About the Need to Confess Sins Aloud

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ABOUT THE NEED TO CONFESS SINS ALOUD

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To Msgr. William M. Helmick

on the occasion of his Eightieth Birthday

for his friendship, guidance and continue support

in my studies and in my priesthood.

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Preface

On April 11, 2015, Pope Francis declared the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy through the papal bull *Misericordiæ Vultus*. If the Church has seen previous jubilees as periods for remission of sins and universal pardon, this is especially true of the Jubilee of Mercy, because the sacrament of penance is integral to our experience of God's mercy.

One week before that jubilee was officially closed on November 21, 2016, Pope Francis met with a Dutch delegation. To them he said:

> "We experience the salvific mercy of God in a special way in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Confession is the place where are received the gifts of forgiveness and the mercy of God, who has initiated the transformation in each one of us and the reform of the life of the church."[1]

The personal sense of sin has been eroding from society for quite some time, as well as any acknowledgment that personal sins have repercussions in the community. This loss goes hand in hand with the evaporation of the Christian life, and the diminished knowledge of God and his mercy. Part of this erosion stems from a widely held belief that sins can be confessed directly to God, bypassing the specific instructions of Jesus when he instituted the sacrament of penance.[2]

If to communicate is to be open to the other (person, community, or God) and to receive any sort "input" from them and to interact with them, then, not to communicate means to begin to close ourselves off.

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1. Vatican City, November 15, 2016. My translation from Italian.

2. American culture, which has greatly influenced Western culture and beyond, has been profoundly affected by the popularization of psychology, and more specifically by the notion that culpability for individual faults lies outside oneself: that every person is a "victim" of dysfunction among family, friends, culture, and environment. Consequently, there is a diminished sense of personal responsibility so that conscience becomes less a form of self-examination than of self-justification.

The significance and practice of metanoia and its fruits (honest examination of the conscience, acceptance of responsibility, and reordering of one's life) are being diluted and used less frequently. This phenomenon is not new, however. Many years ago, Richard Cardinal Cushing, addressing a group of psychiatrists, is reported to have declared: "Gentlemen, you have stolen our thunder! You have stolen Confession from us."

An individualistic society or, more specifically, individualistic members of a society tend to support and live according to

> …the increasingly predominant ethic of self-sufficiency with its focus on individual success; even religion is privatized so that a sense of common faith is lost. In this individualist environment there are no moral absolutes; everything is subjective and relative.[3]

To seek forgiveness by articulating grave sins committed is already an affirmation of the desire to restore unity with the community of the faithful, and, at the same time, it is an act of affirmation and recognition of moral absolutes.[4]

For those who commit venial sins and experience weakness daily, the graces of repeated celebration of the sacrament of penance grant them strength and vigor to continue on the path toward full liberty as sons and daughters of God.

As early as the Council of Trent, we are instructed that in order to benefit from the salutary remedy of the sacrament of penance, the penitent must confess to a priest, in accord with the disposition of the merciful God, all individual grave sins.[5]

Focusing here on the nature of confession, I seek to make evident the need to do exactly what the Council of Trent established; namely, to verbalize or say our sins aloud to a priest. I will do this by first analyzing the importance of the words themselves.

Words are expressions of the deep interiority of each person, and they have a fundamental communal aspect: we speak to communicate. We learn a language from a given community; therefore, it is suitable and necessary to use words to reestablish our communion

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3. Bernardin, "*The Sacrament of Penance in a Sacramental Church*" or "*The Virtue of Penance.*" National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Penance and Reconciliation in the Mission of the Church, 1983. Transcript of a talk (1983).

4. Even in the case of an incorrect assumption that a given act is sinful, when it is not, because that person acted believing that it was.

5. Cf. Council of Trent, 1707–08.

with God and with his Church in a deeply human way, as well as to hear the words of absolution, which personally and unequivocally witness to such an uplifting, renewing, and liberating endeavor.

Of all the sacraments, Holy Communion is the most personal, because we receive the Lord himself in our soul. It is also called Holy *Communion* because we are in communion with our brothers and sisters in faith, who have as well received the Lord in their hearts.

The sacrament of reconciliation is very personal in a singular way. Other sacraments we may not be aware that we are receiving, such as Baptism and the sacrament of the sick; or we need to give our consent, as in the sacraments of confirmation, marriage, and ordination. The sacrament of penance, however, deals with the innermost part of ourselves, where we feel guilty, where we have affected our relationship with God. Our very being has been touched and influenced by our grave sins: we feel contrite, and recognize the need for forgiveness. It is from this depth that the naming of our sins crystallizes our sinful actions. We need to name them in order to remove their burden from our souls. We need, as well, to hear the freeing words of absolution, as a welcome return to communion with God, and with the members of his Church, the communion of believers.

Introduction: In the Beginning Was the Word

In the beginning was the Word; "beginning" not in the sense of the beginning of cosmology, biology, and the theory of evolution, where, science suggests, not the Word, but matter stands at the forefront. But is this true? We experience matter every day, but what about the beginning of the cosmos or the biosphere? We do not possess any immediate experience of those beginnings. What we know is from their development, from how we access them. Contrary to what we perceive with our senses (empirical knowledge), we know what is developed through its consequences, and this kind of knowledge requires an act of thinking.

The Act of Thinking and the Role of Memory

What can only be accessed in the present is in the form of thoughts and of language, and, therefore, of words. If this is correct, then words also belong to the beginning, because, as Harald Schöndorf observes, "this beginning does not exist without the Word, but only in the Word and through the Word."[6]

Equally true is that there are no thoughts without memory. The English word *memory* usually connotes merely the passive storage of information. Augustine instead celebrates *memoria* as an active, constructive faculty of the soul's presence to itself through time. Alan Jacob explains: "It is *memoria,* in this sense, that enables us to think of our lives in meaningfully narrative terms; the whole project of identifying and pursuing a coherent life would be

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6. Schöndorf, *Am Anfang,* 161.

impossible without *memoria*."[7] Saint Augustine, in chapter ten of his *Confessions* provides one of the most famous meditations regarding memory ever written. In the depths of memory, the "subterranean shrine," we are tempted to get lost or drunk. We are, in a certain sense, our memory. We are a fruit of our experience, but this experience is not a point in time, but rather a span of time. We look back, toward our past, while we are still walking forward on the path of our lives. Saint Augustine says, "This experience . . . rested in his [friend Alypius's] memory to provide a remedy in the future."[8] We are, in a certain sense, dependent on our memory to continue walking the path of our lives. We have not reached the final point. We cannot have an "overview" of our lives. God, who is beyond time, sees us. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

Augustine concludes that memory is not simply a passive function; it is not mere recollection. As Jacobs has written about the bishop of Hippo, "Memory allows one not only to recall but also to restructure, to reinterpret past events, to discern a pattern in them that was not visible when they occurred."[9] Memory in one way has the power to "supplant reality."[10] After the experience of having sinned and having repented, memory helps us to build a better reality. We learn from our failures. A passage from Luke's Gospel, where we find the parable of the prodigal son, clearly illustrates this point. This son, after having squandered his inheritance, uses his memory as a touchstone and point of contrast, and says to himself: "how many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger!"[11]

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7. Jacobs, "What Narrative Theology," 28.

8. Agustine, *Confession.* [6.9.14].

9. Jacobs, Ibid.

10. Ibid., quoting James O'Donnell.

11. Luke 15:17.

Jacobs makes a valid point in highlighting Saint Augustine's preoccupation with the relation between memory and sin. Saint Augustine notes that we are able to remember our sins without committing them over again. Jacobs correctly observes that for Saint Augustine, this is one of the most important characteristics of memory, and indicates that it is a special gift from God. "Indeed, if the recollection of sin inevitably drew one back into that sin, memory would be a curse rather than a blessing."[12] To recall past sins can only be commendable for two reasons: To thank God for his mercy and love; and to learn from them in order to not commit them again.[13]

Spirit or Word?

Already in the oldest Bible translations into Latin, the word *Word* (*verbum*) was used at the beginning of John's Gospel.[14]

What was in the beginning, the *word* or the spirit? Does the beginning of Saint John's Gospel allow for this interpretation? Should we not more properly speak of spirit (πνεῦμα)[15] rather than of word (λόγος)?[16] Between the notions of spirit and soul, philosophers and theologians have always had, and continue to have, a tough nut to crack; therefore, to speak of word is much safer, because it is possible to grasp words empirically, whereas the spirit escapes

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12. Jacobs, "What Narrative Theology," 28.

13 The sacrament of penance in some ways cuts the sins from the sinner. Those sins that are forgiven, are forgiven, and what God does, he does perfectly; therefore, to ruminate on past sins is not productive.

14. Not a single Bible translation used the word *reason* to translate John 1:1.

15. Matthew 27:50.

16. Schöndorf, *Am Anfang,* 166.

this possibility.17 Words can be analyzed scientifically, there is something "material" in them.18 At the same time, words can point to spiritual realities.19 We can safely say that "words are the material signs of the spirit."20 Therefore, words, by their nature, are spirit in matter.21 Schöndorf sees in this an indication that with the Incarnation of the Word, words, thereby, fulfilled their destiny, which was in place from the beginning.22

Schöndorf's connecting words and the Word that took flesh to dwell among us,23 is telling. It is as if with the Incarnation of the Word, all words pointed to that crucial moment of human salvation, as well as reflecting that, from the beginning, that was God's intention in his plan of salvation.

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17. When Aristotle defined human as ζῷον λόγον ἔχον (*Politics* 1253a 9–10), he did not want to say *animal rationale* nor did he want to direct toward the "semantic orbit" of its Latin interpretation. To possess the λόγος is the characteristic by which a human takes off from its animal context and inserts him or herself in his or her very essence. "But λόγος is more than *rationale* because originally, and throughout its evolution in Greek philosophy, his meaning implied an essential relation with the expression, with the expressed thought, with words." Lledo, *Filosofia,* 98.

18. For example, in a particular form of literature, poetry, words and phrases can be measured by rhyme and meter. Single words can also be analyzed following their roots and etymology.

19. Like virtues (for example love, hope, etc.).

20. Schöndorf, *Am Anfang,* 166.

21. It is logical that a human, described by Prof. Lucas Lucas with the title of his book from 1997 as "*L'Uomo Spirito Incarnato*" ("*Man, Incarnate Spirit*"), expresses himself or herself in "material signs" of that spirit, that is, in words. (The book was translated into English in 2008.)

22 The original quotation in German: *"Wenn nun aber das Wort seinem Wesen nach Geist in Materie ist, so bedeutet die Inkarnation, die Fleischwerdung des Wortes, eigentlich, dass das Wort damit der Bestimmung nachkommt, die immer schon in ihm angelegt war."* Schöndorf, *Am Anfang,* 167.

23 John 1:14.

The Word as Unity of Body and Spirit

Schöndorf continues: "Words are symbolization[24] and because of this, they are 'corporealization'[25] of the spirit. In words are body and spirit originally united with each other."[26] Body and spirit[27] are not united in the brain but in words. Who denies the existence of the spirit can never deny the existence of words.[28]

Fittingly, Schöndorf wonders, why words and not phrases? Veracity, that is, the capacity to contain truth, is found in phrases. For example: The apple is green. (This sentence can be true or not true. Apples can also be red. The words *apple* and *green* exist and evoke in the reader or listener a specific idea or memory, whether they see an apple in a fruit basket or imagine one.) A given sentence expresses a set of facts on which we can agree or disagree. But a sentence is not the most basic, of archaic origin, but a word is. Words are simpler than phrases, and an individual word itself can convey meaning.[29]

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24. The German word *Versinnlichung* better conveys the fact that what we know, we know through and only through our senses (*Sinnen*).

25. In German: "*Verleiblichung*."

26. *"Das Wort ist Versinnlichung und somit Verleiblichung des Geistes. Im Wort sind Leib und Geist ursprünglich vereint."* Schöndorf, *Am Anfang,* 168.

27. I concur with Schöndorf that it is better to write "body and spirit" and not "body and soul," which would open a Pandora's box and take us away from our theme. *Soul* has a religious tone to it, whereas *spirit* is more neutral in meaning, suitable for our purpose in this paper.

28. We think in a given language. Language "clothes" our thoughts. Words help us to give a precise and clear idea of what we mean. Words circumscribe and reveal our thoughts.

29. Schöndorf gives the example of a toddler who starts to speak in words, not in sentences. They use a word to call someone ("Daddy," "Mom") or to name something ("milk," etc.) He goes on to explain that this originality is not only a chronological priority of the word in comparison with the phrase. If this were not true, then babies would not be able to express themselves with single words, but only with phrases. Lexicons, with the meaning of single words, would be of no use, because it would be impossible to determine the meaning of a single word without the context of a phrase. "When a word has more meaning than one, or when it is part of a rhetorical, poetic, scientific expression, then we need to know the context of the word," otherwise to know the simple empirical description of a word is enough.

Schöndorf believes that "the word is the empirical refutation of empiricism. Because the word is what occurs empirically, it cannot be empirically understood."[30] It can be argued that words are only instruments used for a given purpose, and that they are not part of the purpose itself. Instruments help us to reach a purpose, a goal. Schöndorf continues: "Instruments are only subordinated to their purpose when their goal is superior, and when they reach their purpose they are independent from it."[31] He argues that this is not the case with words. Words are not merely instruments to reach a goal, but they are indispensable aspects of the goal itself.

> With it, word is the permanent sting in the flesh of all materialistic theories and contradicts them permanently from within. Then, while spirit is the opposite of matter and of materialistic [philosophy], for which reason the very existence of spirit attacks frontally and [with materialistic] philosophy; words [made of] the same contradiction to materialistic [philosophy], because words, in contrast to spirit and to soul, can be found empirically, empirically examined, and yet words are not material.[32]

At the beginning of philosophy, there are words; so, too, at the beginning of theology, there are words. Chapter one of this study examines the most important dialogue a creature can have: the dialogue with God, a dialogue permeated with love. Even after Adam and Eve's fall, God does not interrupt or discontinue the dialogue.

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30. "All empiricism, positivism, reductionism, naturalism, materialism exists only in words and through words." Schöndorf , *Am Anfang,* 169.

31. Ibid. Consider the machines and tools necessary to build a house: Excavators, tractors, saws, etc. When the house is finished, that equipment is no longer needed, and it is removed from the property. It is not displayed in the garden as outdoor sculpture.

32. Ibid., 169–70: *"Damit is es aber der bleibende Stachel im Fleisch aller materialistischen Theorien und widerlegt sie permanent von innen heraus. Denn waehrend Seele oder Geist das Gegenteil der Materie und des Materialismus ist, weshalb ihre Existenz vom Materialismus frontal angegriffen und bestritten wird, ist das Wort der gleichsam materielle Widerspruch des Materialismus, den es ist im Gegensatz zum Geist und zur Seele, empirisch antreffbar, sinnlich vernehmbar und geht dennoch nicht darin auf, materiell zu sein."* I translated the German term *wort* (singular) to *words* (plural) in order to fit the text to the general context of this introduction.

Language of Faith

The language of theology can also be called a language of faith. This is particularly true in the Christian faith, since "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."[33] The language of faith is necessary to teach and develop the faith in the particular Christian, when he or she prays to God and participates in the Church's liturgy, as well as for the Church when she speaks, teaches, prays, and worships God.

Gerhard Ebeling observes, "Theology accepts responsibility for the language of faith, but does not create it."[34] That is so because before Christian theology was developed, there was the Bible. Throughout its history, Christianity has depended on the Bible as the source and norm of the language of faith. A clear example of this is the institution of the sacraments, particularly the sacraments of the Eucharist and penance, based on Jesus' words of institution.

The language of faith is not something distilled out of the ordinary language of the world and separated from it. The Bible itself proves that the language of faith is deeply rooted in the language of the world. It is this interconnection that strengthens it, but it is also a source of conflict. Ebeling speaks of the "loss of polarity,"[35] which deforms the language of faith. The two extremes are secularism, with its emphatic doctrine of one kingdom (on earth), and what can be called "regionalism," which Ebeling describes as the "formal establishment of a religious attitude which acts as though it were self-sufficient in isolation from the experience of the world."[36] This conundrum can be resisted only within the experience of the world; that is, head on, and not retreating into a corner. The challenge is to continue to speak about heaven with our feet securely

33. John 1:14.

34. Ebeling, *Introduction,* 188.

35. Ibid., 193.

36. Ibid.

on earth. Therefore, the message "repent and believe in the Gospel,"[37] pronounced by Jesus at the beginning of his public mission, needs to continue challenging people of every age.

To repent and to believe belong together, because without faith, repentance is seen as unnecessary; and without repentance, faith is fruitless, arid, and eventually dies out. Faith is not a possession, but a relationship with a living person: Christ. Paul Wadell explains:

> With the forgiveness offered by the crucified Christ, the story of sin becomes a narrative of hope and redemption. In this respect, our journey to happiness begins at the foot of Jesus' cross because without God's forgiveness, the journey would not be possible. Without forgiveness, we would be mired in the muck of sin, unable to free ourselves. This is why an essential ingredient to happiness is learning to live a forgiven and forgiving life. Remembering that we are forgiven, continually beholden to grace, points us toward happiness.[38]

By begging for forgiveness, we are accepting spiritual help, the outstretched hand of Christ, who reaches out to us when we are drowning. We do not do this with a gesture, but with words, with language. The process of language itself is, in its basic intention, an exercise of love. For example, if a baby is not stimulated with language, because nobody speaks to him or her, the baby is not drawn into a community of language, and likewise suffers a lack of love. The most telling sign of the disintegration of a community is that people no longer speak with each other. It is a superb moment of reconciliation when people again speak with each other. Consequently, words intrinsically act as means of reconciliation. Eberling deftly observes that "harmony comes into being through love mediated by language."[39]

The present crisis of the sacrament of penance reflects the state and health of our relationship with God. If there is no communication with him, there is seemingly no need to go to him for forgiveness. Conversely, by verbally seeking forgiveness from God, we strengthen our

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37. Mark 1:15.

38. Wadell, *Happiness,* 167.

39. Ebeling, *Introduction,* 200.

communication with him, and nurture our dear wish to continue engaging in a loving relationship with him and with each other.

Synopsis

Originally, it was not my plan to start this work with a chapter dedicated to the importance of the divine dialogue, the dialogue between the human being—the apex of creation—and our creator and loving God. Reading some authors from the twentieth century and reflecting on the importance of the spoken word and, above all, the Word of God, inspired me to add a chapter with a solid foundation in the Old Testament. By doing so, I intend to set the groundwork for a better understanding of the importance of expressing in words, within the sacrament of penance, sorrow for having offended the One who is Love: God.

The second chapter is written from a purely philosophical perspective, because I am convinced that problems in theology very frequently have philosophical roots. There cannot be good theology if the philosophical foundation is flawed. I explore the development of words as a gift and as expressions of our being a unity of body and spirit. I also describe the philosophical challenges of words and language. I investigate the remote philosophical problems in dissolution of being. I begin by offering a brief description of the Triangle of Parmenides (Being → Knowing → Saying), and show that the dissolution of "being" toward "saying" that started with Duns Scotus continues today. The dissociation of being and saying suggests that each person can have his or her own truth, disconnected from reality, or that each person can have his or her own reality—and, by extension, morality.

In the third chapter, the philosophical study turns increasingly theological, especially regarding some theologians of the twentieth century, mainly German-speaking authors, but also Karol Wojtyła, and two from the English-speaking world: J. L. Austin and John Searle.

Chapter four gradually shifts from philosophical considerations to more-theological ones, and focuses solely on Louis-Marie Chauvet's thoughts on the theology of the sacrament of penance. I begin with his analysis of language as the "house of being." From there, I consider Chauvet's approach to the importance of language and the sacraments, with a special focus on the sacrament of penance, his area of expertise. To be analyzed is whether Chauvet's theology is the right way to overcome the impasse mentioned in the previous two chapters. I also present my personal critique of his approach.

The fifth and final chapter offers a theological-liturgical discourse, revisiting the sacrament of penance in light of this evolution. In this discussion, I refer to Vatican II, where the directive in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosantum Concilium,* seeking to promote a greater participation of the laity in the liturgy stated: "The rite and formulae of Penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and the effect of the sacrament." The fruit of this effort was the Rite of Penance of 1973, which made sacramental confession more explicitly an encounter with Jesus, the Word made flesh, by way of an encounter in the Word, the Word of God in Sacred Scripture. As a point of contrast, I mention an approach to the sacrament of confession from the Episcopal Church given by Martin L. Smith.

Chapter One

The Divine Dialogue

Questioning, knowing and willing are spiritual activities. Man is actually finite, but he is virtually infinite because he is open to the infinite. —Charles Bent

What does it mean to be "open to the infinite"? It means we are able to hear the words of the One who is infinite: God. In the Old Testament, we find a concise summary of orthodox Hebrew belief about God in the book of Deuteronomy: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord"[1] and: ". . . the Lord is God and there is no other."[2] God first spoke his word directly to his nation, then through the prophets, and his ultimate word "took Flesh and dwelt among us." In the New Testament, belief in one God continues to be a central theme.

The Love Story of Salvation History

Revelation is a dialogue between God and humanity, and this dialogue is a gradually unfolding love story of salvation history that, according to Charles Bent, "unveils a true dialogue, for man's free decisions determine God's further word to man, and man thereby becomes an active partner in this drama."[3]

It is precisely this God, who is totally other, who shows the incomprehensible creative force of his love, by initiating the dialogue with man and woman. This is the *descensus Dei* (the descent of God). It is a word of the divine majesty that opens up the dialogue. This word of God is humanity's theology. Theology means first that God speaks with man and woman; theology is

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1. שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל 'ה אֱלֹהֵינוּ 'ה אֶחָד (Deuteronomy 6:4).

2. מִלְּבַדּוֹ: עוֹד אֵין הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יְהוָה כִּי לָדַעַת הָרְאֵתָ אַתָּה (Deuteronomy 4:35).

3. Bent, *Interpreting,* 187. For simplicity, and in accord with Old Testament usage, the word *man* is favored in this chapter. Of course, *man* refers to humankind, both men and women.

the word that comes from God. To open the dialogue in biblical categories means that God offers man a *berit*.[4] The *berit* is, therefore, a gift of God, a unilateral act of God. He gives the *berit* freely.

The realization of the *berit* is not contingent on any merits or preexisting tasks on the part of man and woman. For them, this *discensus Dei*, this act of God, is pure unmerited grace. In Hebrew there are different expressions to describe the content of this gift. The most important one is *hèsèd*,[5] which indicates a mixture of love, love-kindness, grace, donation of self, and benevolence.[6] This initial divine act, this unilateral instauration by God, is the basis for the bilateral relation between God and man. This *berit* is therefore a "community of life."

From God's gift comes man's obligation to respond. When man accepts the *berit,* it becomes a bilateral identity, a communion of life. We must recall that God is always holy; he will always be the Lord. Therefore, in this dialogue and communion, the two parts are not equal. We can compare the *berit* with a propeller and its two focal points: In the first one, there is God, who has given his *hèsèd* to man; in the second, there is man, who is requested to respond to this gift. What does it mean to respond? God's work requires that man, to whom the divine gift was addressed, work. What is this work of man? In his communion with the *berit*, man must reflect like a mirror God's *hèsèd.* In communion with the *berit,* God asks man to conform to the matching grace. The *hèsèd* of man, means, in the first place, thankfulness; thereafter, loyalty and

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4. בְּרִית Translated as "covenant," "promise," or "pledge." "The relationship of Yahweh and Israel is unique in the religions of the ancient world. In other ancient religions, the deity is identified either with nature or with society that worships deity. . . . On the contrary, the relation of Yahweh and Israel, like the created universe, is the result of a positive action of Yahweh; and the relation of Yahweh and Israel is completed by a positive response of Israel." Brown, *New Jerome,* 1297.

5. חֶסֶד

6. According to Prof. Goswin Habets, from the Gregorian University, this expression is only comparable to the German *"Huld,"* which in one word expresses "covenant," "promise," "pledge," and "reverence."

fidelity. Therefore, the gift of the *berit* from God becomes for man, in the communion of the *berit,* a pledge.[7] The pledge to reflect the *hèsèd* means fidelity.

How can man know in which way he is invited to respond? In what concrete manner can man show his *hèsèd?* In communion with the *berit*. It must be noted that God is always the teacher, and humanity is continually invited to remember how God has loved his nation.[8] To remember means that man and woman need to live according to the rules the divine will has established. Man and woman are invited to conform themselves to the divine disposition, and here enter the Ten Commandments, the law in the concept of *berit*. The Decalogue indicates how humans behaves as an answer to God's love and mercy. The *hèsèd* of man crystallizes in loving obedience to the Decalogue, the law. When man and woman love God and, therefore, behaves accordingly in obedience to his precepts, humans can remain in the grace of God.

The Ten Commandments that indicate to man and woman how they must behave are called in Hebrew *debarim*[9] (plural of *dabar,* that is, the Ten Words). This means that the word, with which God has initiated the dialogue, becomes for man and woman, in the communion of the *berit,* an imperative word by which God reveals his divine will. We find this in Leviticus: "You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (19:2). In this fragment, God reveals the depth of his divine will.[10] This phrase is explained in the prescriptions found in the following verses: "Each of you revere your mother and father" (19:3a); "keep my Sabbaths" (19:3b); "Do not turn aside to idols, nor make molten gods for yourselves" (19:4); "You shall not steal. You

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7. Again, the German words *Gabe* and *Aufgabe* come closer to the original Hebrew, because they contain the word "gave" from "geben" ("to give" in English). Who is the One who gives? God.

8. Exodus 15.

9. דְּבָרִים

10. All other commandments explain the first. For example, if material things are put in first place, it goes against the Seventh Commandment. If power is divinized, the Fifth Commandment prohibits it. If man replaces God with something else, there is no place for him in the covenant.

shall not deceive or speak falsely to one another" (19:11). Through these words explained in the prescriptions of the Decalogue, God calls man to his divine realm, and this is precisely the "*ascensus homini.*" The ascent of man is the answer to God's calling. It is like when Jesus extends his hand toward Peter, who, though he can walk on water, begins to drown. Jesus brings him up above the water.[11] God calls man to himself; therefore, the imperative word and the prescriptions of the Decalogue require from man and woman a purity and a moral innocence that mirror the immaculate purity of God. God's holiness becomes the norm for man's personal morality. The holiness of God that reveals itself first as ontic holiness,[12] given in the ambit of the communion of the *berit,* also reveals the aspect of moral sanctity. To this holiness man and woman are called, and through obedience to the call, they realize their salvation. This is the *ascensus* of man toward God, who is holy, who is morality. Morality is, therefore, a thanksgiving for theology; morality is the echo of theology. There is no morality without theology; otherwise, it would be a superficial morality. In the Bible, God always takes the initiative.

God's Word, the *Dabar* of YHWH

For the people in the Middle East at the time of Jesus, the notion of "word" was of great significance, greater than that for us today, where words are a collection of sounds that are used as phonetical instruments to communicate. A word is a mediator that allows the spirit (νουσ) to express himself. A word has noetic value.[13] When a word designates an object, the word is a

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11. Matthew 14:22–33.

12. In philosophy, ontic (from the Greek ὄν, genitive ὄντος: "of that which is") is physical, real, or factual existence. Ontic holiness, therefore, means the real holiness God expects from his creatures.

13. Noetic used here as "originated in or apprehended by the reason." The Greek word νοητικός comes from νοητος "intellectual," also from νοειν "perceive"; ultimately from νοέω, "I see, understand."

simple label that is "put on" the object. The occidental concept makes a distinction between *res*[14] and *verbum,* a material moment, and a spiritual one. This occidental concept is very far from the one in the Ancient Middle East.

The Old Testament does not make such a distinction. A word is not abstract, but concrete information; it contains what it says. The *dabar* is a word full of content: the word "incorporates" the object. It has its own dynamic.[15] A word spoken with an energetic voice of the will is given a powerful dynamic. Such a word enters into activity with the exterior. It is capable of fulfilling what it signifies. For instance, a royal order requires an immediate response. When a word is uttered, it is an independent reality that cannot be withheld or taken back. In the Old Testament, we find many such examples.

In Genesis 27, Jacob deceives Isaac, who feels that his death is near and wishes to give his word of blessing to Esau, his firstborn son. Rebekah instigates Jacob to fool Isaac, and he is the one who receives the blessing. When Esau returns home and discovers Jacob's trick, there is nothing either he or his father can do. The word of blessing is irrevocable. Isaac cannot cancel or render it invalid.

In 2 Samuel 12:1–7, Nathan visits King David and tells him a parable, after David's adultery with Bathsheba, following the death of her husband Uriah. The king explodes and sentences the cruel man in the parable to death. When Nathan speaks, King David discovers that he has condemned himself. Nathan assures him that the path of the word will be diverted, but the sentence of the word, once uttered, cannot be taken back. It can only be redirected. The sentence falls upon the son of David and Bathsheba.

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14. *Res* understood as a nominative singular Latin noun for a substantive or concrete thing.

15. The word *dynamite* has the same root as *dynamic*: δύναμις, -εως means "power."

In Joshua 6:26 and 1 Kings 16:34, Joshua pronounces this solemn oath: "Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho." Hiel rebuilds Jericho, and Joshua's curse is fulfilled more than three hundred years later.

In theological language, the expression *dabar* YHWH is the most important element of divine revelation. The phrase *dabar* YHWH is uttered two hundred and forty-one times by the prophets. It is the thought and will of YHWH, and is the willful form through which God's activity is manifested in the world.

The Word Appears as Creative and as Revelation of the Law

God's Word created everything that exists in heaven and on earth. *Dabar* is a commandment and order, not a proposition. In the priestly narrative of Creation in the book of Genesis, creation occurs through God's Word. His Word suffices for the world to exist. This is the idea of *bara*[16] in the first verses of the Bible: God *created* through his Word. When we say that the world is the effect of the Word of God, we do not mean that the world is a divine emanation. It is not part of God as the pantheists suggest. At the same time the Word is an element of continuity between God and his work. We find the cultic Word[17] in contact with a sacred action: at the same time that a priest transmits the blessing, God blesses his nation. God acts as priest. To this Word of God, the community that praises God responds.

The Decalogue and the law, the *debarim,* are the manifestation and the will of God. The Decalogue is the summary of God's will, yet God is not a tyrant who imposes his will, but a loving father, who, for the good of his children, establishes ways to live. The force, strength, and

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16. בָּרָא

17. Cultic not in the negative sense (as belonging to a sect or small religious group), but in the most etymological meaning from "care" (Latin *cultus*): as the care owed to deities and to temples, shrines, or churches.

power of God's Word intends nothing else than to gather all his children "as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."[18]

God's Word in the Decalogue is pure objectivity and does not unite to human desires. It expects only one answer from man: obedience and assent, because God's Word possesses a quality of the will. God knows what is best for us humans, even if we do not realize it or do not want to realize it; as, for example, when a toddler learns that fire is dangerous through a protective slap on the hand rather than from a painful accident and burned skin.

The Ten Commandments are valid for everyone. They are supratemporally valid for all generations. They transcend time and place. This authority is independent of man's acceptance and obedience. We know this from Deuteronomy 31:10–31, where God's Word is at the summit of a solemn celebration of a feast of renovation of the covenant celebrated every seven years.

The Word should never be forgotten. With this repeated celebration, Israel wanted to signify that the Word has equal authority for all times and generations. It is a perpetual and actual "today" in the existence of man and woman.

YHWH's Word and His Prophets

The fullest revelation that God makes to Israel is spoken through the prophets. God gives his Word freely and when he wills. He takes the initiative. The prophet can never dispose of it. He needs to wait for it, and it can be denied.[19] In some periods, the Word is rare,[20] and nobody

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18. Luke 13:34.

19. Jeremiah 28:11ff.

20. 1 Samuel 3:1: "The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions."

can control it. God never gives it as an answer to a human petition. God presents himself to Abraham with an unexpected Word; the same was true for Moses and the rest of the prophets.

The prophet listens, sees, perceives, and assimilates the Word. Under the control of God, the prophet can appropriate the Word received, but he is conscious that the power of the Word is independent of him and that it surpasses him. The prophet assumes the Word, and at the same time, he experiences that he does not have power over it, but that the Word has control over him.[21] The prophet speaks about violence: It is like fire in the bones,[22] like a wrath that summits him,[23] and it is also sweet as honey.[24]

To announce to others the Word that he has received from God is the prophet's mission. The prophet depends totally on the Word. When he does not hear it, he cannot announce it. Even in the prophet's mouth, the Word is autonomous. It acts in virtue of its own weight, and it does not depend on the prophet. Each simple message is God's Word. The revelation that it holds is specific, and it is not in the form of a general truth. It is valid in the first place for a specific group of people, in time and space; then, and only then, is it valid for everyone.

God's Word is related in an intimate way to history; it is the engine of the history of Israel. The force of this engine is God's own dynamic. It is a force that performs that which it signifies. It is a work, an ouvre, not only a word. It displays God in his action in time, history,

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21. For example, Amos 3:8: "A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?"

22. Jeremiah 20:9: "But if I say, 'I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

23. Jeremiah 6:11: "But I am full of the wrath of the LORD; I am weary with holding it in. 'Pour it out on the children in the street And on the gathering of young men together; For both husband and wife shall be taken, The aged and the very old."

24. Ezekiel 3:3: "He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.' Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth."

and space. Where the prophetic Word is, there YHWH himself is working. At the moment in which the prophet announces God's Word, God's work starts in history.

With an increase in the sins of humanity, God's responds with increased involvement for his people. After Israel's exodus from Egypt, YHWH speaks to his nation through a mediator, a prophet, who transmits God's message to his people.

In addition to the announcement of the Word, the prophet undertakes symbolic actions. What are their function? Symbolic actions can highlight the Word and can concretize it. They can also take the place of the prophesied word and can produce a signified reality.

Symbolic actions are referred to as such because they are signs of another reality. In these symbolic actions, YHWH, through the prophets, acts in favor of Israel and for Israel. They produce reality like the Word of God in the prophet: when he fulfills these actions, the future starts to be. Symbolic actions have the capacity to create history and can be considered a step toward the sacraments of the New Covenant, because they are external signs that are accepted by the believer (as it acknowledged in the Council of Trent).[25]

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25. DZ 1606: (Council of Trent) 849 Can. 6. *"Si quis dixerit, sacramenta novae Legis non continere gratiam, quam significant, aut gratiam ipsam non ponentibus obicem non conferre* [cf. DS 1451], *quasi signa tantum externa sint acceptae per fidem gratiae vel iustitiae, et notae quaedam christianae professionis, quibus apud homines discernuntur fideles ab infidelibus: an. s."*

The Prophet's Message and His Personal Life

The prophet witnessed to his message with his life. The physical existence of the prophet is expropriated in function of God's Word and God's action.[26] Beginning with Hosea, sacrifice and personal suffering are intrinsic elements of the prophetic role. Before Hosea's time—that is with Amos, Isaiah, and Micah—we do not know for certain if the prophets suffered or not, for they do not mention it in their writings. But with Hosea and later prophets, we see a progression, a crescendo, an increasing personal involvement.

Hosea's whole physical being needed to make YHWH's message clear in the flesh. His obedience went as far as his private life. He experienced in his marriage a bitter disillusion. In his private, intimate life, he endured with his unfaithful wife what YHWH endured with the infidelity of His nation Israel. Hosea suffers because God suffers.

With Jeremiah, there is an even deeper involvement in the person of the prophet.[27] In him, there is bitterness, not only toward the people, but also toward YHWH, which breaks him in two. He finds himself undergoing a horrible abandonment by God. He no longer wants to be involved with people or God.

Ezekiel represents the next level of personal involvement in the prophetic mission. With him, there is a new element of suffering. His role as mediator compromises his own life, because YHWH makes him personally accountable for the people. Ezekiel will be held responsible if one of them gets lost, and he cannot escape this responsibility.[28] His suffering is a vicarious suffering. Here we find yet another essential characteristic of the prophet. With Ezekiel, we

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26. Examples: 1 Kings 11:29–32; Jeremiah 19:10–11; Isaiah 20:2–4; Jeremiah 16:2–4; Isaiah 7:3ff.; Isaiah 8:4.

27. Jeremiah 11:8–23; 12:1–5; 15:10–21; 18:18–23; 20:7–18.

28. Ezekiel 13:4ff; 22:28ff.

arrive at the extreme case of the prophet, but not even he was able to stop the people from being unfaithful to YHWH's covenant.

This same image is found in the figure of Moses. The book of Deuteronomy presents him as a charismatic leader who helps to diminish YHWH's rage, and pays for it with his life. Before the nation of Israel finally reaches the Promised Land, Moses dies, so that others can get there.[29] He sacrifices himself for others.

How will the history of the covenant end? Four hundred years of the Silence of God, four hundred years without prophets and prophecies pass until the arrival of Saint John the Baptist, the last and greatest prophet of all. With John the Baptist, the time of promise, the period of Israel, comes to an end; with the baptism of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, the time of fulfillment, the period of Jesus, begins.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the total revelation of God's commitment to our salvation. He is the servant of God, the one who will not only pay for the sins of others, but will do so in place of others; the one whose perfect obedience makes him perfect sacrifice, the perfect victim, the lamb that goes to the slaughter. His end is the end of the innocent victim; his death is full of shame; and he is crucified among thieves.

Jesus is the son of the Father, with whom eternity melds into history. God's word in the Old Testament has efficacy; God's Word through the sacraments is also efficacious. In both cases, Israel and the Church are compelled to react to the Word, to repent and change their sinful behavior in order to attain eternal salvation.

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29. Deuteronomy 32:51–52.

Prophets and Priests

A Catholic priest needs to be accountable for the people to whom he ministers, as was Ezekiel. To minister to the people of God following God's calling, to pray for them, and to intercede for them in his personal prayers is part of what being a priest entails. Likewise, a confessor needs, in his personal life, to help do penance for the sins of penitents, as did the prophets in the Old Testament. By doing so, the priest represents Christ, and, "however unworthily, he stands *in persona Christi capitis*. The ministerial priesthood [is] an icon of the unique ministry of Jesus Christ, God and man."[30]

This chapter was meant to set a foundation in the Old Testament with the word of God transmitted by a prophet to the nation of Israel and, in the New Testament the role of priests as *alter Christus,* where Christ's words and actions continue to be efficacious and life giving, when God continues unceasingly to reach out the lost sheep. The next chapter considers word and language from a philosophical aspect. In the first centuries, Christian theology utilizes Greek philosophy to better explain faith. Likewise, it is useful to follow that approach regarding the use of words and language, as well as its challenges.

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30. "Exchange of Letters," 106.

Chapter Two

Relation Between Being, Saying, and Knowing

The house of truth is the judgment. —Aristotle

*When reason is in doubt, suspicion is cast on language,
for language is reason's principal instrument*. —George W. Morgan

When a word designates an object, the word is a simple label that is "put on" the object.[1] Effective communication requires more than naming or labeling objects.[2] We must use words to form phrases and so increase our knowledge and share it with others.[3] Walter J. Ong explains that knowledge is actual in "the judgment, statement, assertion, that is, in an event in time through which radical intelligibility is realized."[4]

Before the advent of the written word, maintaining acquired knowledge was an arduous task. For example, history needed to be interiorized, memorized, and transmitted verbally. When the alphabet was developed, knowledge could be recorded and stored, and protected more easily.

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1. Aristotle mentions that "spoken words are symbols of mental experience, and written words are the symbol of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which they directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experience are the image." *De Interpretatione,* quoted in Gilson, *Linguistics,* 60.

For Aristotle, a given mental image (for example "chair") is the same for all men who have seen chairs, but there are as many different words signifying the image of "chair" as there are different languages. If the word were directly caused as the image signifies, language would be as natural as the image itself. It would then be as universal as the image, and just as there would be one sole image of "chair" in all minds, so there would be only word to name it. There would be in that case one language not many. "This is why the word, or noun, is defined as a sound significant by convention, and not by nature." Gilson, *Linguistics,* 61.

2. The first instance in the Bible of something being named can be found in Genesis 1:19–20 when Adam names the different animals. To name them denotes man's dominion (and responsibility) toward them.

3. Aristotle, in his treatise *On Interpretation,* applies himself above all to the study of sentences that are "propositions," because they are the only ones that articulate truth or falsity, good or evil. They are therefore also the only ones that directly contribute to making possible the perfect form of society outside of which humans would not know how to attain their complete development and their end, as Etienne Gilson rightly points out. Ibid., 60.

4. Ong, *The Presence,* 160.

These documents could be passed on to future generations, even if all the members of a given community died out.[5]

Linguists count the Semitic alphabets among the most ancient alphabets.[6] The Pentateuch and the Bible make plain that Ancient Hebrews and Christians, respectively, knew not only the spoken word but the alphabet as well. As seen in chapter one, for the nations in the ancient Middle East, the notion of "word" had a greater significance than for us today. The word for them had noetic value.[7]

Ong observes: "Today we have often to labor to regain the awareness that [words] are still always at root [of] spoken words. Early man had no such problem: he felt [that words], even when written, [were] primarily events in sound."[8]

In the popular phrase "silence speaks volumes," we acknowledge that there is a "speaking silence"[9] and also a poignant pause that can communicate. This is true, Ong explains, because "silence itself is conceived of by reference to sound; it is sound's polar opposite."[10]

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5. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered between 1947 and 1956, date from 250 B.C. to 68 A.D.

6. I will not explore the distinction between "true alphabets," that is, alphabets that assign letters to both consonants and vowels on an equal basis, and other more primitive alphabets.

7. Here *noesis* is used in the original Greek sense of the word, as referring to perception of the mind, what the *nous* does; and in the technical sense used in the tradition of the Brentano-Husserl "philosophy of intentionality."
An example of the importance of the words and the Old Testament is what the German exegetes call *Botenspruch–Botenformel* (real message–messenger formula). This form derives from the diplomatic way of delivering messages in the Ancient Middle East. When a messenger arrived in the presence of the recipient of his message, he did not deliver the message in an indirect way, but in a direct one: "My lord has said: I tell you, …" ("My lord has said" being the *Botenformel,* and "I tell you …" being the *Botenspruch,* or real message, delivered as coming from the mouth of the lord.) An example of this can be found in Isaiah 2, 21–26.

8. Ong, *The Presence,* 3. "The ancient Hebrews tended to think of understanding as a kind of hearing, whereas the Greeks thought of it more as a kind of seeing, although far less exclusively as seeing than post-Cartesian Western man generally has tended to do."

9. To say something implies that the word said has a meaning in itself and to others, who can understand this meaning (starting with speaking the same language), and that this meaning can be conceived, or thought. People can speak about what they do not know, uttering words that make no sense, but people cannot really speak to a new purpose. The only way to say nothing is to hold one's tongue and remain silent. On a different level of understanding, this silence can be interpreted, but to do so, the context needs to be understood, beginning with a common language. The only way of knowing what one thinks is to express it (in words or writing).

During the Middle Ages, a greater visualization of language occurred, initiated by script, and the alphabet became more widely used in the West. Both advances were suddenly brought to a new intensity in the fifteenth century and thereafter with the invention of an ornate lettering style.

Before Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, around 1440, the importance of the spoken word was much greater than we can conceive today. Even after, the spoken word continued to be an important way to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next. For example, in the philological work of the Grimm brothers,[11] we get a glimpse of the importance of the oral tradition and its subsequent popularity as printed word. They collected popular German folktales, told from generation to generation. They also began writing a definitive German dictionary in 1838 (four hundred years after Gutenberg's printing press!).[12]

If the printed word was so instrumental to the advancement of knowledge and science after books were no longer hand copied, we can recognize a renewed emphasis in the auditory, beginning when radio, telephone, and television became permanent fixtures, first in the Western world and then the world over, but especially since personal computers and the Internet have made the world a "global village."[13] This cannot be interpreted as a going back to the past or a

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10. Ibid., 3.

11. I mention these two philologists because the amount of information that a person knew in their lifetime was much less than what a current Sunday *New York Times* contains today. In other words, even though the printing press helped to spread knowledge, the increasing amount of knowledge not was available to the average civilian, as stated by Paul Johnson in *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815 – 1830*.

12. *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (German dictionary).

13. The role of mass media in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections would be an interesting case sturdy, especially its veracity and provenience, but also the popular distrust of the media and fascination with alternative sources of information (for example WikiLeaks).

going back to an oral world; however, the increasingly interconnected world gives us, according to Ong, a "unique opportunity to become aware of a new depth of the significance of [words]."[14]

There is a profound connection between sound, thought, truth, and time.[15] Ong correctly states: "Sound belongs with thought not only because of its interiorizing and socializing powers but also because of its relationships to time. Sound is time-bound: it exists by moving through time. Sound can never be sensed other than as something going on."[16] In sound, there is a beginning, an end, and a period in between. In a normal conversation, there is a time to speak and a time to listen. We cannot listen to more than one conversation at the same time. We cannot process the information received and react to it in more than one conversation; *mutatis mutandis* we cannot read more than one text at the same time.

We always speak about something, with someone. This is true even if we talk to ourselves, which for some philosophers constitutes thinking.

The Basic Problem

When we speak, we speak in a given language. It can be our mother tongue or not. If we have something to say, we have it in our minds as *verbum mentale*.[17] It can be said as *verbum orale;* it is uttered in a given language with more or fewer words than in others.[18] Words dress

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14. Ong, *The Presence*, 9. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to explore the relation between the use of memory in oral cultures and alphabetic cultures (with printed books), or even with cultures with advanced communication technology. We need only to compare the number of poems, discourses, etc., that students needed to memorize in school one generation ago, with the quantity that students needed to memorize now.

15. Language consists of statements relating to time, in which the tenses are determined by the perspective in which the speaker at the present time regards them.

16. Ibid.*,* 148.

17. I purposefully avoided the word *idea* here, because it is attached to so many different shades of philosophical meaning.

18. For example, there is a difference in the number of words the *Our Father* has in Latin and in German.

our thoughts; some languages dress certain thoughts better than others.[19] Lies, on the other hand, camouflage our thoughts, disguise them, regardless of the language.

Now, the question arises: why it is possible that a different *verbum orale* (a different word in a different language,[20] for example) has the same *verbum mentale?* The problem here is the reference. For instance, when different people identify in different languages the type of pet they own (a dog might be called *Hund, chien, perro, cane*, etc.), are they describing the same type of animal? Each act of reference is a linguistic act.[21] Abstract thought does not exist, but always the thought of something. Thought is consistently intentional. (Ludwig Wittgenstein says what cannot be imagined cannot even be talked about![22]) Where the word is absent, the being is absent.[23]

There is a natural and fundamental nexus between the existence of beings and language. The most intimate relationship a human can have—the relation with God, started with God speaking to Adam and Eve. The relationship with God becomes real when God speaks. When God speaks, things come into being. God's speech transmits being (Genesis 1:3ff). The creative act of God is to speak! If God had not spoken, we would not have had a concept of God. In the book of Genesis, Adam learns to speak from God; so it can be said that the primordial language is a divine one. Unfortunately, after Original Sin, human language was affected. Lies became possible. The extreme case in which language impeded the fostering of community is narrated

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19. For example, in French the number eighty is descriptively called "four times twenty."

20. Therefore the *verbum scriptum* depends on the *verbum orale*.

21. So too when we call our pet by name, it is a linguistic act.

22. Journal entry (12 October 1916) in *Notebooks 1914-1916*. 84e. We can also wonder if a name guarantees the existence of the named thing?

23. Wittgenstein: "*Wo das Wort bricht, verschwindet das Sein.*" The same thought is expressed by Martin Heidegger: "Where the word 'falls apart,' the being [also] 'falls apart.'" ("*Da wo es am Wort gebricht, gebricht es am sein.*")

for us in Genesis 11, with the story of Tower of Babel. The Divine punishment for the sin of pride was to confound the language of the people. When communication with God is interrupted, they cannot understand each other either. Saint Luke redacted his gospel in contraposition to Genesis chapter 11, as a communion of hearts that manifests itself in language.

Only humans have the capacity to wonder. Already in antiquity, Thales of Miletus recognized this. Wonder and awe naturally occur in the presence of beauty, but wonder can also be understood as the impact that information gathered through the senses has on a human being. Saint Thomas Aquinas calls this *Apetitus Virtutis:* the necessity on the part of the subject to act, when confronted by what is given to him through the senses.[24]

Judgment: The House of Truth

For us, the question is, how can I tell the truth? That is to say, what relation exists between knowledge and reality? (The more or less real does not exist!)[25] Starting with the basics, with the "building blocks" of knowledge, any given text can be broken down into paragraphs, and paragraphs into sentences, and sentences into single words. A sentence puts together a subject with a predicate or a verb. For example: the day is sunny; the motor works.

The first term is the subject, the "thing" (*res = ens*) to be described: "*esse rei causat veritatem intellectus.*"[26] In other words, truth is based on being ("*veritas supra ens fundatur*").[27] Hence, as it is self-evident that being exists in general, so it is also self-evident that truth exists.

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24. Aquinas, *Summa, Questio* LXXXI, Art. 1ff.

25. Being does not have any degree. Something is or is not. For example, a woman cannot say she is somewhat pregnant. She is, or she is not.

26. "… the being of the thing, not its truth, is the cause of truth in the intellect." Ibid., *Questio* XVI, 1 ad 3.

27. Aquinas, *Questiones,* q. 10, a 12, ad 3:1.

The truth is based on being (which is the object of the judgment) and not on essence (which is the object of simple apprehension). The truth is material in simple apprehension, and formal in judgment.[28] The concept possesses only a similarity with the thing.[29] But only in judgment can accord with the intellect be reached.[30] Only in judgment is the needed reflection available.

There is only one place in the intellective or knowledge processes where the question of truth or falsity directly applies: this is the point at which we form a judgment, at which we base something on something,[31] that is, when a subject is joined to a predicate. We may know truth in various ways, but only in predication can truth and falsity be formally tested. To any direct juncture of subject-member with predicate-member, the question, *is it true?* applies (given that it is possible to answer the question). Ong asserts, "The plenary act of intellection, of knowing in full formal attire, is the judgment, the statement, the union of subject and predicate."[32] It is when one says, "a is b" or "a is *not* b" that the basic question regarding knowledge can be applied; that is, the question of truth and falsehood.

Therefore, we can say with Josef Pieper, that "the dignity of [words], to be sure, consists in this: through [words] is accomplished what no other means can accomplish, namely, communication based on reality."[33] In the abovementioned example of judgment "a is b" or "a is

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28. For example, a male Cardinal is a red bird. I see a red bird in a tree that looks like a Cardinal and sings like one. Is it a Cardinal or not? My senses give me information, and my judgment tells me that it is indeed a Cardinal.

29. A concept of fire does not mean that our hearts are burning. Likewise, our concept of God is not God himself.

30. The knowledge of the concept of fire is obviously not fire in the heat.

31. Aristotle speaks of ten categories: one substance and nine accidents, especially in *Metaphysics,* Book Z.

32. Ong, *The Presence,* 158.

33. Pieper, *Abuse of Language,* 32. For clarity, I changed the singular "word" to the plural "words."

not b," the important part is not the verb "is" or the subject, but the predicate, the "b." *Predicate* means "something said," and quite literally so. *Predicatum* (something said before an auditorium, a proclamation, or declaration) is the Latin equivalent, part for part (*pre + dicare*), of the Greek term κατηγορία,34 which means "public accusation, charge, something cried out against someone in the marketplace or gathering space" (or ἀγορά). In this way, each time a *predicatum* is joined to a subject, it is like bringing an accusation to bear against that subject: Can "b" be said of "a," or not? For example, is the man with a scar on his face culpable, or not?35

The subject (Latin *subjectum* or "something thrown under"; matching the Greek ὑποκείμενον36 or "something laying under, placed under") is conceived as in a spatial field.37 We can imagine a rug and the categories of items placed on it, such as pieces of furniture or children's toys. Who knows that the rug and the pieces of furniture are there? Only the human person.38 Man and woman are the pinnacle of the categories. Humans are a substance of a superior type because there is a spiritual dimension. Humans have an ontological character; that is, it is the *ens*39 in which all other *ens* become *logos, ratio*. If there were no human beings, the *ens* would not be known, and they would be closed in on themselves. The human person is the horizon (as a point of union) between the material and the spiritual. It is at this horizon that language is found.

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34. κατηγορία = κατά + ἀγορά

35. I chose this example, because in the time before passports, criminals in some countries had a bit of their ears cut as a sign of their criminal status.

36. *hypokeímenon*

37. Ong, *The Presence,* 157.

38. Person, as philosophical concept, is designated here also as "man."

39. Define as being or existence in the most general abstract sense.

Language and Reality

Words convey reality. A problem arises when communication is not based on reality. Philosophers describe this problem as the *fall of the referent*. Gerhard Ebeling elucidates this point, when he states:

> The crisis of language lies in the fact that the coherent structure of understanding has broken down, because language has taken on an existence of its own and has become isolated from its basis in experience. Consequently, the words are uttered into a void, their universality becomes universality and nothing more. They are no longer in touch with the concrete and treat it as hostile.[40]

How did we reach a point when words lack their dignity[41] and even become hostile to the concrete?

In order to tackle this problem, we must return to the basics. I will proceed in two ways. First, a more general one: I will consider the existence of knowledge and whether humans are capable of knowing the truth. The second is more specific: I will examine the relation between Being, Saying, and Knowing.

About the Existence of Knowledge: Is Man Capable of Knowing the Truth?

Humans by nature desires to know. He desires to acquire not merely knowledge in general, but systematic knowledge of reality so as to embrace it in all its complexity and variety. To attain this organization and unification of knowledge he or she acquire by his or her contact with external reality, humans follows the lead of certain principles and laws of thought that are the very life and light of his or her intelligence. Humans do not receive knowledge, nor do they create it; rather, they construct it. Knowledge is an intimate and individual product of the meeting of soul and external reality.

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40. Ebeling, *Introduction,* 77.

41. In Josef Pieper's sense, as enabling communication based on reality.

A philosophical inquiry into knowledge gives rise to two main problems. The first pertains to ideas, which are, as it were, the construction material of science; the second concerns those principles and laws of thought that we may compare to the architectural plans of a building to be constructed. As regards ideas, the philosopher questions their relationship to things, and to what extent they make things known to us; as regards principles and ideal laws, humans wonder whether they are merely principles and laws of thought or also principles and laws of being. These are two sides of the same coin, the same problem; specifically, the problem of the value of human knowledge. Does knowledge represent reality as it is in itself, or does it represent it only as I think it to be? Is knowledge objective, or is it subjective? Already words echo this so-called critical problem.[42]

Whether we consider knowledge to be objective or subjective, it starts in reality, as we have seen. The thing that is detected by our senses receives a name. The name is uttered in word (or words).

In a single word, we find the following elements: the significant (sound), the meaning (that which the term expresses), and the referent (the thing that is being talked about). Therefore, we can say that a thought is expressed in language, and that language makes reference to a reality.[43] But if this reality on which language is based is taken away, that is, if the language no longer refers to a reality external to it and the thought, then it closes itself off and becomes immanent.

In such a case, the object of knowledge is the "word" and not the "thing" itself, in which it is supposed to be based. Therefore, the truth is not the adequacy between the understanding

42. For modern philosophy this is a pseudo-problem. Others consider it to be at the root of modern philosophy.

43. Genesis 1:19–20 demonstrates this idea when Adam names the different animals; communication is and needs to be based on reality. Naming the different animals is not yet communication, but it is the beginning of it.

and the thing, but mere grammatical coherence, a correspondence between thought and language. Thus, the meanings of words change according to the use we give them in context.44 In this regard, Pieper insightfully states:

> Human words and language accomplish a twofold purpose, as Plato without doubt would have answered—in clear agreement with the entire tradition of Western thought. Since this accomplishment is twofold, we may already here suspect that the word's degeneration and corruption can also be twofold. First, words convey reality. We speak in order to name and identify something that is real, to identify it for someone, of course—and this points to the second aspect in question, the interpersonal character of human speech.45

The previously mentioned "critical problem," or existence of the truth *(an sit veritas),* has always been present in the history of philosophy as a valid question for investigation. However, from Descartes and Kant on, this question is reformulated in such a way that it is no longer an issue of "deducing truths from the first principles," but is posited as the fundament by which all metaphysical inquiry is to be constructed. Hence, "Epistemology" has usurped the place of "First Philosophy" as the necessary condition sine qua non from which all metaphysical principles are derived. This problem that marks the latter part of the sixteenth century causes a most notable rift between the Thomistic school (moderated realism) and those advocates of a critique of the first principles of knowledge. Questions raised by Thomists are: Is it necessary to prove that which is held to be evident, namely, that we can arrive at an objective truth of reality? (Is the problem a valid problem?) Is a sustained doubt a valid method of investigation? Are there such truths— synthetic a priori—innate in the mind?

Such questions have divided Thomists concerning whether or not a bridge should be built between a moderated realism and idealism. Is it necessary to reconstruct metaphysics that departs

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44. For Ludwig Wittgenstein, words are like chess pieces that draw their importance based on their position on the board.

45. Pieper, *Abuse of Language,* 15.

from certain principles of the mind to the extra-mental world, or would any such attempt compromise the foundation of an immediate knowledge of reality through the mediated form of our intelligence?

Brief Historical Sketch

The problem of knowledge is not an invention of Descartes and Kant: Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus* is almost exclusively a search for a truly scientific knowledge.

Aristotle deals with knowledge systematically. First in "Posterior Analytics," he exposes the theory of knowledge. Later, in his treatise *De Anima,* he analyzes the diverse functions of knowledge. Still later, in *Metaphysics*, book IV, he defends the value of the first principles against the Sophists; likewise in his treatise on the Skeptics, dealing with Pyrrhon to Sextus Empiricus.

Saint Augustine could be seen as a precursor to Descartes. He frees himself from skepticism by calling attention to the fact that the existence of "I" is undoubtable: *"si fallor sum,"* that is, "if I doubt, I am." From here, he ascends from the "I" to "God" and founds all truth of knowledge on the "illumination" of the spirit by divine ideas.

At the dawn of the Middle Ages, the problem reappears under the form of "the problem of the universals." What is it in reality that corresponds to the universal essences that the human spirit conceives? The thirteenth century was marked by three main positions: absolute realism rooted in Plato; moderated realism rooted in Aristotle; and conceptualism or nominalism. But the critical problem did not remain isolated with the problem of the universal. Each philosopher elaborated a complete theory of knowledge: first Thomas and Bonaventure, later Scotus, last

Ockham, whose nominalism prepares the way for modern epistemology.[46] We will consider Ockham later.

Arthur McGrade believes that Ockham's account of cognition "has been suspected of leading to the dashingly undesirable form of skepticism of Decartes' *First Meditation* in which thought seems entirely cut off from any reality beyond itself."[47] This assumption is based on the generally critical tone of Ockham's analysis and, more specifically, on his thesis that "by God's power, there could be direct, intuitive awareness of a thing without the things existing."[48]

McGrade correctly asserts that "intuitive awareness, whether of an existent or non-existent object, is of a sort to cause true judgment, not false ones."[49] Descartes introduces the problem of knowledge as the first problem that philosophy should resolve if it wishes to convey its thoughts with order. For him, before being able to boldly discuss the secrets of nature, the capacity of intelligence to penetrate them must be examined. We cannot know anything before knowing what intelligence is, for as it is through intelligence that we know other things. Descartes poses two problems. First, to find a first truth that is absolutely undoubtable from which all other truths can be deduced. From this he derives the *"cogito"*—then the "I am"—then "God must exist." The second problem is called the "problem of the bridge," which is to pass from thought to being, and above all to prove that the material world exists apart from the subject.

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46. "The foundation of the thirteenth century synthesis of philosophy and theology, of reason and faith, of nature and grace, was attacked by the movement known as the *via moderna* (the modern way). Its greatest representative was William of Ockham. The great rival schools of Thomas Aquinas and John Scotus, . . . as well as the school of Giles of Rome, were all referred to as *via antiqua* (the old way)." Allen, *Philosophy,* 152.

47. McGrade, *Some Varieties,* 422.

48. Ibid. Taking an example from McGrade, "If God can conserve our awareness of the page we are now reading while destroying the page, how can we be sure that we are in fact now looking at a real page?"

49. Ibid., 423.

All the successors of Kant have sought to resolve these problems. However, the logical end of Descartes is the "idealism of Berkeley": the world does not have existence outside of our ideas.

For Kant, critique is the "obligatory preface for metaphysics," because while the sciences are taken for granted, metaphysics cannot be. One must search to see why the sciences are possible, and metaphysics is not a science like these. Scientific knowledge is composed of judgments that are essentially a "synthetic *a priori*."[50] The problem can thus be reduced to knowing what a priori judgments are possible. In this way Kant sees the critical method. For him, it is a transcendental analysis that consists in restructuring the granted judgments in science to the principles that they explain. This is a reflexive analysis, not psychological (of ordinary consciousness) but "logical," that disassembles the mechanism of "pure reason."

After Kant, the problem of knowledge is no longer considered the first problem of metaphysics but, rather, the only problem on which philosophical studies focus. This is understandable if it is the spirit that posits being. The only question is to know when and in what conditions the affirmation of knowledge is objective.

The Thomistic positions point to the critical problem; that is, internally among different Thomists, strong discussions have been raised as to how this question should be addressed. Some ask: Can a critique of knowledge be called Thomistic, as it would begin by denying what is most evident? How would the problem be formulated? Last, what method could be used? Cartesian doubt, a transcendental analysis, or reflection on the act of knowing? The only common ground to be found among these theses is that they are all constructed realism.

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50. In Kant, the first distinction that separates a priori from a posteriori judgments by reference to the origin of our knowledge of them, is that a priori judgments are based on reason alone, independent of all sensory experience, and therefore apply with strict universality. A posteriori judgments, on the other hand, must be grounded on experience and are consequently limited and uncertain in their application to specific cases. We come to know them as matters of fact through our sensory experience.

From Being to Knowing to Saying

This second approach to the problem of communication not being based on reality is linguistic.[51] Parmenides, with his poem Περι Φυσεως ("On Nature") starts the problem. For Parmenides, Knowing and Being are the same!

$$\text{Being} = \text{Knowing} \rightarrow \text{Saying}$$

For Aristotle, each one of the corners of this triangle has its own legitimacy.[52]

$$
\begin{array}{ccc}
(1) & \rightarrow & (2) \\
\text{Being (είναι)} & & \text{Knowing (νοείν)} \\
\uparrow & \downarrow & \text{(Tendency to unite the triangle)} \\
\text{Saying (λέγείν)} & & \\
(3) & &
\end{array}
$$
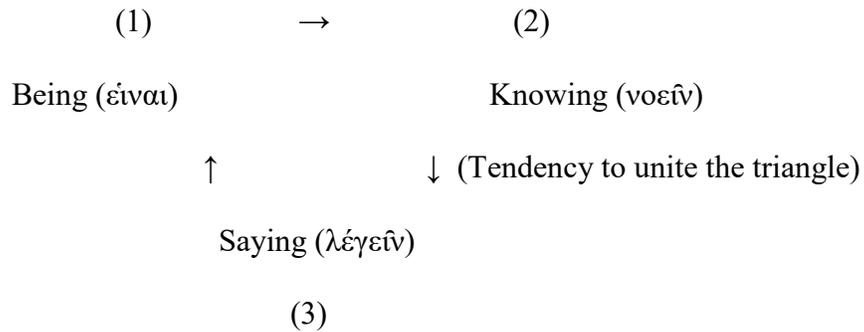
Against the break of the triangle Plato proposes an effort of the soul with itself, the reminiscence. The passage from δόξα (to think)[53] to έπιστημή (science).

The Greek (none nominalist) way of thinking tries to unify the triangle, starting from Being (είναι). The modern school of thought (like Descartes and Kant) tries to do it based on Knowing (νοείν). The modern way of thinking attempts it from Saying (λέγείν).

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51. Plato's dialogue *Cratylus* is historically the first stone in the vast building of the Philosophy of Language. In it, the question arises, Can words bring us to the knowledge of things? In *Cratylus* 388b, we find a clear response in the antique confidence in names (ὄνομα): ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί έστιν ὄργανον καὶ ("A name is, then, an instrument of teaching and of separating reality.")

52. For Parmenides there is a total identification between Being-Knowing and the saying; therefore, for him, there is not a triangle but a simple line. For the Greek sophist philosopher Gorgias, the being is not, and if it is, it cannot be known; and if it can be known, it cannot be communicated.

53. This word picked up a new meaning between the third and first centuries BC when the Septuagint translated the Hebrew word for "glory." This is not the meaning intended here. It can be argued whether the better word is νοῦς or νόος, which is translated in Latin with *intellectus* and *intelligentia,* respectively. In philosophy, common English translations of the Greek νοῦς include "understanding" and "mind," even "thought" or "reason." I chose δόξα, from the verb δοκεῖν, because it can be translated as "to appear," "to seem," "to think," and "to accept." All verbs that reflect wonder and awe show that humans have confronted the world, which is the beginning of knowledge. For more information, see *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* by Martin Heidegger.

Even though it is possible to analyze Greek thought in this matter, for the purpose of this thesis, it is more useful to start with William Ockham. For with him begins seven hundred years of progressive dissolution of the subject.

I chose to focus on Ockham, because he questions the ontological status of the subject.[54] He reduces the problem of the relation Knowing-Being, because Knowing is to utilize a singular time in order to know a singular thing. For Ockham, to know is to denote; it follows that there are no universals. The object is merely shown to the subject; it is not thought by him.

The other possibility is to take into account only the thought and the object, forgetting language. In this position, everything is reduced to the relation of representation to represented. This position is called *rationalistic idealism*.

If with Ockham the object appears to the subject, that is, the object is a mere apparition $(S \rightarrow [O])$,[55] then, as a second step, we find structuralism, in which a relation between the apparition and the one to whom it appears remains, but as a semiotic phenomenon (that is the arrow between $[S] \rightarrow [O]$). The apparition is without referent. Here the subject simply appears as a "parameter" without referent.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel can be placed between the second and third stages. He prepares the transcendental Kantian subject in order to later dissolve it.[56] He is mining it from

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54. Some philosophers look years before him, and place Duns Scotus as the starting point of dissolution of the subject. It is true that Ockham, following Scotus, insists that we have an "intellectual intuitive awareness of extra mental singular things distinct from our sensory awareness of them." McGrade, *Some Varieties,* 421.

55. In his work on logic, Ockham develops some consequences of his attitude to the relation between spoken language, thoughts, and things (objects). "He recognizes that there is a strong tradition according to which spoken words are the signs of thoughts, but he insists (*Summa Logicae* [1], I), in line with this theory, that the 'spoken words are imposed to signify the same things as are signified by the mental concept.'" Marenbon, *Later Medieval,* 181.

56. Kant erases God, who sustains the subject, but Kant does not succeed the subject in content.

the inside, but he keeps it, or at least the empty shell of it. He practically killed the philosophy of Emmanuel Kant.

The third stage takes place in the twentieth century. Particularly with Martin Heidegger, we find cultural reductionism. In the strongest sense of the word, it would not be the subject or the object, but the relation between them that matters. In other words, there is a subject and an object, but *only* in relation to each other.

We are now in the dissolution of post-modernism. The tentative goal is to save a certain objectivity of the subject in the (twisted) linguistic field. For example, with Umberto Eco, we are at the point of the extreme dissolution of the object and of the subject. With this scenario, we can safely say that this is a much more favorable time to rebuild the right relation between Being, Knowing, and Saying, because metaphysics has collapsed.[57]

The entire discourse on the possibility of man and woman to know had as its ultimate goal, exploration of the possibility of knowing God, and what consequences such knowledge has for them.

For Hegel, human beings have an implicit identity with the Infinite; what they need is for this relationship to become explicit. The obstacle between ourselves and God is not ignorance only, as in Hegel,[58] but sin. Sin can be overcome only by divine intervention in the person of Jesus, who overcomes the barrier of sin and opens up the possibility of reconciliation.

It is not erroneous to say that language has subverted God in the twentieth century (as happened before, in the time of the sophists). If the goal is to liberate the subject of every repression, the subject itself needs to be destroyed. This implies the destruction of language

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57. An easy metaphysic against the absence of metaphysics is what originates with what Gianni Vattimo calls *pensiero debole* ("weak thought"), because they put the foundation of their thoughts in a non-foundation (the lack of foundation).

58. Hegel was able to exhibit an incredible progress in every aspect of culture; however, we concur with Diogenes Allen that in Hegel's system, "ethics and religion are not part of an individual's own 'subjectivity' (or person) unless they are acquired or appropriated by an individual for him- or herself." Allen, *Philosophy,* 244.

through destruction of the dissolution of the subject of grammatical judgments. This operation has been reiterated ostensibly since Nietzsche through Heidegger until today.

If we believe that man is an "incarnated spirit," then words are the expression of that unity. To be reconciled with God is not merely to know of this possibility, but to actualize it for ourselves by our response to faith.

Words are also a way to express our remorse, recognizing the sins committed and naming them, getting them "off our chest" in the sacrament of confession. Likewise we wish to hear the words of absolution, bringing peace to the soul. There is definitely a sense of relief after hearing: "I absolve you from your sin. Go in peace." This is God personally welcoming the repented sinner and embracing him or her with his fatherly love.

Chapter Three

Moving from Philosophy to Theology in the Twentieth Century

Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced. —Kierkegaard

Das Neue Denken as a Response to German Idealism

Similar to what occurred in the thirteenth century, with the *via moderna* (the modern way) surging as a reaction to the school of Thomas Aquinas and John Scotus (dubbed *via antiqua,* the old way), *Das Neue Denken,* or the New Thinking,[1] was a response to the long dwindling of German Idealism.[2] The terrible experience of World War I was the coup de grâce. The security of human progress based on reason alone was shaken. Technology, which was supposed to serve mankind, ended up unleashing a destructive power never before seen. The war experience was a wake-up call in the faith lives of many. The concepts of community and God were no longer impersonal "ideas," or "moments" of that idea, as the Idealists claimed them to be. God became a personal God. Interpersonal relationships were also philosophically reevaluated.

Martin Buber

Martin Buber's book *I and Thou* brings to the fore the notion of dialogical philosophy. The relation to the Other is essential for self-identity. Through the Other, we discover who we

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1. Term coined by Franz Rosenzweig, who sought a total renewal of thinking through a novel synthesis of philosophy and theology that he named *Das neue Denken,* contrasts with the "old thinking," which is portrayed as logical, non-dialogical, timeless, and meant only for the isolated individual. *Das neue Denken* is grammatical (as opposed to logical), monological (as contrasted to dialogical), and counters the timeless, that is, it takes time and takes the other person seriously.

2. German Idealism maintains that being and thinking are the same. Some authors place German Idealism in the 1780s to the late 1840s, or roughly between Kant and Hegel. However, Hegel's thoughts were carried further by his disciples, labeled as "right" (or "old") and "left" (or "young") Hegelians.

are. Buber distinguishes between the *Begegnung* (mode of meeting) and the *Erfahrung* (mode of experience). The first is subjective, immediate, and not imitative. The second is objective, impersonal, and imitative.[3] The *Erfahrung* is the world of the "It" as Buber states:

> The world does not participate in experience. It [the world] allows itself to be experienced, but it is not concerned, for it contributes nothing, and nothing happens to it. The world as experience belongs to the basic word I–It. The basic word I–You establishes the world of relation.[4]

Buber is more attracted to the world of *Begegnung,* the world of meeting and encounter, the world that gave the title to his book *I and Thou.* He makes an interesting distinction, helpful for the purpose of the present paper, when he states that

> basic words are spoken with one's being. When one says You, the I of the pair I–You is said, too. When one says It, the I of the word pair I–It is said, too. The basic word I–You can only be spoken with one's whole being. The basic I–It can never be spoken with one's whole being.[5]

Martin Buber, like a prophet a century ahead of his time,[6] foresaw what he calls "the linguistic sin against the spirit."[7] He explains the inverse proportion of (1) the improvement of human's capacity for experience, to (2) his power to relate with his fellow man. The relation between the *I* and the *Thou* is what liberates the *I* from becoming isolated. The first relationship

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3. This reflects the use of the German verbs *begegnen* (used for meeting people) and *erfahren* (not used for people, but for life experiences). Buber also plays with the meaning of the German word *erfahren,* which is related to *fahren* (to drive or go), as well as with *befahren,* which means to drive over the surface of something. Buber's translator correctly states that Buber wants to make the reader "suddenly aware of the possibility that *erfahren* might literally mean finding out by going or driving, or possibly by traveling. But by further linking *erfahren* and *befahren,* Buber manages to suggest that experience stays on the surface." Buber, *I and Thou.* 55. Ronald Gregor Smith, the translator of the 1955 edition, does not make this remark but he includes it in the translation.

4. Ibid., 56.

5. Ibid., 54.

6. The first draft of *Ich und Du* dates from fall 1919, but it was completed in spring 1922.

7. Ibid., 88.

that Buber speaks about is a religious relationship; and all other relationships are only possible because of this one.8

In Buber's later work *Between Man and Man,* he describes this interdependent relationship thus: "Above and below are bound to one another. The word of him who wishes to speak with men without speaking with God is not fulfilled; but the word of him who wishes to speak with God without speaking with men goes astray."9 For a Christian reader, this sentence immediately makes us recall Jesus' New Commandment to love one another as he has loved us,10 linking the love of neighbor as a testimony to the love of God.

Even if for Buber language was not as important as for other authors (for example, Ferdinand Ebner, whose work we will discuss next), he places a very high value on community. He observes that "we expect a theophany of which we know nothing but place, and that place is community."11 He even goes so far as to say that "[we] are willed for the life of communion."12

It is in the community that we learn a language. Buber does not mention the family as the first community, but he does not deny it, either. For him, the basic movement of the life of dialogue is "the turning towards the other."13 It is in communication with the Other that we learn who we are and what we are. It is fundamental and foundational. He believes that "the mystery

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8. "Three are the spheres in which the world of relation is built. The first: life with nature, where the relation sticks to the threshold of language. The second: life with men, where it enters language. The third: life with spiritual beings, where it lacks but creates language. In every sphere, in every relational act, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train of the eternal external You; in each we perceive a breath of it; in every You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its manner. All spheres are included in it, while it is included in none." Ibid., 149–50.

9. Buber, *Between Man,* 15.

10. John 13:34.

11. Buber, *Between Man,* 7.

12. Ibid., 14.

13. Ibid., 22.

of the coming-to-be of language and that of the coming-to-be of man are one."[14] With the learning of a language, humans learns who they are, and they are able to describe what they wants, likes, and desires, but also what they dislikes. They learns not only to say "yes" but also to say "no." (These two words may be among the first a toddler learns that also show his or her character.)

Buber's concern is authentic relation, because "persons appear by entering into relationship to other persons."[15] The place where this happens is the *zwischen* (the between). Buber interprets this space in a religious sense first of all, because God is the origin of this grace; only he makes this encounter happen. He makes that space available. He opens the channels of communication.

In one of Buber's last essays "*Schuld und Schuldgefühle*" ("Guilt and Guilt Feelings"), he speaks of the "event of illumination." In this case, it is not the *zwischen* that matters, but the I-with-me. This happens by way of self-examination. In Buber's own words:

> . . . a man ventures to illuminate the depths of a guilt which he has certainly recognized as what it is, but not yet in its essence and its meaning for his life. What he is now obligated to do cannot be accomplished in any other place than in the abyss of I-with-me, and it is just this abyss that must be illuminated. . . . But without this powerful wave of light which illuminates the abyss of mortality, the legal confession of guilt remains without substance in the inner life of the guilty man, no matter how weighty its consequences may be, and the religious confession is only a pathetic prattle that no one hears.[16]

Buber's illumination seems more a "peeking in to" a place from the outside through a window, rather than a stirring up of water from inside a pool.[17] It is, as he states, a first and necessary step

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14. Buber, *The Knowledge,* 117. As before, for simplicity and readability, the word *man*—meaning humankind, both men and women— and related pronouns are favored in this chapter.

15. Buber, *I and Thou,* 112.

16. Buber, *The Knowledge,* 137.

17. Cf. John 5:1–16.

to a confession. In a sense, it is a *zwischen ad intra*, that is, within the person, not *ad extra*. The first relationship to amend is with God, and then with our fellow human.

In the fifth chapter of *The Knowledge of Man,* Buber examines the inner resistance of the self-illumination and the recognition of guilt, by beautifully comparing two classical figures of world literature: Nikolai Stavrogin in Dostoevsky's novel *The Possessed* and Joseph K from Kafka's narrative *The Trial*. Stavrogin "dissolves the meaning of existence through denying it and manages to destroy himself through the destruction of all over whom he gets power."[18] Stavrogin makes a confession to a priest in words, but he "remains incapable of self-illumination. He lacks the small light of humility that alone can illuminate the abyss of the guilty self in broad waves."[19] Joseph K likewise pays a visit to a priest, but in his talk "denies the ontic character of guilt, the depth of existential guilt beyond mere violations of taboos."[20] Joseph K does not believe he is guilty: "we all are men here, one as much as the other."[21] Buber focus on Joseph K's evading his guilt by generalizing it, and also by talking about others "instead of occupying himself with himself."[22] Joseph K "escapes the demand to bear into his inner darkness the cruel and salutary light. He insists that there is no such thing as personal existential guilt."[23] However, this illumination needs to involve words, as well as a formal recognition of guilt.

One question I have for Buber is, How it is even possible to have what he calls "legal confession" if the illumination (which I would think of as a self-examination) has not taken

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18. Buber, *The Knowledge,* 138.

19. Ibid., 143.

20. Ibid., 142.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid

23. Ibid., 144

place? If the guilty feelings make a person avoid his or her illumination, by doing so, he or she indirectly recognizes the guilt that he or she tries to hide by not looking at it.

To Buber's great credit, he influenced the shift from seeing God's revelation as primarily propositions or statements, to the notion of a personal God. As Diogenes Allen, commenting on Buber's thought, states: "God is said to be one who is always a subject in relation to us. God is not an object of knowledge, but one who is known only in encounter."[24] Our relationship with him is important.

Ferdinand Ebner

Ferdinand Ebner's epitaph reads: *Bedenker des Wortes* (Thinker of the Word), in the sense that he was a philologist, someone who loved words.[25] For him, "humans are given the 'word'; in the word, being is founded. It is only in the word, in language, that the 'I' meets a 'thou,' so that relationship and self-consciousness may occur";[26] and for Ebner, this word is given in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Following the teaching of the Catholic Church, Ebner believes that "through [Jesus] it is possible to address God in the human Thou."[27] Joseph Chapel observes that for Ebner, World War I brought a dramatic life conversion that turned him definitively toward Christ.[28] For him,

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24. Allen, *Philosophy,* 253.

25. What I know of Ebner, I learned through the doctoral dissertation of Rev. Joseph R. Chapel.

26. Chapel, *Why Confess,* 27.

27. Ibid. (quoting James Mudackal, "The Dialogical Structure," 42). A hint of the possibility of addressing God in the human *Thou*, that is Christ, is given to us in Matthew 27:51 and Mark 15:38, when it is recorded that at the moment of Jesus' death "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." This has been interpreted as a sign that Holy of Holies was exposed, symbolizing that the channel to communicate with God was no longer the Temple in Jerusalem but through Christ.

28. Ebner was thirty-two years old when World War I started.

the war was a cause for despair, because Christian fought against fellow Christian. Ebner even wrote that "amid the noise of the war the Word was forgotten."[29]

Ebner's most productive years were from 1916 to 1923, during which his best work was published: *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten* (*The Word and Spiritual Realities*).[30] Ebner's main theme is that God created man by speaking: "In creating him God said to him: 'I am and through me Thou art.'"[31] And so a human person answers him: "Thou art and through Thou I am."[32] It belongs to humans to speak,[33] and we are human because we speak. Ebner notes that the difference between humans and animals is the faculty of reason, which enables them to speak. Confronted with the question, "What is reason?" Ebner answers:

> Reason is the possibility of being addressed by the word and the meaning of the word, and only subsequently the ability to form concepts and ideas. It is the special human consciousness which is constituted by the word, and which is therefore not to be separated from language; and in this consciousness, it is the presupposition of the human application of the understanding. The animal certainly has consciousness, and even understanding, but not reason … 'without word, not reason,' and 'reason is language, logos.'[34]

For Ebner, reason and language are intertwined; they are codependent. There is no reason without language. In his philosophical thinking, Ebner also connects reason with faith: "Man exists in and by virtue of divine address; his essence *qua* man is therefore intrinsically relational

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29. *"Im Lärm des Krieges ging das Wort verloren."* Quoted in Chapel, *Why Confess,* 30.

30. English translation in Green, "The Word,"

31. *"[Gott] sprach ihn schaffend zu ihm: Ich bin und durch mich bist du."* Quoted in Chapel, *Why Confess,* 30 (footnote 83).

32. *"Du bist und durch Dich bin ich …"* Ibid.

33. No other creature was addressed by God during creation; only after the fall did God address the snake directly (Genesis 3:14).

34. Quoted in Chapel, *Why Confess,* 32. Here Chapel observes that Ebner's phrase *"Ohne Wort kein Vernunft"* and *"Vernunft ist Sprache, lógos"* ("Without word, no reason," and "reason is language, *logos*") is actually a citation of Hamann's "Letter to Herder, August 7, 1784. Johann Georg Hamann was the philosophy professor of Johann Gottfried von Herder, who used his writings as a main support for the *Sturm und Drang* movement.

—and religious, in that God is man's ultimate presupposition."[35] This means that "the existence of man in his spirituality has the existence of God as its presupposition,"[36] because man is God's creature.

For Ebner, God, by speaking with his humans, he created them. As God spoke to them, he constituted them as his partner in dialogue.[37] Even after Original Sin, God continued the dialogue with Adam and Eve. We are told that "God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'"[38] Knowing what had just happened, God continued calling him. Adam responded, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."[39] It can be assumed that God called Adam and Eve more than once before they got the courage to leave their hiding place.

I and Thou: Contributions of Ferdinand Ebner

Ebner reflecting on the *I–Thou* ponders the reason why the *I* can never be found in itself, and so must look in the *Thou*. This is at the root of his diary entries of 1916 to 1917, where he notes three important themes: the fragmentation of life, the existence in reality, and the meaning of authentic relations.

The existence of the *I* cannot be proven by solitary thinking (as opposed to Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum,* which places the foundation of *Thou* inside man, not outside in reality, as seen in the last chapter).

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35. Ibid., (quoting Green, "The Word").

36. *". . . die existenz des Menschen in ihrer Gestigkeit die Eixistenz Gottes zur Voraussetzung hat; mit anderen Worten: dass der Mensch von Gott geschaffen wurde."* Ibid. (quoting Ebner).

37. "*Gott aber schuf den Menschen, indem er zu ihm sprach.*" "*Er sprach ihn . . . Ich bin und durch mich bist du.*" Ibid.

38. Genesis 3: 8–9.

39. Genesis 3:10.

Chapel points out two useful influences in Ebner's response to the "Cartesian-Hegelian" system. First, Søren Kierkegaard's book *Sickness Unto Death*[40] with its solid sense of the nature of the spirit, and of the *I* in man. Kierkegaard affirms that the "*I* in man is concretized in becoming an individual before God."[41] From here Ebner realizes that the *I* is in need of an adequate relation.[42]

Ebner's second influence, *per via negativa,* is Ludwig Feuerbach. Feuerbach believes that "the reality of man is not revealed as spirit, but as flesh and blood," and also in his fellow humans. Even if for him the *Thou* is not God but other humans,[43] "the concreteness and infinitude of the subject is still linked to a relation with something [or someone] other than itself."[44] Ebner recognized that Feuerbach missed the importance of the link, the *mit* ("with"), even though there is no link between man and God, but between man and man. Still, Feuerbach places the source of man's identity outside himself. Ebner "Christianizes" Feuerbach's idea of the need of man, so that "man cannot know God without knowing his fellow man" first.[45]

However, the first and most important relationship is not between humans, but between humans and God. Because God started the relationship, he is always the first person; the human is the listener, the second person in the conversation. The relationship is, and cannot be other

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40. Written in 1849 under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus.

41. Chapel, *Why Confess,* 33.

42. As noted by Chapel, Ebner did not follow Kierkegaard in his limited view of what was possible between humans in relation.

43. Man with man is God, which represents the dethronement of God by the human.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 34.

than, personal. "There is a single I, and that I is the unique one before God."[46] Each person is exceptional and literally one of a kind. There is no other *I* than I. The *I* is who I am, it is not just a part of me, but totally me.

From Ebner's thought we can determine that in a world of humans, and in the history of humans, there is only one unique *Thou,* and that is God, who called all humans to life. The "I am" of man and woman, unconsciously presupposes God. If the relationship *I–Thou* with God is right, then the relations among humans will also be right. It is also possible to be secluded in my *I,* and to find other *I*'s secluded in themselves. We remain then isolated *I*'s, each secluded in himself, outside the *I–Thou* relation. As Chapel points out, the "*I–Thou* relationship with God is at the heart of human existence."[47]

Having the Word

"Having the Word" is a key element of Ebner's thought. Through the Word, the passage of nothing into being came about, because God's Word is creative. "At the root of all dialogue between human beings is the fundamental fact that the person has already been addressed by God in the Word."[48] Therefore for Ebner, there is always a religious interpretation of the phenomenon of language.[49] God is also the one who listens to the word of man and woman.

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46. Ibid., 37 (quoting Ebner). *"[…dass] es nu rein einziges Ich gibt, und dass das Ich das 'Einzige' ist—vor Gott. Dieses Ich ist—um das auszuprechen, kann man nicht anders als seine eigene Person einsetzen und 'persönlich werden—in mir selber, und in dir, . . . "*

47. Ibid., 38. Imagining heaven, it is not other than an eternal personal loving relationship between God and each person in heaven, as well as a loving community of saints. On the other hand, hell can be imagined as a place of isolated people, who realize in despair their eternal desolation.

48. Ibid., 40 (quoting Ebner).

49. Ibid. (quoting O'Donnell, "The Trinity as,").

For Ebner, the *God* is to be honored by not using it, except when speaking to God: "the word God should be pronounced only in prayer, or at least only when pronouncing it becomes prayer."[50] Ebner believes there is a sacredness in language, because it comes from God, but also because the Word is something "which the relation of the I to the Thou presupposes on the one hand, and establishes on the other."[51]

For Ebner, language is a gift, and therefore it has a transcendent origin. He distinguishes between *the Word,* which is divine; *word* as the condition needed for humans to dialogue; and *words,* which are human.

Furthermore, for Ebner, "the word itself is freedom."[52] It is so, because a human can distance him or herself from his or her own intuitions and experiences, having concretized them by naming them. He or she can stand back and apart from them. Because of this distance, this gain in perspective, he or she can choose in freedom.[53] We agree with Chapel when he states that for Ebner "the gift of freedom means that man is called in the word to full life."[54]

At this point Ebner becomes a theologian when he states: " The I is stuck in a prison whose walls can only be breached if the thou (through which the I exists) comes to the I, and it is

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50. *"... Das Wort Gott sollte nur im Gebet ausgesprochen warden oder doch immer nur so, dass sein Aussprechen ein Gebet ist."* Ibid., 41 (quoting Ebner, *Notizen* [9 Oktober 1916]).

51. Ibid., 43 (quoting Green, "The Word,"). *"... etwas, das also das Verhältnis des Ichs zum Du einerseits voraussetzt, andrerseits herstellt."*

52. Ibid., 45 (quoting Ebner).

53. Chapel mentions an example with animals, which comes directly from Ebner. I will elaborate on this example. Animals must obey instincts; they depend on impressions and stimulus. They are very secure in their known environment. Man is free from this dependence on the internal and external. Without training, hungry animals cannot freely abstain from eating when food is found. Conversely, animals are not free to act other than as animals.

54. Ibid.

Jesus the Word who shows how this occurs through the word. Jesus was, and is, the way to the thou. 'According to his own word, he is the way that brings man to life.'"[55]

After Original Sin, which represents the abuse of freedom per se, there was in humans a yearning for redemption. Humans are in need of a guide to bring them out of the slavery of sin. The first step in this work of redemption was a linguistic one; it was to relearn how to speak with the *Thou,* with God. As Jesus told us: "In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you are to pray: Our Father who art in heaven…"[56] It is in prayer that that man or woman speaks to God, but not only with words, as Ebner notes:

> The Word embraces and carries language—not only language, but the whole man, and not only man, but the being of the whole world—and therefore it is more than language, more than our spoken words. It embraces everything which we cannot express, for which our language does not have the right word. It embraces God, because God embraces the Word. And it embraces Love.[57]

The all-encompassing love of God requires that man trust in his Word, and trust in words, reflected in language. Ebner argues that "all authentic community is based on trust in the Word."[58] Where there is no trust, there cannot be love, and therefore there cannot be a community. God's love is creative also in the sense of creating community; it builds community.

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55. Ibid.

56. Matthew 6:7ff.

57. Chapel, *Why Confess*, 46. Cf. Ebner, *Aphorismen*: *"Das Wort umfasst un trägt die Sprache—nicht nur die Sprache, sondern den ganzen Menschen, und nicht nur den Menschen, sondern sa Sein der ganzen Welt—un darum ist es mehr als Sprache, mehr als unsere gesprochenen Worte. Es unfasst alles, was wir nicht aussprechen können, wofür unsere Sprache das rechte Wort nicht hat. Es unfasst Gott, weil Gott das Wort umfasst. Und es umfasst die Liebe."*

58. Ibid., 47 (quoting Ebner, *Die Wirklinchkeit Christi*): *"Denke man sich nur einmal eine menschliche Gemeinschaft aus, in der das Vertrauen aufs Wort bis aus den letzten Rest geschwunden wäre, nicht wie Menschen stünden sich die Menschen gegenüber, sondern schlimmer als wilde Tiere."*

When trust among people is present, then it is possible to relate with others as persons,[59] "and such personal dialogue always leads to God. Where there is true community, the Word is always accompanied by love."[60] Love is the glue that keeps a community together and thriving. And that love demands a reaction from each person. The returned love transforms us from being "hearers," in love, to "doers" of the word.[61]

According to Ebner, "Word and love are the only two realities of the spiritual life. And they form the link between the I and the Thou."[62] If humans does not respond to God's love, and they do not engage in any dialogue, they isolates themselves. Word and love are the antidotes to this sickness of loneliness and despair. Word and love do not permit people to withdraw into themselves. "As a spiritual reality, the working of the word is supernatural, so the real science of language is not a human, natural science."[63] Through love, the Word is "fertile and generates spiritual life in the person to whom the Word is addressed."[64]

If we consider that verbalizing our sins is an act of recognition of this offended divine love, then with Ebner's insight it is easier to see that the divine word (of absolution) will be able to restore spiritual life abundantly.

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59. For example, analyzing in different languages the word *foreigner,* the Romance languages are all similar (in French *étranger, i*n Spanish *extranjero,* and in Italian *straniero*). In these languages the concept is that someone is a stranger, an unknown person, no matter where that person comes from. In German, the concept of foreigner makes a direct allusion that that person comes from another country: *Ausländer*. The implication is that one can no longer be a stranger, after being known, but one's place or origin will always remain, regardless of the time spend in the new home country. The Latin expression does not implicate the being known or not, or the place of origin; but it only makes reference to the language: *Barbarus* (literally, the ones who babble). They were uncivilized people, that is, not Roman or Greek.

60. Ibid.

61. *" . . . in jedem, das uns von Gott gegeben ist, in dieser, deren uns durch das Wort gegebene Forderung wir im Leben zu erfüllen haben; im Wort, das uns zum 'Hörer,' in der Liebe, die uns zum 'Täter des Wortes' macht."* Ibid., 48 (quoting Green, "The Word," 26). [WR, *Schriften* 1:99.]

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid. (quoting Ebner, *La parola è la via*, 99–100).

More-Contemporary Contributions

Romano Guardini

For Guardini a human being does not exist as a self-sufficient individual. He or she takes shape from inner resources, but a human being "exists also in relation to that which comes to him or her from without."[65] It is in this sense that a person as an individual knows what it takes to stand alone, but, at the same time, realizes that he or she is not meant to be isolated; humans are social beings. In this view, being a person entails *I–Thou* relationships. I must "open up and disclose myself [to another person]. But the relation remains incomplete if the same movement does not proceed from the other side so that the other person permits me to become his or her 'you.'"[66] This partial phrase could have made Guardini a secular humanist, but he went further, completing his thought by recognizing that the existential source and goal of human life is God.

Robert Krieg makes a good point when he observes that had Guardini stopped at the interpersonal (horizontal) level, that is, without including God, he "would have left his readers vulnerable to what he perceived to be the dangers of heteronomy and autonomy. Heteronomy places the authority for one's life outside oneself";[67] Guardini asserts that personal existence must be governed by theonomy, because God is the only absolute authority for human life, and by loving God, human beings are free to become a complete *I* within an *I–Thou* relationship, and the *Thou* is God. More specifically, "The real and ultimate 'Thou' is the Father. He who really says 'Thou' to the Father is the Son. To become Christians means to enter into existentiality of

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65. Krieg, *Romano Guardini's Theology,* 463 (quoting Guardini).

66. Ibid., 464 (quoting Guardini). The "you" in Guardini's writing equals Ebner's "Thou."

67. Ibid. Examples of heteronomy are to place authority in another human being, but also an ideology, an institution, or government. Here it is worth considering when Guardini's book *Welt und Person* (*The World and the Person*) was published: 1939, on the eve of World War II, the year he was forced to retire at age 53 by the Nazi Regime.

Christ. The one who is reborn says 'Thou' to the Father, as he is given a share in Christ's pronouncing of His 'Thou.'"[68]

For Guardini, Christians together with Christ can say "Thou" to God the Father. In that moment, each Christian expresses his most authentic *I,* because he is united with Jesus, who said of himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."[69]

Bernard Häring

Love is the element Bernard Häring most emphasizes in the dialogue with the Other, with the *Thou*. He connects it to the Word, as he states: "Man exists as a person in word and in love, i.e., he emerges from himself in such a manner that his remaining-self is not diminished but increased. Love is already implied in the word that is directed to the Other, to the Thou."[70] Love and word require a partner, otherwise it is a monologue and an egocentric love, which is not real love, because it lacks the element of complementarity, or a response. Using a word of Ebner, love helps to avoid the "I-aloneness" (*Icheinsamkeit*).[71]

Häring sees the foundation of human dignity in "understanding ourselves, our whole being, our whole existence as a Word coming from God, as an appeal and an invitation to love him in return."[72] This is from the beginning, as Häring recognizes, in the prologue of the Gospel

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68. Guardini, *Welt und Person,* 156–57.

69. John 14:6.

70. Chapel, *Why Confess,* 85 (quoting Häring, *Free and Faithful,* 2).

71. The German language also permits the concept of being alone even as a pair: *Zweisamkeit* (two-aloneness) in both senses: in being alone with the two, or both feeling alone together.

72. Ibid. (quoting Häring, *Free and Faithful,* 1–3.)
Saint John in his Gospel does not repeat the institution of the Holy Eucharist. He does not speak about the gift, but the response to that gift. We see this in verse 13:34: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another…" The synoptic gospels and John's Gospel are complementary. The accepted (and 'digested,' that is assimilated) word of God is the gift of divine love. God invites the New Israel to the new covenant (new *berit*); and

of Saint John. Man is constituted by God's Word, and man responds with work and action.[73]

When God calls each person by name, man is in some sense incomplete, unfinished because

man's very existence has a dialogical context; man must respond to the call with all his being.[74]

It is in man's response (or lack thereof) that man's responsibility is founded. In the personal

relationship with God and with his fellow man (and also with the world), man is called to

openness.[75] These two loves belong together. We cannot have one without the other:

> The word and the love between man and man, flowing from the I to the Thou, is in a measure always conditioned by a third, because God is already in our midst when there is a real communication between person and person. It follows that man cannot truly love if he has not discovered in love the Thou of his neighbor. Love of self and love of neighbor cannot reach the depth essential for preservation and fulfillment unless both seek and find in God their origin and their center.[76]

We spoke of responsibility as a response, but what about self-responsibility? For Häring, it can

only be considered in the sense that the *Thou* lives in me and forms part of my own existence.

The lack of response, the lack of responsibility to a *Thou,* is a sin, characterized in

Häring's thought as "alienation." This closing in on self, which also represents an alienation

from self, has sinful consequences. Häring says it "spells disintegration, loss of self-respect,

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the New Israel, in the new covenant, must engage itself by loving one another, like Jesus loves us. What does it mean to engage oneself? The offer of divine love in the love of Christ is accepted by man and woman who reciprocate it by loving his or her neighbor. The divine love proposal raises a love for the neighbor. The new covenant is God's love in Jesus that engages and calls for an answer.

In *Presbyterorum Ordinis,* chapter two, at the end of number 4, we read: ". . . *in Missarum celebratione, in qua inseparabiliter uniuntur annuntiatio mortis et resurrectionis Domini, responsum populi audientis et oblatio ipsa qua Christus Novum Foedus confirmavit in Sanguine suo, cui oblationi fideles, et votis et Sacramenti perceptione, communicant."* To the gift (*oblatio ipsa*) as an invitation to enter in communion, the people answer with deeds of love toward the neighbor.

73. "Man exists in word and love; he becomes a spiritually conscious and free being only by opening himself to the love and acknowledgement coming from others and by responding in acknowledgement and love, by work and action." Ibid. (quoting Häring, *Free and Faithful,* 2:428).

74. Ibid., 86 (quoting Häring, *Free and Faithful,* 2:201).

75. Even if Häring did not mention it explicitly, the theme of John 13:34 ("A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another") pervades this thought.

76. Ibid., 87 (quoting Häring, *The Law of Christ,* 352).

frustration, and disturbance in one's rapport with others."[77] Sin is a rupture in personal

relationships: "Sin, in the full sense is a refusal to a person or a refusal of a greater love to

Christ."[78] Because Häring sees the foundation of human dignity in an understanding of

ourselves, our whole existence is a Word coming from God, an appeal and an invitation to love

him in return. Sin disfigures that dignity and refuses to give an answer to that dialogue of divine

love.

The Concept of Person

It is not possible to speak about the necessity of saying sins aloud without exploring the

concept of personhood itself. Therefore, we will briefly analyze this notion that touches on

philosophical as well as theological fields and goes to the very core of our faith in God, as well

as our understanding of the sacraments in general, and of the sacrament of penance in particular.

Then Professor Joseph Ratzinger helpfully discusses the concept of person:

> But the profession of faith in God as a person necessarily includes the
> acknowledgement of God as relatedness, as communicability, as fruitfulness. The
> unrelated, unrelatable, absolutely One could not be person. There is no such thing
> as person in the categorical singular. This is already apparent in the words in which
> the concept of person developed: the Greek word 'τὸ πρόσωπων' (prosopon) means
> literally 'look toward'; with the prefix *pros* (toward), it includes the notion of
> relatedness as an integral part of itself. It is the same with the Latin *persona* =
> 'sounding through'; again, the *per* = 'through … to' expresses relatedness, this time
> in the form of communication through speech. In other words, if the absolute is
> person, it is not an absolute singular.[79]

Ratzinger's main thesis concerning the concept of person can be summarized as follows: The

concept grew out of the interplay between human thought (Greek philosophy) and the

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77. Ibid. (quoting Häring, *Sin in the Secular Age*, 72).

78. Ibid. (quoting Häring, *Acting on the Word*, 220).
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79. Ratzinger, Joseph (Pope Benedict XVI), *Introduction to Christianity,*180.

developing faith in Christ, beginning with Scripture. This interplay was driven by two questions, one from the Old Testament, "Who is God?"; and one from the New Testament, "Who is Christ?"[80]

Christian thought borrowed a word from philosophy in order to answer these two questions: τὸ πρόσωπων, i.e., *person.* By doing so, it gave the concept a new meaning and opened a new dimension in philosophy. For this reason, it can be rightly said that through Christ, perfect God and perfect man, we discover who we truly are, and Christ is set before our eyes as a model to imitate.

Karol Wojtyła

From the beginning, Karol Wojtyła proposed in his philosophy and theology that man, in order to be truly man—that is when he crystallizes his calling as person—cannot live but in communion with other men, and for others.[81] The social dimension of the person, with all its consequences and implications, appears in Wojtyła's first work *Love and Responsibility*.[82] Here he speaks of love that cannot be unilateral, but must be the opposite, bilateral. It is love that exists between people; that is, it is social. In its fulfillment, it is interpersonal and not individual. Love unites, and it is contrary to isolationism and division.[83]

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80. Ratzinger, *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990).

81. The writings of Karol Wojtyła as John Paul II will be analyzed in chapter five. These are his reflections before becoming Pope. Some theologians think that Guardini's writings influenced Karol Wojtyła, because Wojtyła's philosophy of the human person is grounded in a phenomenology similar to that of Guardini.

82. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility,* 73, 74, 84.

83. Wojtyła, *Metafisica della Persona,* XC. My translation.

In Wojtyła's mind, it is impossible for a humans to become what he or she are called to be, persons, without openness to others. For Wojtyła, the community is a constitutive dimension of personal autorealiziation.[84]

> When man spontaneously 'transcends,' himself in the direction of another or to a community (in this transcendence there is also a 'becoming bigger than himself'), that demonstrates that the autorealization or the autotheology includes in itself an openness of the subject. Man realizes himself 'through the other' to accomplish his own perfection living 'for the other,' and in so doing, he transcends himself toward the other, and becomes bigger than himself.[85]

In 1976 and 1977 Wojtyła wrote two articles on the antithesis of participation, which he calls alienation.[86] There he mentions that alienation weakens or even nullifies man's capacity to enter into relationship with another human being, that is, with "another *I*." It renders ineffective man's capacity to accept the Other naturally pursued in our deepest *I*.[87]

Symbol and Sacrament: Performative Language in J. L. Austin and
the Speech Acts of John R. Searle

John L. Austin[88] makes a distinction between constative statements and performative statements:

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84. There are two ways to deny the spirit of participation: (1) Individualism, which constitutes a moral error that humans make when they thinks that their own good is totally separate from (or even in contrast to) the good of the Other; that is, from the common good. (2) Totalitarianism, the opposite error of individualism, because it considers the individual as being able to pursue only his or her own individual particular good, unwilling to act in a constructive way with others. Both errors have in common the same concept of human. Cf. *Persona e atto*, 1185, quoted in *Metafisica della Persona,* XCIV.

85. An essay from 1976 entitled *Transcendenza della persona nell'agire e autoteleologia dell'uomo*, quoted in *Wojtyła, Metafisica della Persona,* XCI. My translation.

86. Both are titled "*La persona: soggetto e comunità e participation o alienazione?*"

87. An example of this extreme way of thinking can be found in Jean-Paul Sartre's play "*Huis clos*" (No Exit) from 1944, in which he mentions that "Hell is other people."

88. (1911–1960).

A constative statement merely reports a certain state of affairs, communicates a certain datum of knowledge, affirms that these or those objects are behaving in this or that way, that is this or that event took place in one way or another, that this was the result of that particular experiment, and so on.[89]

In contrast, some statements go beyond reporting, communicating, and affirming. When a groom says in front of a member of the clergy or a judge: "I do take this woman for my wife: at a wedding, he is not reporting a marriage, he is indulging in it."[90] These types of statements Austin calls performative, and he describes them this way:

by virtue solely of its enunciation, [it] performs a certain kind of action. For example, if X says to Y: "I promise to help you in your enterprise," X engages himself effectively to take those steps in the future which are necessary to help Y in his enterprise. Hence X creates a new situation which did not exist before. . . . He is now bound by the obligation which he assigned to himself. . . . The enunciation of the sentence is a veritable action.[91]

A constative statement does not alter a situation in any way, as, for example, when reporting the weather during the news on TV. Conversely, a performative statement creates a new relationship, altering the situation; it performs an effective action. When a person goes to confession and confesses his or her sins, this is a relationship-changing action; namely, the relationship between God and the penitent, but also between the penitent and the Christian community, even if it does not immediately appear to be the case.

Austin makes a further distinction between constative and performative statements. To make his point, he distinguishes three different types of acts: (1) A locutionary act that is simple: "the performance of an act *of* saying something."[92] (2) An illocutionary act, the "performance of

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89. Chapel, *Why Confess,* 146 (quoting Ladrière, "The Performativity," 51).

90. Austin's example.

91. Ibid., 147 (quoting Austin, *How to Do Things,* 4–9, in Ladrière, "The Performativity," 51–52).

92. Ibid., 148 (quoting Austin, *How to Do Things,*).

an act *in* saying something."[93] (3) A perlocutionary act, when saying something produces "certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thought, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of the other person."[94]

The American philosopher John R. Searle[95] was Austin's student at Oxford. Influenced by him, Searle elaborates a theory of "speech acts" to advance the examination of how language operates, as it is used. Language for him is behavioral, because "talking is performing acts according to rules."[96] Searle distinguishes four kinds of "speech acts" and how they function in relation to one another: (1) uttering words (words and sentences) is to perform *utterance acts;* (2) *propositional acts* are referring (which indicates what objects are spoken about) and predicating (which ascribes properties to objects spoken about); (3) *illocutionary acts* for Searle are stating, questioning, commanding, promising, etc.; (4) *perlocutionary acts* (which was originally Austin's notion), produce in those addressed a certain effect (for example inspiring, persuading, edifying, instructing, etc.).[97]

The central point in Searle's *Speech Acts* is that a propositional act will not occur alone; it always accompanies an illocutionary act. These only show in their enunciation. The illocutionary act is associated with a perlocutionary act because it may have a specific effect on the hearer.[98]

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93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. (1932–).

96. Ibid. (quoting Searle, *Speech Acts,* 22).

97. Ibid., 149 (my summary of Searle, *Speech Acts*, 24–25).

98. Ibid. (quoting Searle, *Speech Acts*, 29).

The illocutionary act contains some indicating expression with an illocutionary power that may or may not be explicit. It can be tacit. For example, the statement "It is snowing" may be more completely stated as, "I affirm that today's weather is snowy." In an illocutionary act, what is borne in mind "is what is effected by the speaker, in the act of speaking."[99]

The theories of Austin and Searle found resonance examining the dynamics of the operation of language within liturgy, and so, by extension, in sacraments. The liturgical language goes beyond its communication purposes. As Jean Ladrière makes clear,

> [Liturgical language] does not consist in the reporting of events, the description of objects, the formulation of theoretical hypotheses, the statement of experimental findings, or the handling of data. It is characterized in that it is a certain form of action; it puts something into practice: in short, it possesses an 'operativity.' It is not merely a verbal commentary on an action external to itself; in and of itself, it is action.[100]

A fundamental characteristic of sacramental speech within liturgy is that it is an action. Catholic theologians speak of sacramental efficacy or causality. The Council of Trent affirmed the phrase "*ex opere operato*"[101] as a doctrine of faith. This is because sacraments are acts of Christ himself. Sacraments are efficacious in themselves, despite the unworthiness of the minister.

Applying Searle's theory of speech acts to the sacrament of confession, we can say that the sentence "I am sorry" has the performative value of "I implore you to forgive me." "I implore" is the illocutionary indicator of what kind of performativity is present.

In addition, ". . . you to forgive me" establishes a referential or relational predicate. Paraphrasing Austin, this is a performative statement, because it creates a new relationship,

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99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., 150 (quoting Ladrière, "The Performativity," 51).

101. Council of Trent, 1547. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1128.

altering the situation; it performs an effective action. In the case of the sacrament of confession, the sentence "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned," but more specifically, the act of contrition, needs to express the penitent's personal remorse for having offended God's love. We recognize that there is no right to be forgiven, nor is there such a thing as a general duty to forgive on the part of God. We Christians have a moral obligation to follow Christ, who taught us to forgive.

To forgive is a gift, and it can only flow from the generosity of the offended person, in the case of the sacrament of penance, from God. Therefore, forgiveness is always an act of moral nobility. It belongs to the realm of mercy. And mercy cannot be compelled or usurped.

Heidegger: Language and the House of Being

Martin Heidegger is one of the most influential philosophers of the last century. The terrible experience of the First World War, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, seems not to apply to Heidegger because, even though he served as a soldier in the final year of that conflict, he had desk duty. He did not experience firsthand its horrendous impact. However, some philosophers, such as E. F. Kaelin,[102] credit Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) for having given a renewed impetus to the existentialist movement begun by Kierkegaard.[103] Kaelin rightly states that by doing so, Heidegger "brought to life once more Kierkegaard's depiction of the

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102. Kaelin, *Being and Time,* 304.

103. Heidegger, *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)*. Particularly interesting for our purpose is the fifth chapter, sections §28 The Task of a Thematic Analysis of Being-in (*Die Aufgabe einer thematischen Analyse des Ich-Seins*); §31 Da-sein as Understanding (*Das Da-sein als Verstehen*); §32 Understanding and Interpretation (*Verstehen und Auslegen*); §33 Statement as a Derivative Mode of Interpretation (*Die Aussage als abküftiger Mode der Auslegung*).
Heidegger's book was easily appropriated by Christian theologians. The most important of them was Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). He claimed that "the gospel is distorted because it is presented in terms of a prescientific cosmology. . . . The Bible must be demythologized so that the gospel itself may be made accessible to modern people" (Allen, *Philosophy,* 252). The protestant theologian Paul Tillich "considered the 'question of Being' as the fundamental question on both philosophy and theology, and he explored it by a study of the structure of the being of human beings" (Allen, *Philosophy,* 253).

ultimate paradox—that the Eternal should become historical—as stimulating both philosophical thought and religious commitment."[104]

For our purpose, Heidegger is of interest, because for him we humans are the only ones who can ask questions about our own being. The question of Being is crucial for Heidegger. In *Sein und Zeit,*[105] he claims that he has taken the first steps toward the recovery of the "question of Being." He undertakes this endeavor in a study of the way human beings exist. He uses *Dasein,* a German word that is literally translated as "being there."[106] This is Heidegger's intention, because humans not only exist like objects that just are, but there is an openness in us.[107] The *Dasein* exists, and it alone. "Thus existence is standing out and perduring the openness of the there: *ek-sistence.*"[108] This term is to be understood to mean "to ek-sist," "to stand out." Man and woman are subjects, but he or she are an "ek-sisting" subject who places himself or herself outside themselves in the world.

Humans can become; actually humans have a calling to become what they are meant to be. (In a Christian manner of speaking, which was not Heidegger's, we are called to become holy, which is a process rather than a state.)

To find ground to restate the question of Being, Heidegger revisits the classical presuppositions of the tradition concerning ontological investigations. And these are the

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104. Kaelin, *Being and Time,* 304.

105. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*).

106. In English, it is usually translated as "existence."

107. In classrooms, when a teacher takes attendance, students normally answer with "here" or a similar expression, to let their presence be known. This is the way Heidegger interprets the meaning of the word *Dasein*: to be there. It is unfortunate, that Heidegger did not know Spanish, because that language makes a distinction between being and dwelling (*ser y estar*). One is something (for example, professionally) independently, where one physically is. That verb is *ser*. (For example: *Yo soy un doctor. I'm a doctor*). To assign the physical place (but also the emotional state) one uses another Spanish verb *estar* (*Yo estoy aquí. I'm here*).

108. Heidegger*, Ibid.*, 125 (footnote). This unique way of writing that word will be picked up by Louis-Marie Chauvet in chapter four.

universality of Being, its indefinability, and its self-evidence.109 Only the last point is relevant for us here. The self-evidence of the concept stems from the necessity of using a cognate of the term in framing a definition for it. Everything that is, is. In other words, everything that is, exists. But it is this existence that is different in mere objects that "are," and humans that "are there," because, as Kaelin notes, "our understanding is a way of our being related to other things that are. But rather than being 'self-evident' in the sense intended by the traditional presupposition—as having no need of an explanation—the knowledge we have of our own being because we *are it* is only implicit."110

What Heidegger tries to do in this magnum opus is to investigate our (human) being phenomenologically. One of the typical aspects of being human is the desire to know, and we achieve knowledge by asking questions. When children start their learning process, there is a phase when the word *why* is very common. We all have asked many questions in our lives.

> Involved in any question, outside the activity of the questioner himself, there is something that is questioned (*ein Befragtes*), something that is asked about (*das Gefragte*), and something that is learned by the asking (*das Erfragte*). Corresponding to each of these structural moments of a question, we have in ontological questioning an entity, its being, and the meaning of its being.111

The different sciences are devoted to different "areas of Being."112 The behavioral and anthropological sciences deal with human beings as if we are only objects in the world of

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109. Kaelin, *Being and Time,* 23.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid., 24. The access to Being (as what is asked about) is always through entities (which are questioned); and what is learned by the asking is the meaning of that being.

112. For example, chemistry studies the properties of matter, and music, the properties of sound, etc.

nature.[113] This is the reason why Heidegger hyphenates the expression *In-der-Welt-sein* (to be in the world), "to indicate the concreteness of the relation between a self and its world. Being in the world is definitive for a human being's existence, since that world is created by that being's unique self-projection."[114]

For Heidegger, there is a close connection between philosophers and poets, because "entering into dialogue with [them] is one way of living in the house of Being; . . . He who would be a philosopher should always be *Unterwegs zur sprache*[115] [on the way to language], even if along the way he discovers that it is language that speaks [*Die Sprache spricht*!]."[116]

Heidegger in his essay *Holzwege* ("Off the Beaten Track") writes that "language is the dwellingplace of being, and that means that we get at things always by going through this dwellingplace. When we go to the well, we go through the wood, we always go through the word "well" and "wood," even if we never pronounce these words nor think of anything linguistic at all."[117] Language is the house of being also because by naming things, as in the examples given above, mere labels are not placed on them, but rather, their presence is summoned, and they are made present. It brings them back from the murky waters of the memory, into the clear waters of the surface, like a long-lost treasure that is rediscovered.

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113. There are two areas in particular that dehumanize human beings: politics, which is prone to consider each person only a vote; and marketing, when people are viewed only as consumers.

114. Ibid., 28.

115. Ibid., 342 (footnote 35), (quoting Heidegger, *Der Ursprung*,).

116. Ibid., 302. This famous phrase of Heidegger was formulated in his lecture on language ("*Die Sprache*"), in memory of Max Kommerell, and was first delivered on October 7, 1950, at the Bühlerhöhe building. He repeated it later in lectures and books. The German philosopher and sociologist, Theodore W. Adorno, expressed a similar thought he stated that language "acquires a voice."

117. Chapel, *Why Confess,* 132 (quoting *Holzwege*, 286; this portion appeared as "What Are Poets For?")

Chapter Four

Louis-Marie Chauvet's Thought on the Theology of the Sacrament of Penance

It is necessary humbly and trustingly to confess one's sins to a minister of the Church. In the celebration of this Sacrament, the priest represents not only God but also the whole community.
— Pope Francis

During the last century, especially the second half, Roman Catholic theology experienced turbulence in relation to the understanding of the sacraments. Among the most well-known theologians who contributed to the theology of the sacraments in the twentieth century, we find Odo Casel and his book *Das christliche Kultmysterium (The Mystery of Christian Worship)* (1932); twenty years later, in 1952, Edward Schillebeeckx published his doctoral thesis *De sacramentele Heilseconomie (The Redeeming Economy of the Sacraments);* and in 1961 Karl Rahner wrote *Kirche und Sakramente (Church and Sacraments).* Then came the Second Vatican Council, which we will discuss in chapter five. Many contemporary theologians consider Louis-Marie Chauvet, with his major work from 1987 *Symbole et sacrament: Un relecture de l'existance chrétienne (Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence),* to have renewed the global sacramental approach.[1] This book evolved from his doctoral dissertation.

As early as chapter one of *Symbol and Sacrament,* Chauvet criticizes the "Onto-Theological" presuppositions of classical sacramental theology.[2] That is, he challenges the scholastic framework of causality, because he believes, where sacramental theology and practice

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1. Prof. Chauvet (age 75) no longer teaches at the *l'Institut Catholique* in Paris, but works as pastor in the French diocese of Pontoise à Deuil-la-Barre. According to André Haquin "there does not seem to be another theologian today who has so profoundly renewed the global sacramental approach as the young professor from the Catholic Institute of Paris." Chapel, *Why Confess,* 198 (quoting Haquin, *"Vers une théologie"*).

2. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 8.

are ruled by the notion of causality, even language itself can be instrumentalized.[3] According to Chauvet, "the category of causality is always tied to the idea of production or augmentation; thus, it always presupposes an explanatory model implying production, . . . a model in which the idea of 'instrumentality' plays a pivotal role."[4] This position contrasts with the idea of incompleteness in the process of becoming in man's spiritual life.[5] To this somewhat mercantilist approach (Chauvet calls it a "productionist scheme of causality"),[6] he proposes a less "cold" model based on human relationship, where love is included; that is, in which gifts are exchanged, not in which something is given after having "earned" it.[7]

In his critique of the presuppositions about causality in the classic, medieval, Roman Catholic, sacramental-theological synthesis, Chauvet uses modern linguistic theory as a theological tool to analyze the nature of Being and various forms of existentialist thought. Following Heidegger, Chauvet complains that "[l]anguage has ceased to be the place where humans are born at the heart of the real."[8] Because symbols participate in the reality to which they point, Chauvet champions a "symbolic schema for language" in order to

> set up a discourse from which the believing subject is inseparable, just as language is inseparable from being or *Dasein* from *Sein*.[9] In theology as in philosophy,

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3. "Language has ceased to be the place where humans are born at the heart of the real." Ibid., 30.

4. Ibid., 7.

5. Martin Heidegger's influence on Chauvet is unmistakable. Already on page eight, we find Chauvet quoting Heidegger's "foundational ways of thinking" that aim to explain the totality of being. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament.*

6. Ibid., 43.

7. Strictly speaking, to say that we "earn" heaven means only symbolically, because there is absolutely no relation between what we humans can do on earth and the eternal reward in heaven.

8. Ibid., 30.

9. As explained in the previous chapter on page 66.

subjects can truly "grasp" nothing without, at the same time, recognizing themselves to be already grasped by it.[10]

Chauvet, like Heidegger, believes that language is the "house of being" in which humans "ex-sist."[11] "To overcome metaphysics is thus to be always underway, 'on the road,' on the way toward language."[12] For Chauvet, language is a mediation, not a mere instrument for something. Humans are "formed in the womb" of language. Language gives birth to what they will become. The subject comes to be through language.[13]

Chauvet could have been influenced by Martin Buber in his reflection of the *I* and the *you*.[14] The tacit or implicit *I* can only identify the speaker, and only as long as he or she speaks. The *I* is not conceivable without a *you*. In a dialogue, the *I* of the speaker becomes a *you* when the partner in conversation transitions from listener to speaker, and the former speaker becomes a listener. Chauvet calls this a "reversible relationship":[15] the *I* becomes *Thou,* and the *Thou* becomes *I*.

Such interchangeability does not always imply equality of the speaker and the listener. It is through language that one subject is distinguished from another (and from the surroundings). Language is also the mediator through which similarities are discovered. Mutual knowledge can only pass through this mediation.

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10. Ibid., 43.

11. As seen in last chapter, Heidegger prefers to write it with a *k* (as in ek-sistence), whereas Chauvet prefers to write it with an *x*.

12. Ibid., 55.

13. Heidegger would say, "Language bids man speak, and man responds." lecture on language *("Die Sprache")*.

14. Such a study is not the goal of this thesis, however.

15. Ibid., 93 (quoting Ortigues, *Le discours et le symbole,* 153–54).

God willed that sacramental graces would not be received in an immediate way, but a mediate one. Through the words of the Sacramentary, the people "come into being" as believers. Likewise, it is also through language that believers become part of a community, together with other believers. Take, for example, baptism. The baptized are introduced to the faith community using exactly the same words of reception, and for each candidate the rite is repeated, even if there are many persons to be baptized.

Language and Sacrament

Borrowing from Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, especially from his "language game,"[16] Chauvet emphasizes that there is a "language game" specific to faith: we need to "allow faith to speak in its own language, in order to understand how it speaks."[17]

When a speaker says, "God is Father," the speaker takes a stand. He or she expresses an attitude toward God (in relation to a listener, who may or may not believe in God), and, at the same time, before God (from whom he or she feels a filial affection). This means that the believer's assertion is "expressive and performative."[18]

The faith language renders present the realities of which it speaks. Chauvet believes that "the language of faith reveals the identity of God as Father and our own identity as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters; and by revealing this identity it makes effective the paternity of God, as well as our own filiation and condition as brothers and sisters."[19]

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16. Which can best be thought of as an explanatory analogy that offers a kind of direction-signal in thinking and talking of language. Games exist when they are played. One needs to know how to play before the game starts. We need to know a language before we can speak about a language.

17. Ibid., 427 (quoting Ladrière, *L'articulation*).

18. Ibid., 427–28.

19. Ibid., 428.

Chauvet derives from J. L. Austin what he calls the *illocutionary* dimension of the language act; that is, when the "act is effected *by* saying something," which is distinct from the external effect produced "*by* the act of saying something and constitutes the *perlocutionary* dimension of the language act."[20] This last dimension has an effect outside the speaker, for example, when the emotional state of the listener changes after the words "I love you";[21] or "I am sorry." Such words can set acts in motion, for example, after hearing an officer say "I order you . . . ," a soldier must obey.

Chauvet also notes that within the *illocutionary act,* the power of words "resides in the fact that they are not pronounced by an individual as an individual, but rather as a proxy of the group, as a representative of its 'symbolic capital.'"[22] Even if Chauvet does not mention this explicitly, implicitly he suggests that in the sacrament of confession, when the penitent hears the words of absolution, he or she is reconciled with God first, but also with the community of the church. This communal aspect of reconciliation is necessary, because sins, even private sins, affect the Church as a community; therefore, the reconciliation also needs to have a communal aspect.[23]

After reflecting on the nature of the speaker, Chauvet explores a "hierarchy of degrees" that exists at the level of ritual.[24] As an example of the upper end of the spectrum, he uses the

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20. Ibid., 132. Chauvet using Austin's categories and original emphasis.

21. The context of such an expression is important for its meaning as well. For example, there is a difference if a married man expresses those feelings to a woman who is not his wife, or if those words are uttered by a single man to the woman with whom he is romantically involved.

22. Ibid., 134.

23. In the sense of number 1488 from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church:* "To the eyes of faith no evil is graver than sin and nothing has worse consequences for sinners themselves, for the Church, and for the whole world." At this point, I do not find the need to address communal penance services and communal absolution.

24. Ibid.

sentence "I baptize you," uttered by a presider acting within the limits of a "negotiation rite."[25] At the lower end of the spectrum is the statement "I bet you," said among chatting friends. In both cases, the saying and the doing, based on the statements alone, is "ritual" and in the *illocutionary* order.

Of greatest interest to Chauvet are instituted rituals, such as the sacrament of baptism. Chauvet observes that it is "only within this framework [church, state, law, etc.][26] that the performative takes on meaning. . . . It has the characteristics of a rite, and its performance is exactly of the order of symbolic efficacy."[27]

Consider, for instance, an example from Josef Pieper.[28] When someone, during a conversation, says, "To be or not to be, that is the question," he is quoting Shakespeare. When an actor says the same words onstage in the theater, he is not quoting Shakespeare, nor is he acting on Shakespeare's behalf; rather, the actor speaks and acts "in the person" of Hamlet, whom he is playing. He is not acting on behalf of Hamlet. The actor is, in a sense, one with Hamlet. He speaks and acts "as" Hamlet. What Chauvet means is that within the framework of a church institution, a priest,—who is part of that institution (and also represents the community of believers)—when he says, "I baptize you" and pours water over the head of a baby at the baptismal font inside the church, performs an act with highly symbolic efficacy (not only the formula of baptism but in this case, also using water, with its rich symbolism). The priest is not quoting from the Sacramentary, nor is he merely washing a baby dressed up in liturgical

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25. Ibid. Chauvet mentions that the "correctness of the procedures (legitimate agent, proper formula and gestures, and so forth) play a major role in such ceremonies."

26. My examples.

27. Ibid., 135.

28. Pieper, *Was ist ein Priester?,* 10. Example used as my own illustration; not used by Chauvet.

garments. Instead, he is performing a sacrament according to a ritual established and approved by the Church, and his words are efficacious.

Chauvet rightly recognizes the danger of objectifying grace. He proposes that grace is communicated according to a symbolic scheme through language,[29] since it is "a communication supremely effective because it is through language that the subject comes forth in its relations to other subjects within a common 'world' of meaning,"[30] thereby forging a new relation between subjects that the sacramental "expression" aims at instituting or restoring in faith. This symbolic work is, on one hand, within the realm of *intra-linguistic* efficacy (but it cannot be reduced to it, because it is God's grace), and on the other, it is *extra-linguistic,* because it points to a relationship established outside of us, in Christ. Ritual language attests to the interpersonal dimension, so that the symbolic efficacy of sacraments as mediations is related to sacramental grace.

Chapter six of Chauvet's *Symbol and Sacrament* is dedicated to the relation between Sacred Scripture and the sacraments. This is an important connection for two reasons. On a general level, it highlights the continuity with the tradition of the Church and with the liturgy in which the sacraments are embedded. On a more practical level and for our purposes, the traditional practice of reading a short passage from the Bible before confession starts has almost been lost, obscuring the life-giving relation between the written Word of God in the scriptures and the human reception and response to it, especially in the sacrament of penance.

Chauvet goes on to make a connection between the Bible (the written Word of God) and the liturgy (the human attempt to respond with words and action) when he writes, "[the] Bible

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29. The symbolic scheme, as contrasted to what Chauvet calls the "metaphysical" scheme of cause and effect.

30. Ibid., 140.

was born of the liturgy, from its very beginnings, from the most ancient texts of the holy book."[31] According to him, the reading of the Bible in the faith community helps to determine the canonicity of the Bible, that is, "the canonical Bible is the fruit of the 'reading' (*lection*) operating simultaneously as a 'selection' (*selectio*)."[32] The liturgy also plays an important role in this principle of selective reading.

If Saint Jerome said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ!" then, by extension, we can say that "Ignorance of the liturgy is ignorance of Christ." Chauvet borrows from *Dei Verbum* (the dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation from Second Vatican Council)[33] the rich image of a table, when he proposes a traditional and irreversible dynamic moving from "the table of the Scriptures to the table of the sacraments."[34] Both tables are rich and serve in the Church (one from the ambo and the other from the altar).

Sacrament as Dramatized Word

It is in this sense that Chauvet confers great importance to the relationship between subject and the actual (liturgical) space. Liturgical space is a place that is "informed"[35] by the tradition and collective memory of Christians, where they have been fed with God's Word and with Christ's body. Chauvet stresses that liturgical space speaks, and that it does so as "Christian

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31. Ibid., 191 (quoting Béguerie, "La Bible," 109).
32. Ibid., 209.

33. *Dei Verbum,* 21: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body."

34. Ibid., He alludes to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32), when Jesus explains to them the Scriptures, so they went from "the desire to see-touch-find, to accept in its place the hearing of a word, whether it comes from angels or from the Risen One himself, a word recognized as the word of God." 162.

35. In the Aristotelian and Scholastic sense of the term; that is, for example, flesh is not flesh unless it is informed by soul.

space, as do the objects and actors which, in interaction, make it up, manifesting metaphorically the mystery of Christ and metonymically[36] the ecclesial communion in time and space."[37] Chauvet does not explicitly mention the concept of sacred space, but we can infer that there is a space that is "eminently part of the *sacramentum*."[38]

In keeping with Chauvet's emphasis on the importance of the liturgical space is his interest in the body. From the ancient practice of the celebrating church, we can recognize the many symbols that the liturgy offers to the five senses.[39]

In the sacrament of confession, both matter and form are conveyed with words. Chauvet fears that language is understood as a category that reduces the sacrament to linguistic analysis, as if one favors a beautifully wrapped package solely for the paper and ribbon, discarding the gift inside.

In Chauvet's view, deeds have priority over words, or, rather, "that which is truly said is that which is done."[40] He emphasizes this also so as to safeguard the liturgical language from the threat of "magicalism" in rituals, because "magic of the word which believes it can change the world by its own mana."[41]

Chauvet believes the "trivialization" of the liturgical ritual is another danger; for example, through excessive and familiar use of everyday language or wordy explanations. The

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36. From *metonymy:* a figure of speech that consists of the use of the name of one object or concept for that of another to which it is related, or of which it is a part, as in "count heads [or noses]" for "count people."

37. Chauvet, *The Liturgy,* 36.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 37.

40. Ibid., *Symbole and Sacrament,* 325. Chauvet notes that we live in a time when even the way something is said can have more weight than the message itself. Therefore "ritual language must be treated within the framework of pragmatics, and not just semantics."

41. Ibid., 326 (quoting De Heusch, "*Introduction*"). Chauvet states that magicians "turn technology into language in the same way they turn language into technology."

opposite, likewise a danger, Chauvet calls "ritual conservatism"; that is, keeping the sacraments in a "frozen" state.

To combat these threats, Chauvet insists that the rite must demonstrate a "symbolic rupture" with everyday life, beginning with the place and the time of the rites, as well as the objects used (chalice, etc.). The language employed in the rite also needs to distinguish itself from the ordinary.[42]

Chauvet reminds us of the basic law of liturgy: "Do not say what you are doing; do what you are saying." Chauvet's thought applies to the priest and deacon during a liturgical act, but also to the congregation, in that their observance of the sacrament attests to their personal belief through pious participation, as, for example, when uttering the appropriate responses, and when kneeling and standing at the proper times.[43] This reaction of the congregation during Mass and during baptisms, among other rites, demonstrates that sacraments are not private. As a liturgical ritual, even the sacrament of penance refers to the community expressing that it is the Catholic faith that we share, and continuing those rituals in time.

Sacramental Rituals

The sacraments, in their "symbolic efficacy" can order and "restore to order" the elements that give the community its identity and cohesion.[44]

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42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 375. While the sacraments are not private, they do, however, involve the individual and demand a commitment, the "taking of a stance": "The very fact that we received a sacrament does not involve us. It is a step that we take each time. And we cannot 'negotiate' at this stage: we either take the step or not; we either make the gesture or not. It is impossible here to play on 'analogy': the rite 'positions' us, depending on whether we go through with it or not, whether we submit to it or not, in a movement that is more than cerebral, one that requires a follow-through into action." Chauvet gives the sacrament of baptism as an example, as the body is plunged into the symbolic order proper to the Church, metaphorized by the water in baptism.

44. Ibid., 359. Chauvet gives examples of symbolic order of economic, social, political, and ideological values, the elements that first appear incoherent or disturb social harmony.

Chauvet states that by assenting to "submit" oneself to the sacramental ritual of the Church,[45] one subordinates one's own theological ideas, religious feelings, and ethical accomplishments. In a sacramental rite,

> the self is put at the disposal of the Other whom it can let act in the Church's mediation. The self lets the Other act by performing a gesture which is not from itself, by saying words which are not its own, by receiving elements which it has not chosen. It is indeed the very condition of faith that this symbolizes, it is being a believer that the self puts into play, radically, leaving no escape route.[46]

The fact that sacraments have a bodily element, an element in which "corporality is the very mediation where faith takes on flesh,"[47] Chauvet calls the "Enfleshment of Faith." Faith involves a "consent of the body." The corporality of the sacraments is so important for Chauvet, because "it speaks by its action and works through the word, the word-as-body. It tells us that the body, which is the whole world of humankind, is the unavoidable mediation where the Word of a God involved in the most human dimension of our humanity demands to be inscribed in order to make itself understood."[48]

Generally speaking, there are two clearly distinguished points in every sacrament. One is the sign, and the other is the grace that is produced. Matter and form are used for sacraments in a figurative and analogical way. In material things, matter and form compose a physical unity, but in sacraments they form an extrinsic or moral reality. The scholastics distinguished three parts in

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45. Chauvet, *The Sacraments,* 106. Chauvet has an interesting thought regarding the terms "rite" (noun) and "ritual" (adjective). He says that "they designate something which is done every time in an identical way (same sequence of moments with the same gestures and the same words, for instance, one sings "Happy Birthday to You," one blows out the candles on the cake). . . . Every rite is received from tradition, received from preceding generations, and in general, when it comes to the main elements of a religious ritual, received from the founder, whether she or he is historical or mythical. One does again what Moses or Jesus commanded us to do or else what the founding ancestors did first. This is why ritual language has this characteristic of being *programmed*."

46. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 375.

47. Ibid., 376.

48. Ibid.

the nature of every sacrament: (1) the external sign *(Sacramentum tantum);* (2) the internal grace effect as such, the ultimate/principal effect: God's love, presence, power, and grace *(Res tantum);* and (3) an intermediate reality, that is, the effect and sign, the seal that remains after the sacrament is completed (*res et Sacramentum*). This is produced by the sacrament apart from grace.[49] In the sacraments of initiation, the intermediate reality is character. In the Eucharist, it is the presence of Christ. In matrimony, it is the inseparable bond of unity. In the anointing of the sick, it is the spiritual anointing. In confession, it is contrition.

Regarding the form of the sacraments, Chauvet notes that "every sacrament is an event of the Church," as evident by the linguistic "we" found in liturgical action. In the case of the sacrament of penance, sin has a "formal" component (sin against God) and a "material" one (sin against others and oneself). These two cannot be separated. Likewise, reconciliation with God reflects this unity, which is always mediated by reconciliation with the Church, the *pax ecclesiae* as *res et sacramentum.*[50]

Chauvet states that "to sin against God is always to sin in some way against the Church."[51] At the same time, he emphasizes that there is a communal sacramental expression of it in the entire Church that intercedes for sinners: "as the concrete realization of the *Ecclesia* is not only the receiver of forgiveness, it plays an *active 'ministerial' role* in the reconciliation. It is *by the Church* that one is reconciled to God."[52]

Part of the sacrament includes a personal element, when the penitent approaches the priest and makes a "verbal avowal of sin": "This exteriorization sacramentally shows that every

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49. Summarized from Karl Rahner, who reminded us of the vital ecclesial dimensions of the sacrament of penance in an essay entitled, "Vergessene Wahrheiten über das Bussacrament," 447–71.

50. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 432.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., 434. Original emphasis.

conversion to God must pass from the heart to acts."[53] The priest, at this point, is not the one who bestows forgiveness; only God can do that. Chauvet elaborates on this thought when he states:

> The sacramental request for pardon from the Church and from its minister does no more than unfold the petition for forgiveness made to the one who has been wounded: it manifests, through the symbolic function exercised by the priest, what has taken place; it expresses what has taken place and, by expressing it, by giving it the language of body and word, accomplishes it. It thus reveals the very essence of forgiveness.[54]

In other sacraments, the form is more obvious, as for example, in the sacrament of matrimony, when the couple exchanges their vows. In the sacrament of confession, there is a need to express remorse and to show contrition. This external act reflects the internal state of the penitent. For Chauvet, to perform the ritual of reconciliation, with all its parts, is to take the sacrament seriously, and language reflects that conviction.

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53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., 435.

Chapter Five

Confession of Sins

With the forgiveness offered by the crucified Christ, the story of sin becomes a narrative of hope and redemption. In this respect, our journey to happiness begins at the foot of Jesus' cross because without God's forgiveness, the journey would not be possible. —Paul J. Wadell

As already seen in chapter one of this study, the Hebrew Scriptures demonstrate awareness of individual responsibility for sinful actions and the need for forgiveness. Israel's infidelity (that is, sin) was linked with the covenant promise to the Hebrew people.[1] At the same time, the Hebrew people acknowledged the sins of individuals,[2] as well as the communal nature of sin, because they believe sin always has a negative effect on the community or on subsequent generations (this latter aspect is totally foreign to the Christian faith). Sin for the Hebrew people is never a purely private matter. These communal and individual dimensions are carried throughout Jesus' teaching. With this communal aspect of sin in mind, we attest that

> the Church is incapable of forgiving any sin without Christ, and Christ is unwilling to forgive any sin without the Church. The Church cannot forgive the sin of one who has not repented, who has not been touched by Christ; Christ will not forgive the sin of one who despises the Church. *What God has joined together, man must not separate.*[3] *This is a great mystery, but I understand it as referring to Christ and the Church.*[4]

This interesting thought linking Christ the Bridegroom, to his bride the Church, in the sacrament of confession, highlights as well the communal aspect of sin, because the entire

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1. Hosea 1–3, Isaiah 54:6, Jeremiah 3:1–4.

2. In Genesis 3:3, we see Adam and Eve as the prototypes of all individual sins. The sinner needs to be forgiven by God (Leviticus 4:20, 5:10; Numbers 14:19).

3. Mark 10:9.

4. Blessed Isaac of Stella, *Sermo,* 1728–29.

Church is affected by it; therefore, a representative of the Church needs to reconcile the Church with the particular member.5 Karl Rahner stresses this point when he says, "Reconciliation through the Church is also reconciliation with the Church."6

With the emphasis on the communal aspect of confession, we may lose sight of the fact that confession primarily responds to a human need, not a divine one. When Christ instituted the sacrament of confession, he was thinking of us, not of himself. We agree with Alfred Wilson, when he states that "wherever there is a sincere contrition, [Jesus] pardons in a flash, and would pardon without more ado, if such an arrangement were good for us. [Jesus] saw, however, that it would not be good for us to be let off without an apology for serious sin. . . . God insists on an apology from us, for our sake not for His."7

On a human level, it is important to ask for pardon for our wrongdoings and misunderstandings. On a spiritual level, we need to ask God for forgiveness, and confession is the right channel to do it. The sacrament of penance enables us to gain the maximum benefits of Divine Mercy.8 As we know from the *Our Father,* there is a direct commandment of Christ to "be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."9 By forgiving the closest person to us (the one we can see), we are also demonstrating our love for God (whom we cannot see). By forgiving our brothers and sisters, we show gratitude to God, who forgave an infinitely greater debt out of love for us.

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5. See also Pope Saint John Paul II, Wednesday Audience, April 15, 1992, about the necessity of the mediation of the Church.

6. Rahner, *The Church,* 94.

7. Wilson, *Pardon and Peace*, 17.

8. Ibid.

9. Luke 6:32–36.

The Second Vatican Council and the Ecclesiological Dimension of

the Sacrament of Penance

The Second Vatican Council did not dedicate a specific document to the study of the sacrament of Penance; nevertheless, diverse documents address the sacraments and the sacramental life of the church, especially *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO), and *Christus Dominus* (CD). *Lumen Gentium* (LG), paragraph 11, offers the densest passage:

> Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from the mercy of God for the offence committed against Him and are at the same time reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins, and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion.

This text applies the principle expressed in the decree of *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR), paragraph 11: "in Catholic doctrine there exists a 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith." In this way, a unitary vision of the sacraments is revived, as well as a systematic vision of the sacraments, where all sacraments form an organic unity as preparation or specification of the primordial grace that the Eucharistic sacrifice irradiates.[10] All six sacraments point to "the Most Blessed Eucharist [which] contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church, that is, Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread."[11]

At the same time, Christ "always associates the Church with himself in this great work in which God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified."[12] In this unitary perspective of the sacraments, the Council sees the sacrament of penance in relation to the Holy Eucharist. In this way, the ecclesial side is highlighted and recovered, so that the sacrament of penance is not

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10. PO 2. In footnote fifteen, this document follows the *Summa Theologiae:* "The Eucharist indeed is a *quasi*-consummation of the spiritual life, and the goal of all the sacraments."

11. PO 5.

12. SC 7.

reduced to a private matter between the penitent and God, but is seen in all its richness as a ministry of reconciliation that reunites the penitent with God and with the Church,[13] thereby fortifying the Christian and spiritual life of the baptized.[14] This rediscovery of the ecclesiastical aspect of the sacrament of penance is particularly important. In our modern world that praises individualism, and where most believe that matters of religion are better kept private, it is important to highlight the sacraments that take the penitent back from darkness to light, from isolation to community, from egoism to love.

The Second Vatican Council, as a consequence of a deeper understanding of the nature of the Church, appears to sanction this ecclesial dimension. In *Presbyterorum Ordinis,* we learn that the sacrament of penance "reconciles [the penitent] with God and with the Church."[15] We find the same thought in *Lumen Gentium* 11. In this way, the Second Vatican Council does not limit this salutary effect of the sacrament of penance, but, rather, gives reason for it: Sin is an offense against God, and it is a wound to the Church, which is holy, but with a holiness that is concretized in its members. Because of mortal sin, the baptized, although still belonging to the Church (only in a "bodily" manner and not "in his heart"),[16] becomes a "dead member," being deprived of the grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is the soul that vivifies the Church. In this way the Church, Christ's Mystical Body, suffers violence and is weakened by sin.

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13. LG 11 and PO 5.

14. CD 30 and PO 18.

15. PO 5.

16. LG 14.

The Second Vatican Council: From Confession and Penance

to Reconciliation

It needs to be acknowledged that the reform of the Sacred Liturgy requested in *Sacrosantum Concilium* ("The rite and formulas for the sacrament of penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament")[17] took ten years to complete, making penance the last major rite to be revised[18]; with this effort, our liturgical library was virtually complete. Shortly after the Rite of Penance was promulgated, Pope Paul VI addressed the need to reform our ways of thinking and also our religious practices relative to the sacrament of reconciliation. He said the following at the general audience on April 3, 1974:

> "We are talking precisely about the supreme interest of our life, our own salvation. We are dealing with walking on the edge of two great abysses. . . . The one is that of sin; today's mentality is blinding itself to the existence of sin and blocking out the dizzying sight of sin's lethal and fearsome depths. The other abyss is that of love, of goodness, of mercy, of grace, of resurrection: It is what God offers to our freedom at the level of redemption and of the sacramental activity of the church."

Already in the *praenotanda* of the new document, there was a change in the language referring to the sacrament of penance. As Robert Kennedy notes, "the shift from an emphasis on confession or penance—placing stress on the action of the penitent (the doing of penance, the telling of sins)—to reconciliation, which places stress, in the first instance, on God and God's action in Christ."[19] Reconciliation with God underscores God's mercy, goodness, love, healing, and forgiveness, and deepens our friendship with the One who paid the price for the sins of humanity: Christ.

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17. SC 72.

18. The *Ordo Paenitentiae* was promulgated on 2 December 1973.

19. Kennedy, *Reconciling Embrace,* 98. This shift in language is captured best in the message of Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans: "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:10–11).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes it clear that sin can only be understood if we first recognize that our destiny is to live in profound relationship with God, to seek God, to love God. "For only in this relationship is the evil of sin unmasked in its true identity as humanity's rejection of God and opposition to [God], even as it continues to weigh heavy on human life and history."[20]

As seen in the writings of Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner in chapter three, relationship is that which defines us as truly human. As Christians, we know that communion with God is our vocation, our path in life; therefore, everything that distracts us or slows us down from growing in our friendship with God is sin.

Auricular Confession or Individual Confession?

The term *auricular confession* reveals more than the term *individual confession*. The former insinuates a confidential and oral confession of sins and thereby infers the physical presence of the penitent, which is imperative for the validity of the sacrament. Saint Augustine was the first to categorically reject confession done by a messenger or by letter.[21]

It has always been the tradition of the Church that confession of sins be made orally. Still, there are cases when a written list of personal sins may be submitted by the penitent within the rite of the sacrament. Under certain conditions, this does not jeopardize the validity of the

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20. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #386.

21. Cuschieri, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation,* 189 (quoting *De Vera et Falsa Poenitentia*, 1122.25): *"Praecepit enim Dominus mundandis, ut ostenderent ora sacerdotibus (Luc, 17:14): docens corporali prasentia confetenda peccata, non per nuntium, non per scriptum manifestanda. Dexit enim, Ora monstrate; et omnes, non unus pro omnibus."* Modern means of telecommunication make it possible to have one-on-one communication like teleconferences, but renounce the physical presence in that communication. The scope of the present paper is more the philosophical-theological aspect of confession, rather than the physical one. Therefore, I believe Saint Augustine's opinion is still valid, because the corporality element of the sacrament is necessary.

sacrament.22 It is more an exception than a rule, however, and does not change the necessity to express our sins orally.23

Naming: Examination of Conscience

One of the most moving and symbolic parables of Jesus related to forgiveness, we find in the classic text of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.24 The Father in the story never at any time repudiates the younger son. He has already forgiven him (otherwise he would not have spotted him from afar, which suggests that the Father never stopped hoping that his son would return), but his forgiveness cannot take effect, unless and until the son himself literally and figuratively turns around; that is, until the son can bring himself to turn around so that he can meet the forgiveness of the Father. The critical point in the life of the prodigal son comes when he recognizes his misery and hunger, and reflects on how much better his father's hired workers have it. Once he turns back, he tells his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you."

The examination of conscience is a necessary step before saying our sins aloud. It is not an examination of the memory, but of the conscience. The examination of the conscience lends concreteness to the sins. We received the power to give names from God, 25 but in the case of naming sins, Adam and Eve resist doing so, an attitude that perpetuates itself in all of their descendants up to the present day.

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22. Cuschieri, Ibid., 192.

23. In the case of a mute person, the handing over to the confessor of a written confession of sins is permissible, but not obligatory. However, in cases where there is any physical impediment in the penitent, the substitution of a written list in order to avoid embarrassment of the penitent is not sufficient reason, because embarrassment is part of the penance for one's sins. Cuschieri, Ibid., 193.

24. Luke 15:11–32.

25. Genesis 2:20.

To confess sin is to confess love of God at the same time. For this reason, according to Louis-Marie Chauvet, the reading of Scripture as the Word of God precedes the examination of conscience. [26]

Confession: Bringing to Speech

The specific and integral confession is from divine right, because Christ himself wants it that way. He wants that self-accusation of the penitent to be an essential condition to receive the forgiveness and the sacramental graces proper to the sacrament of penance. A motive of grave necessity, for example in a war,[27] can suspend the obligation to tell our sins to a priest, but it does not suppress it, and when the impossibility is lifted, penitents are obliged to finish the sacrament in the usual way. Penitents must confront their own sins by naming them and assuming responsibility for their actions.

As previously seen in chapter two of this study, when a word designates an object, the word is a simple label that is "put on" the object. Communication is more than naming or "labeling" objects, however. By naming our sins to a priest, we make them present; we call them out of the murky waters of our memory into the crystalline waters of the present and take responsibility for those sinful past actions. This process moves from personal, individual thinking, to the engagement of speech, which is an active doing and presupposes a listener, a partner in communication: God

Bringing sins to speech is essential to a relation, as Bernard Lonergan suggests in his example of human love:

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26. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 432–33.

27. In reality, the collective general absolutions started to be used in both world wars. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document on June 16, 1972, to remind us of the extraordinary circumstances required for a general absolution to be done.

When a man and a woman love each other but do not avow their love, they are not yet in love. Their very silence means that their love has not reached the point of self-surrender and self-donation. It is the love that each freely and fully reveals to the other that brings about the radically new situation of being in love and that begins the unfolding of its life-long implications. What holds for the love of a man and a woman, also holds in its own way for the love of God and man.[28]

As we discussed in chapter one on the divine dialogue, a word is not abstract; it has its own dynamic. When remorseful penitents put into speech their sins in the context of the sacrament of penance, they set this dynamic in motion, namely, acknowledging some past actions as sinful, distancing themselves from them, and apologizing for them, and seeking forgiveness.

The Importance of Hearing the Absolution

After having acknowledged their own sins to a minister of the Church, who witnessed the penitent's conversion, God gives his pardon with the sign of the absolution. In this way, the dialogue that was sought by using language, is answered. God has willed to use sensible signs to confer salvation and to renew the broken friendship.

This is the only time in the sacrament of penance when the priest speaks *in persona Christi capitis,* concluding the dialogue with Christ, the penitent having heard the words of absolution with human ears. At that moment, the penitent realizes that through Jesus of Nazareth, God inaugurates a Kingdom marked by the definitive forgiveness that restores human beings' communion with God, with one another, and with the whole of Creation. That moment of absolution is, in some way, a foretaste of heaven, because the penitent experiences God's love. Such forgiveness is a sign of the hoped-for coming of God's New Heaven and New Earth.[29]

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28. Chapel, *Why Confess,* 293 (quoting Lonergan, *Method in Theology*).

29. Cf. Revelation 21:1–5a.

Confession in the Episcopal Church

Awareness of the rite of reconciliation is growing in the Episcopal Church since the issue in 1979 of the *Book of Common Prayer*. In the Anglican Communion, confession is obligatory, but the method is left open: "one may confess in the hearing of a priest or not, according to one's own choice, but one must confess."[30]

Anglican theology distinguishes between the sacrament of Absolution and the practice of revealing one's sins to obtain the release of a burden, to receive counseling, or to attain comfort.[31] The sacrament of Absolution is "not merely human, but divine."[32] It is not one-sided, something done by the penitent alone; there is also the "gift given by God."[33] Auricular confession is not obligatory, or as the manual states, "in regard to making confession in the hearing of a priest, . . . all may, some should, none must.'"[34] In other words, there is an obligation to confess sins, but one may do so directly to God or through a priest.

The Anglican Communion does not have what a Catholic priest needs to have in order to hear confessions (and administer other sacraments, as well as to celebrate Holy Mass): the "faculties." According to their manual, Anglican priests are required to know how to administer the sacrament of Absolution, because it is part of the "ordination commission."[35] In the stipulations regarding the "extraordinary place" needed to hear confession, we learn it should not be heard "at the altar rail which symbolically is the place of union of a soul in grace with the

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30. Conkling, *Priesthood in Action,* 18. Rev. Conkling was the seventh bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago and served from 1941 to 1953.

31. Less frequently, the sacrament is called the sacrament of penance.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 19.

35. Ibid.

Lord."[36] For members of the Anglican Church, however, there is not "compulsory" confession; that is, the precept to go to confession at least once per year. "No priest can refuse communion to one of his parishioners who does not come to confession."[37]

Martin L. Smith on the Sacramental Theology of Confession

In his manual on preparing for confession, Martin Smith has in mind not only members of the Anglican Church, but also those of other traditions, such as Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Regarding the place where confession occurs, he finds (Roman Catholic) confessionals that are divided into two compartments and separated by a screen, foreign to the Anglican faithful and not useful, because reconciliation rooms "make the celebration of the rite rather 'impersonal,' and they prevent the priest from administering the laying of the hands, which today is an integral element of the rite."[38]

Two forms of service are provided in the *Book of Common Prayer,* and there is no essential difference between them. Penitents are free to choose. The first one is brief and direct, addressed to God and to God's church, and in a secondary way to the priest, who is present as a witness and as the church's representative. Smith mentions that this form "involves the church's pardon," which, I think, can be interpreted as sin having offended the community of believers and having offended God; therefore, the penitent receives from God mercy and forgiveness, and from the Church his pardon.

There are two forms of absolution. The first is adopted from the traditional form given in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer,* where the words "I absolve you" appear, emphasizing the

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36. Ibid., 20.

37. Belton, *A Manual,* 9. Regarding the possibility of denying Holy Communion in the Catholic Church, see canons 912 and 915 of Canon Law.

38. Smith, *Reconciliation,* 26.

"empowerment of the church's minister to grant Christ's pardon."[39] The second form calls on Christ directly "to absolve the penitent, through the priest's ministry by the grace of the Holy Spirit."[40]

The second form of service, which is fuller and with a richer content of imagery, begins with the priest and penitent reciting together verses from Psalm 51 and an invocation of God's mercy. The priest is there as a "fellow sinner, not as a judge, and stands together with the penitent in need of God's mercy."[41] Then the priest takes the opportunity to read aloud from verses of the Scripture, which invite and encourage the penitent to make his confession. What follows is a prayer to remind the penitent of her complete dependence on God, who created humankind and redeemed it in Christ, and "giving the penitent a new life in the community of the faithful.[42] At the end, the priest prays to God to accept the confession and pronounces the absolution while laying hands on the penitent's head. As Smith notes, this "solemn gesture communicates reconciliation and readmission to fellowship."[43]

Problematic is what Smith states next: that in an emergency, when no priest is available, an Anglican can unburden his conscience by confessing to a layperson, who cannot respond with an absolution based on priestly authority, but only with a prayer assuring God's pardon.[44]

Surprisingly, there is a tradition in the Anglican Church of making confession to spiritually gifted and holy laymen and laywomen in order to receive spiritual guidance and

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39. Smith, Ibid., 27.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid, 28.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. For those cases, the formula "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, forgives yours sins by the grace of the Holy Spirit" can be used (*Book of Common Prayer,* 448, 452).

prayerful affirmation of God's mercy, beyond the case of emergency. Certainly, good can come from acting in humility and asking for the counsel of a layperson. However, this is not what the Catholic Church understands the sacrament of confession to be. It is true that because of a lack of faith, a penitent may pay exaggerated attention to the human qualities of the confessor—real or objective—but this is marginal to the sacrament. God can make the waters of his grace run clean even through rusty pipes. I cannot emphasize enough that every priest who has received from the Church the faculty to absolve sins validly, does so because he acts in persona Christi capitis. For souls, Christ has opened the living springs of pardon. In his blood, he washes our sins.

Conclusion

Peace in the Universe through peace with God. . . . [The] basic definition of the attributes of worship is marked concretely by an awareness of man's fall and estrangement. Of necessity it takes place as a struggle for atonement, forgiveness, reconciliation. The awareness of guilt weighs down on mankind. Worship is the attempt, to be found at every stage of history, to overcome guilt and to bring back the world and one's own life into right order.
—Joseph Ratzinger

The research and writing of this paper has been a decade-long theological and philosophical journey. My interest for languages, philosophy of language, the influence of language in society, and the interpersonal character of human speech started with my studies in philosophy at the turn of the new millennium. It was a joy to receive the opportunity to expand this interest in the theological field, where it has to do with reality and with truth, with the dignity of communication and with the sacredness of words; ultimately, it has to do with our relationship with our selves, with others, and with God, where the sacrament of Confession is a case in point.

This paper was not originally conceived with a chapter exploring the divine dialogue. I began to consider adding it after reading Ebner, particularly when I realized that the foundational work highlighting the importance of language would be incomplete without some mention of language in the Bible. This critical addition was confirmed for me when I read Chauvet, because his theology is devoted to the relation between the Church and the Bible.

In chapter one, I spoke about the realization of the *berit,* which is not contingent on any merits or preexisting tasks on the part of man and woman. It is an act of God that is pure unmerited grace. I also mentioned that in Hebrew there are different expressions to describe the content of this gift. If *hèsèd* refers to a promise, it connotes a loyalty within an alliance, such as

in spousal love. It is a love that speaks of radical, mutual, and promised solidarity. It is a love that becomes demanding and knows the rage of jealousy.

In Saint John Paul's second encyclical *Dives in Misericordia,*[1] he mentions a second Semitic word that is at the core of the word *mercy: rahamin.*[2] Its root is found in the word *rehem,*[3] which means "womb." Clearly, this speaks of maternal tenderness, of love for the fruit of the womb. It also reminds us of the fatherhood of God in Hosea 11: a loving fatherhood, a firm tenderness.[4] God's love, too, even in the Old Testament, has a tender side, like a mother's love.

In retrospect, it might have been beneficial for me to connect the first two chapters with some ideas from John Macmurray's book *Persons in Relation*, particularly his second chapter, "Mother and Child." I hope this shortcoming is remedied somewhat in chapter three.

Chapter two was principally philosophical, dealing with language itself. I decided to include it, because sometimes the most basic things are the easiest to overlook and to neglect. In some ways, this chapter was intended to bring us "back to the basics," regarding the dignity of words, the importance of language, and the potential for its corruption, particularly when words no longer or do not precisely express reality, disrupting the interpersonal character of human speech. It was my hope to illustrate indirectly that the process of language itself is, at its most basic, an exercise of love. Where there is love, people speak with each other; where there is not, interpersonal communication suffers or is nonexistent. People reconcile with each other with

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1. Footnote 52.

2. רַחֲמִים.

3. רחם.

4. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me . . ."

words (the most frequent being "sorry," "pardon," and the like). As Gerhard Ebeling states, "Harmony comes into being through love mediated by language."[5]

Chapter three was the most eye-opening for me. I was confronted for the first time by the thought of Ebner, and by a more in-depth study of Buber's contributions to theology. I sought to construct a bridge between the German philosophers and theologian, like Romano Guardini and Bernard Häring (as well as Karol Wojtyła) and the two English-speakers, one from the Old World, J. L. Austin, and one from the United States, John R. Searle.

Originally I had planned for a longer fourth chapter and intended to include more of Chauvet's theology, but during my research, I became somewhat disenchanted with him, mainly because of Heidegger's influence. I found it problematic, because Heidegger's philosophy is unique, with a unique language that I do not consider suitable for the theology of sacraments. Even more challenging was Chauvet's use of Jacques Derrida with his deconstruction philosophy. To "ride" the newest wave of philosophy has risks, particularly when that philosophy becomes dated. I found that Chauvet's analysis of the sacraments of penance undertaken just a few years after changes introduced after the Second Vatican Council, did not give him enough perspective to make an informed analysis of the new developments (for example, the moving away from confessionary to a reconciliation room), because he wrote his book when the "waters were still shaken." I was hoping for more from Chauvet's theology. I appreciate his work, but I find it lacking.

Chapter five is most directly related to the thesis of my paper. I never intended it to be a thorough analysis of the sacrament of penance in light of the Second Vatican Council, but I did touch upon that to give some points of reflection. It was suggested that I compare the Catholic sacrament of penance with the Anglican practice as a point of contrast, which I did.

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5. Ebeling, *Introduction,* 200.

As I finish this paper on Divine Mercy Sunday, I wish to close with the following thought: What a truly incredible thing it is to make the salvation of the human race dependent upon the free response of Mary! Mary's "yes" to God shows us the power and transcendence of personal choice, expressed with her simple *Fiat*. I think even the angels in heaven held their breath before her "yes." Mary's loving, faith-filled consent to a plan she did not fully understand, becomes the model of our own daily consent to the divine will as it manifests itself in our daily lives.

I am convinced that in the same way God wanted to make the history of human salvation dependent on Mary's answer, so too does he want us to respond individually to his invitation to repentance, especially within the sacrament of penance.

O Mother of devoted love and mercy,

most Blessed Virgin Mary,

with all my heart and all my affection

I take refuge in you,

though I am a poor and undeserving sinner.

You stood by your most dear Son

as he was hanging on the cross.

Stand mercifully by me,

poor sinner that I am . . .

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