empties himself so that the other may be freely give itself away to the creative act of relationship, which is, the unity of their intentions to love may come to be. Thus, “being’s necessary sense is then ‘necessary’ in the way all actions for the beloved are necessary when one is in love; the only power forcing one to do anything is the interior dynamism which draws one to the beloved.”⁴² In this way, being transcends love from distance to intimacy.

LOVE FROM DISTANCE TO INTIMACY

The transnihilation of being transforms distance to intimacy because love transcends being as it gives away itself in order for the other may come to be. Here, it is in being’s transnihilation that we see most powerfully that being is gift, that being is given; the gift in this most radical sense means not just to give something to another, instead, the gift in the first place allows the other to come to be, and come to be freely, that is, entirely as itself.⁴³ So, love in the transnihilation of being transforms distance into intimacy because love in its essentiality gives itself freely to being. Yet, as love gives itself to being, the finite reason is tempted to put being as tantamount to God.

One of the consequences why the human person falls into the temptation to juxtapose being and God is because of the distant relationship that God allows in being to recognize His absence. But, Ulrich sees that this distance of being and

God is a positive force to bring out the necessary sense of being. He says:

*Doesn't God then have to disappear into being in such a way that he would mediate himself and find his meaning precisely by giving determination to the being that is yet 'undetermined' concerning its goal by negating that indeterminacy and making it concrete, whereby being would then also realize its 'sense'?*⁴⁴

The question entails that God necessarily needs to distance Himself into being because it is through His absence that being learns to seek the origin of its subsistence. In the quest of being to seek God, the human person realize that this God whom he is searching for is entirely far different from ones nature as a finite being. Yet, realizing God’s distance to being accounts the reality that this absence is actually a manner of his eternal presence. This “absence of God,” this darkness and distance, is a sign of his nearness and what would only alienate us from God is possessing being as something “juxtaposed to him”; thus, the “pure mediation” of being, which is “nothing,” by contrast reveals God’s infinite loving presence.⁴⁵

As such, the transnihilation of being “transforms distance into intimacy” because being is nothing other than the being of beings; being is nothing, and because it is nothing, its real otherness is noncompetitive, so much so that it is the intimate act of beings themselves.⁴⁶ Thus, it is in this nothingness of being that the power of love is fully expressed in the transnihilated character of being as a gift, given away. As love draws its concomitance in the transnihilation of being, it grants us the knowledge to realize that in spite of the absence of the other, love transforms distance into intimacy because of its pure mediation to being. Here, love also reveals itself in the unity and multiplicity of being.

⁴¹ Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 6.

⁴² Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 6.

⁴³ Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 16.

⁴⁴ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 24.

⁴⁵ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 23.

⁴⁶ Coleman, “Thinking the ‘Nothing’ of Being,” 16.





LOVE IN THE UNITY AND MULTIPLICITY OF BEING

Aquinas says that things “are related to unity and multiplicity in the same way they are related to being, and since the entire *esse* of things depends on God... the cause of plurality of things must be sought in God.”⁴⁷ Beings are created in the likeness of God; and this goodness is the disposition of being which is express in love. Ulrich claims that, “There had to be diversity in the things produced by God, so that the divine perfection might in some fashion be imitated in the variety found in things.”⁴⁸

Beings need to be different from each other for the oneness of God to be experienced in the uniqueness of beings. Love is experience in many different ways. Yet, no matter how love reveals itself in the manifold of experiences, the identity of love as a gift remains. Here, if identity presents itself now in one way, it also holds in reserve other ways of being given and reappearing as the same thing again, to ourselves and others; it always both reveals and conceals itself; the thing can always be given again, perhaps in ways we ourselves cannot anticipate.⁴⁹ So, love remains to be love as it gives itself in the unity and multiplicity of being.

The multiplicity of being comes not from the created beings, but rather from the self-evident God who demonstrates his infinite power in the multiplicity of love. One realize it when the human person recognized his or her nothingness to God. The created beings to represent God’s goodness as finite creatures according to the perfection that is proper to them. “Not even the entire universe of creatures perfectly represents the divine goodness by setting if forth

adequately, but represents it only in the measure of perfection possible to creatures.”⁵⁰

Thus, love in the unity and multiplicity of being is shared without conditions and reciprocity, because love desires nothing other than to give itself abundantly. “God’s love does not will the hypostasis of being,”⁵¹ which is the logicizing and conceptualizing of beings in ideality; otherwise, God’s divine goodness will not be enjoyed completely and purely. The love of God is simply manifested in the life of every being. In this manifestation of love, the human person can listen obediently to the calling of his or her innermost being to draw closer to the origin of creation, God. Therefore, to think of love in the nothingness of being is to long for God, as one recognizes the nothingness that envelops being in this world.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The theme of Ferdinand Ulrich’s *Homo Abyssus* centers intimately on the struggle of being to draw the meaning of its subsistence to God. As being struggles to seek the purpose of its subsistence, being is also challenge to endure the temptations that comes across in its way to finitization. Thus, in order to reinvigorate and sustain being in this struggle and temptation, love must be sought in its most complete and simple way, which is possible when one thinks of love in the nothingness of being.

To think of love in the nothingness of being is to realize love in the unknowability of being. The truth about love manifests when love learns to accept the indefinable and incomprehensible reality of being. As one learns to accept these

⁴⁷ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 75.

⁴⁸ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 76.

⁴⁹ Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. University of Cambridge, 2000: 31.

⁵⁰ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 77.

⁵¹ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 78.





unknowable realities of being, one begins to love the perfection of being's nothingness. To think of love in the nothingness of being entails that nothing can be added to love because love in truth is nonbeing. Love is perfect when one does not expect everything to itself, for love has been already and is always free since the beginning of creation, and hence, it only seeks nothing other than to love being in itself. In this nothingness, love draws its meaning ultimately in the light of divine goodness.

Love draws itself abundantly from the infinite unknown and perfect reality of love, which is found in God. To think of love in the nothingness of being invites every person to love the other without ceasing, without measure, and without conditions, for love is already giving from the beginning. Thus, going back to Paulo Coelho's elucidation of love, one can finally say that, "To love is to be in communion with the other and to discover in that other the spark of God."

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