

ABSTRACT

“Reason as Gift:
Reengaging the Onto-Theological Critique with Pope John Paul II”

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To many contemporary thinkers and Catholic theologians, Heidegger’s “onto-theological critique” is seen as legitimately exposing human reason’s true identity as a self-grounding “will to power” that aims to subject the whole of reality, even God, to the grasp of its determinative thought. In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, however, Pope John Paul II defends reason and its quest for knowledge as one of humanity’s noblest tasks, vital to the life of man and the Church’s mission. This dissertation argues that he defends reason, not simply from reliance upon tradition, but also by revisiting the great Christian revelation of the Love of God in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Using an interpretive lens of gift, the Pope’s entire corpus proffers a theologically enriched sense of reason by showing how rational activity in its concrete exercise is always-already situated in relation to the generosity of the Triune God. Reason is not fundamentally a matter of power but love. In **Chapter 1**, we will see how John Paul II turns to the revelation of God as the “ultimate truth” about gift, so that God’s own life as an exchange of mutual love between the divine persons asserts itself as the paradigm of all other gifts. In **Chapter 2**, we shall examine how the Pope revisits the notion of the causality at the origin of creation by exploring the generosity inherent in a trinitarian act of creating. In **Chapter 3**, we shall explore how the Pope represents the conditions that underlie knowledge by providing a deepened notion of creation as a gift “rooted in love.” In particular, he will demonstrate how both being and the rational subject are constitutively related to the Triune God. In **Chapter 4**, we will show how the Pope refers to the “nuptial mystery” in order to illuminate the subject’s encounter with being. Through a careful exploration of marriage, the Pope demonstrates how all knowing involves an encounter with the “other” that is primordially rooted in an original trinitarian love. It is precisely the sense of reason inherent in this experience that operates in the activity of metaphysical thinking.

