

THE WORD SPRINGS FROM THE FLESH: THE MYSTERY OF THE PREACHING OF THE KINGDOM

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“It is not enough then for the word to come down from heaven; it must also be born from the flesh. Hence it cannot be uttered all at once; it cannot dispense with the lapse of time required by the entire life of Jesus.”

“Short and concise utterances come from Him, for He was no sophist, but His word was the power of God.”¹ This is how St. Justin Martyr describes the teaching of Jesus in a letter to the Emperor Hadrian. In another text, addressed to the Jew Trypho, he exhorts the latter to pay attention to the words of the Savior, “for they have in themselves such tremendous majesty that they can instill fear into those who have wandered from the path of righteousness, whereas they ever remain a great solace to those who heed them.”²

What is it that gives the words of Jesus their power and majesty? Does their mystery lie in the truth they convey, or is it in the persuasive reasoning that undergirds them? There must be something else; otherwise, how could we explain the fact that,

¹Cf. Justin Martyr, *Apology* I, 14, 5 (in *Justin Martyr. The First and Second Apologies*, trans. Leslie William Barnard [New York: Paulist Press, 1997], 33).

²Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 8, 2 (in *St. Justin Martyr. Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003], 15).

according to Justin, they have the power to convert even the roughest of men and to produce moral improvement where the efforts of a Plato or a Pythagoras were in vain?³ But what is in a word, apart from the idea it conveys, that can imbue it with conviction and firmness?

These questions call for urgent consideration at a time when the concept of “word” is in a profound crisis. According to Emmanuel Levinas, this crisis reflects the disintegration that threatens our society: “the wreckage preceding the catastrophe itself, like rats abandoning the ship before the shipwreck, comes to us in the already ‘in-significant’ signs of a language in dissemination.”⁴

At the same time, here we enter into a contemporary debate—perhaps not unconnected to this crisis of the word—on the value of the *divine* word of which religions speak. In today’s interreligious dialogue—so crucial for our public coexistence—it is essential that we keep religion united with “logos” (which in Greek means both “word” and “reason”). Can the human words of Jesus—his *logoi*—provide a starting point for a better understanding of the place of the divine Logos in the totality of the Christian faith?⁵

All of this confirms the importance of studying the mystery that Justin perceived in the words of Jesus. Can the preaching of Christ enable us to apprehend the value of the word, both human and divine?

1. Word and event

Let us start by asking what constitutes the heart of Christ’s preaching. The answer is not difficult: Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God. But what is this kingdom about? Biblical scholars agree that

³This is a common idea in the Fathers. Cf. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 47, 5 (ed. Kannengiesser, Sources Chrétiennes 199, 438–440).

⁴Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 59. Translation slightly altered.

⁵The relationship between religion and reason is one of the subjects that Pope Benedict proposed as urgent for the dialogue between religions and contemporary culture. It made up the core of his magisterial lecture at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006.

we are faced here with a very broad concept that cannot be encapsulated within a single definition.

We can, however, locate it within some basic coordinates. In the first place the kingdom signifies the concrete lordship of God on earth: “God reigns” and in this way he brings the justice and peace that mankind longs for. This presence finds its expression in the familiar form Jesus uses to speak to his Father: “Abba.” The kingdom is then God’s coming near to save man by receiving him as his son. Secondly, the kingdom appears as an approaching reality that irrupts among men with the coming of Jesus. Now the course of each existence, and of the whole of history, finds itself before the crucial decision regarding its final goal. Scholars speak in this regard of the eschatological nature of the kingdom.⁶

Precisely because the kingdom comes in the midst of history, a question becomes crucial for understanding its meaning: what is the connection between Jesus’ preaching and the events that surrounded it, between his message and his deeds?

The question was a topic of debate in the Protestant theology of the last century. Bultmann’s thinking exercised a particular influence here: according to the German exegete the actions of Jesus, and more concretely all of his miracles, have nothing to say as such to modern man. How is it possible, then, for a Christian to go on reading about them and profiting from them? Bultmann argues that this is only possible if he learns to demythologize them, distilling from the facts narrated by the gospels the precious liquor of the kerygma: in every story there is a call to conversion, to a change of life here and now. Whether the miracles actually happened—the restored sight of the blind, the leaps of the cripple—is dismissed as a minor matter. To interpret the miracle means to understand the message of salvation that runs under its surface like a stream of living water. On Bultmann’s reading, all that matters about Jesus is basically his word and his message, and everything is concentrated in his preaching as recorded later in the apostolic writings. Bultmann’s position paved the way for a reduction of the word to the idea, of Jesus’ preaching to its content. Bultmann’s disciples—even where they broaden his perspective—continue to move within this narrow framework.

⁶Cf. Walter Kasper, *Jesus, the Christ* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1977), 72–88; James D. G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making*, vol. 1: *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 383–487.

Opposition, however, was not slow to emerge within the Protestant camp itself. It was orchestrated in part by Wolfhart Pannenberg.⁷ Pannenberg noted a paradox in the theory put forth by Bultmann, who tried to demythologize concepts that are said to be alien to modern man, for example, Christ as the “Son of God,” in order to make them more comprehensible. But a crucial term was left unexplained. What in fact is the “Word of God”? What does modern man think when he hears this expression? Does it strike him as any less “mythical,” any less in need of explanation, than the expression “Son of God”? Paradoxically, for Bultmann the “Word of God” ends up as a reality that is itself alien to the world, just as the myths that he criticizes. In fact, this word can only be heard as an inner voice that is directed at the subjectivity of each individual person. We are free to accept it, but the decision will always be a leap in the dark, impossible to justify to others or in the public square.⁸

According to Pannenberg, to speak of the “Word of God” can itself be ambiguous. We must begin instead by determining the biblical concept of revelation and go on from there to explain in what sense we are speaking of a divine Word. The crucial datum of Scripture is in fact that revelation has to be understood as history—God speaks through his saving action in the world. It is on the basis of this assumption that the meaning of the Word of God must be determined. The first consequence of this is that the divine Word does not speak solely in the existential silence of our consciousness. On the contrary, God speaks through the events of the world and his revelation is accessible to every person who has eyes to see.

⁷Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed. *Revelation as History* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 123–158; “Language as Medium of the Spirit,” in *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 339–396; cf. also *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 230–258. Pannenberg’s reflections on language have been an inspiration for many of the points developed in this paper.

⁸Cf. Paul Ricoeur, “Preface to Bultmann,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980): “The *sacrificium intellectus* we refused to employ for myth is now employed for faith. Moreover, kerygma can no longer be the origin of demythologization if it does not initiate thought, if it develops no understanding of faith. How could it do so if it were not both event and meaning together and therefore ‘objective’ in another acceptance of the word than the one eliminated with mythological representations?”

This connection between word and history appears in a special way in Jesus' preaching. In fact, in his words Jesus declares that he brings history to fulfillment. His word, then, demands to be heard in the context of the history of which he speaks and in which his message is verified. Only the Resurrection, as an act in which the Father confirms the Son's claims made during his earthly life, can definitively confirm Jesus' message. History confirms the word and the word discloses the meaning of history. The credibility of the Christian message arises from this harmony.⁹

This relationship between word and event has great significance for a theology of the mysteries of Jesus. Indeed, "mystery" refers to the manifestation in history of the divine plan for humanity. Can the preaching of Jesus be considered a mystery, then? If his words express only eternal ideas that have no necessary relation to the time in which he lived, we would have to reply in the negative. How could that sort of word ever be measured against the slow development of man's path in time? If, on the contrary, Jesus' words are intrinsically connected to history, then it seems that we may rightly accord the preaching of the kingdom of God the status of "mystery."

At this point, we need to take a step forward. To grasp this connection between word and history in its entirety it is not enough to say, as we have, that Jesus' words refer to history. *What we want to show in the following is that the intertwining of word and event is intrinsic to the preaching of Jesus; that his words are in themselves events.* Indeed, in addition to the idea it conveys, there is in every word—in its concrete sound, in the accompanying facial expression, in the time it takes to speak it and in the rhythm of speech—an event that takes place in history, that is inseparable from history. Can we not look for the relationship between word and event in the actual utterance of the word of Jesus, that is, in the very form taken by the Master's preaching?

Let us reflect for example on the word "Abba," recognized almost unanimously as characteristic of the message of Jesus, a central element of the preaching of the kingdom. In order to determine its meaning, we cannot forget how it was actually spoken, the context in which St. Mark has preserved it: "And going on a little further he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it was possible, this

⁹Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 253.

hour might pass him by. *Abba, Father, he said . . .*” (Mk 14:35–36). Does this anguish and turmoil not add anything to the message of Jesus? Can we isolate the word “Abba” from the manner in which it was uttered? These questions reveal that when we consider the preaching of the kingdom we cannot dispense with a preliminary question: the question of what a “word” is. We must ask ourselves specifically how the idea conveyed and the material form of its expression determine each other in the word.

Justin Martyr’s statement, cited above, that the power of God is in Jesus’ words, does seem to refer to the manner in which Jesus’ words were uttered.¹⁰ St. Irenaeus, who has the same theological perspective as Justin, helps us to see how this is so. The Bishop of Lyons formulated what would become a classic central principle of Christology: the Logos “did . . . become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.” But what is the context in which this principle appears? The saint applied these words directly to the preaching of Christ: “For in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless our Master existing as the Logos (Word), had become man. For no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except his own proper Logos (Word). . . . Again, we could have learned in no other way than by seeing our Teacher, and hearing his voice with our own ears.”¹¹

Irenaeus postulates that it was necessary for Jesus to preach the word in sounds that could be heard and with the accompaniment of visible gestures. This theology can be better appreciated by way of a comparison with gnostic ideas. The gnostic heretics believed in secret communications that were spoken from a deep, secret origin and were understood in no less of a secret manner by the disciples. According to the gnostics, the Lord’s message was fit only for reception by spiritual persons, and was to be transmitted in secrecy from heart to heart. Against the gnostics, Irenaeus points out the

¹⁰If I may be permitted to refer here to my own work on Justin: *Los misterios de la vida de Cristo en Justino Mártir* (Analecta Gregoriana, 296) (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2005), 294–297.

¹¹The text continues: “that, having become imitators of His works as well as doers of His words, we may have communion with Him, receiving increase from the perfect One, and from Him who is prior to all creation. We—who were but lately created by the only best and good Being, by Him also who has the gift of immortality, having been formed after his likeness” (cf. *Adv. Haer.* V, 1, 1 in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 526).

necessity for sense-mediated perception of the spoken word. This is because the way in which the words are lived in the body before being pronounced forms part of the message itself; it is this that gives the message a power of conviction that can persuade the simplest of persons.¹²

What conception of the word and of language lies behind this understanding? Irenaeus does not give us an answer, but his work can serve as an inspiration for our own.¹³ Taking our cue from what we have said with respect to Jesus' preaching, we will begin by reflecting on the question of the essence of the human word (section 2). The relationship between word and event cannot be exclusively a characteristic of Jesus' word; otherwise it would remain alien to all other human words. A study of Jesus' words can, in turn, shed light on how to understand human language itself (section 3).

2. *Toward the original word*

In an attempt to recover the original value of the word, which has been so concealed by the automatism of modern life, Romano Guardini compared our use of language to that of Adam in paradise. He argued that the first man was capable of naming the animals because when he looked at them he was able to perceive their inner essence. Something within Adam resonated at the sight of each creature, and from this consonance between the nature of things and the inner being of man, there emerged the word. The name was in fact the human soul's response to the soul of each creature.¹⁴

¹²Cf. Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo*, vol. 4: *Traducción y comentario del libro IV del "Adversus haereses"* (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Serie Maior, 53) (Madrid, 1996), 52–53.

¹³See, however, the book by Manuel Aróztegi, *La amistad del Verbo con Abraham según San Ireneo de Lyon* (Analecta Gregoriana, 294) (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2004). From what is said there about the concept of faith in Irenaeus (69–134), we can deduce how the saint understood the words of Jesus.

¹⁴Cf. Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (Pio Decimo Press, 1956): "With the loss of the true name, was broken that vital union between the two parts of creation, the human and the non-human, which in God's intention were to be indissolubly joined in the bonds of peace. Only some fragmentary image, some obscure, confused echo, still reaches us; and if on occasion we do hear a word that is really

This point of view seems difficult to justify now. We tend to assume that words are products of the arbitrary decisions of man, so that it is we who confer meaning on a universe that is, in reality, empty of any preexistent meaning. There is for us an unbridgeable abyss between the events of the natural world and the words we use to name them. What might be a possible way to connect these two extremes?

One concrete starting point for a reply is suggested by the relation between music and word. This is not an arbitrary choice: on the one hand, music is already a language, a tool of communication;¹⁵ on the other hand, what is communicated by music can never be separated from the concrete performance of each piece with the accompanying tones and sounds that connect it to the sphere of nature.

There are those, in fact, who have identified music with the primordial language, with the original word that is now hidden from our view by routine. Richard Wagner wrote a study on Beethoven in which he set out to demonstrate that every language must at bottom be reducible to music. Here Wagner was following the philosophy of Schopenhauer, for whom music alone, the supreme art, was capable of communicating the truly human. For in music we do not find the division between subject and object that is proper to visual perception and that has been the source of so many headaches in western philosophy. A person listening to a symphony enters into immediate contact with music; he is immersed in music from the beginning, without any need to cross a bridge to connect him with reality.

But in what does this reality consist? According to Schopenhauer, the quintessence of life, which is hidden from the eyes of the majority, is the vital “will” that moves everything and by which we enter into contact through feeling. The real tragedy of humanity is that, seduced by our experience of light (the visual experience that separates the subject from the object), we have rationalized our existence and forgotten the real forces that move the world. The artifice of words has been superimposed on the real language of life,

a name, we stop short and try but cannot quite catch its import, and are left puzzled and troubled with the painful sensation that paradise is lost.”

¹⁵On the relationship between emotion and music, cf. Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 254–265.

which is the language of music. Only the musical experience can awaken us from this delusion and put us in direct sympathy with the primitive vital forces.

The musician turns out to be, then, the real redeemer of man, the one who makes his own experience of spiritual renovation possible for others. The key is to lose oneself in music. From this point of view, the word becomes superfluous, and is overwhelmed by the energy of the musical. Wagner concludes from this that it is necessary to rethink the way our society educates: the emphasis should be put on music and its power to awaken us to the truth of things.¹⁶

In the same Vienna where Wagner was so influential, the philosopher Ferdinand Ebner offered a response to this romantic project. According to Ebner, Wagner was wrong; the real state of things is exactly the opposite. Music is like a dream, like the reveries we so often fall into during the day. Music represents a stage of solipsism that is opposed to real human life, which is constituted by the encounter with the other.

Ebner does not deny music's role: for him musical experience is a cry for help resounding from man's solitude. But music is in any case only an initial stage of development that he is called to overcome. This means, of course, that salvation does not come through music. The redeemer is not the musician but the friend who pronounces the word and in this way shatters the isolation in which man is trapped.¹⁷ Ebner goes on to develop a philosophy of the word based on dialogue, which frees man from the subjective weight of his feelings.

Ebner's reaction is justified, as we will see later. There is, however, a grain of truth in Wagner's argument: music, as a language closely connected to the world of emotions, reveals to us an important dimension of human experience. How can we defend the essential newness brought about by the word without severing it from the emotions to which music testifies?

It would be no use to mount a critique of Wagner's argument in terms of the superiority of the word over music. Doing so would cut off our access to any kind of continuity. Our starting point should be instead an analysis of the affective world to which music refers. We will ask whether our emotions are capable of being

¹⁶Cf. Allan S. Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna Revisited* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 86–89.

¹⁷Cf. *ibid.*, 99–101.

the bearers of an initial meaning, and whether this can serve as support for the birth of language.

At this point we can turn to the conclusions reached by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which he stresses the closeness between bodiliness and language.¹⁸ In doing so, he tries to avoid two opposite ways of interpreting the word. The first, intellectualism, sees the word as a cloak assumed by a concept to make itself communicable; this means that syllables, sounds, and written signs are only expressions of an already completed thought. At the opposite extreme, empiricism interprets the word as a conjunction of images and an association of phonemes: the underlying idea is reduced to a particular combination of material elements.

According to Merleau-Ponty, these two positions, although seemingly opposed, actually agree in depriving the word of its proper contribution. Both fail to see that it is precisely by being a form of corporal expression, uttered in space and time, that the word carries a newness of meaning and goes beyond the realm of matter.

The French philosopher does in fact avail himself of the example of music in order to express this relationship. He says that music provides us with an example of language that never departs from its material components of sounds and time. The only way to call to mind what the Ninth Symphony conveys to us is to hear it again; there is no message of music that can be spoken without music. In music we have the expression of a meaning that is inseparable from its concrete corporality, from the sounds and the time in which they are transmitted.

Merleau-Ponty then maintains that in its origin, every word is music and preserves in itself the same corporal substratum on which music is based. Words are different ways of singing the world, forms by means of which the body sings the praises of the universe.¹⁹

¹⁸Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 202–232.

¹⁹“If we consider only the conceptual and delimiting meaning of words, it is true that the verbal form—with the exception of endings—appears arbitrary. But it would no longer appear so if we took into account the emotional content of the word, which we have called above its ‘gestural’ sense, which is all-important in poetry, for example. It would then be found that the words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of ‘singing’ the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naïve onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional

His analysis allows us to confirm that just as music is based on the primordial language of the affections, the word, too, emerges from the soil of affectivity.

From this point of view we can attempt to explain the relationship between affectivity and language. Thanks to affectivity the person is offered an immediate contact with the world, a unity that precedes the separation between subject and object. This means that from the point of view of affectivity, self-perception and perception of the world always go together: man does not perceive himself as an isolated being, but, from the very outset of his experience, as someone open to and molded by the encounter with reality. It is this fact that made the experience of music so fascinating for Schopenhauer and Wagner.

But we cannot stop at this point. We need to add that this unity between the individual and the world is not a static one: the emotions set up a movement in which the person, touched by the exterior world, is called to transcend himself in order to seek out goals beyond his frontiers. A consequence is that the emotions transform the way we experience time: now we can differentiate between the past of our initial encounter and the future of an additional fulfillment. We could also say that time receives meaning, inasmuch as there is a coherent thread that unites the whole movement of affectivity.²⁰ This is precisely the meaning revealed by music. Music, then, is not the experience of fulfillment as Wagner thought: the mission of music is rather to awaken in us the desire for transcendence.

From this point we can understand the novelty brought about by the word. It is connected with the fact that the horizon revealed in our emotions opens up before us an unlimited path of transcendence. Unlike animals, man looks for the ultimate meaning of his existence, for an explanation of the whole of reality, in his encounter with the world. The birth of language can be seen then

essence" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 217). "The predominance of vowels in one language, or of consonants in another, and constructional and syntactical systems, do not represent so many arbitrary conventions for the expression of one and the same idea, but several ways for the human body to sing the world's praises and in the last resort to live it. Hence the full meaning of a language is never translatable into another. We may speak several languages, but one of them always remains the one in which we live" (218).

²⁰Cf. Hans Jonas, "To Move and to Feel: On the Animal Soul," in *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, Ill., 2001), 99–107.

as a moment of maturation in this encounter between man and the world, when the absolute character of this transcendence is properly grasped. This is connected with the symbolic character of the word, which pronounces what is not immediately present to our perception, and so offers a broader frame of reference to our emotions. We might say that the utterance of the word assumes in itself the movement of affectivity and gives it a new horizon, in an attempt to pronounce the absolute beginning and the absolute end of existence. In this sense, Pannenberg has argued that the birth of language is related to the experience of the religious.²¹

What is important to highlight at this point is that the transcendence of the word is in continuity with the movement of our emotions; it is based on this movement, which is the movement of affective love. At this point it is interesting briefly to consider Emmanuel Levinas' reflections on language.²² Levinas accepts Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the corporal character of language, rooted in our bodily perception of the world. But he wishes to determine the newness brought about by language with respect to perception. His response is that the word's meaning is originally given in the concrete encounter with the face of the Other. "The Other" here indicates the neighbor precisely inasmuch as the absolute foundation of existence (connected with the religious experience) is revealed in him. Language is thus, from its origin, the response to a call. The primordial word is then a word of dialogue. This is the form that the transcendence proper to the word takes. It does not consist in leaving the realm of emotions, but rather in arriving at their deepest truth. The first movement of love revealed in the emotions is able to go beyond itself only by affirming the other in his absolute dignity. Language witnesses to the fact that the initial movement of love is called to go beyond itself in the total acceptance of our neighbor in personal love. In this sense Ebner was right: only the word pronounced by a friend is able to rouse us from our solipsism by helping us to experience the real horizon of transcendence to which we are called.

²¹Cf. Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 361.

²²Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 201–219. Our presentation in this paper is different from Levinas' inasmuch as we try to underscore the continuity between the emotions and the word.

What we have said allows us to turn now to Christian revelation. Here a new word comes from this horizon of transcendence, toward which our emotions point and which human language attempts to pronounce.

3. The mystery of Jesus' word

Our guiding principle has been the desire to discover what mystery the words of Jesus conceal. Does it consist primarily in the coherence of his reasoning? In fact, we have located the crucially new element elsewhere—in the connection between the content of Jesus' words and the concrete form in which they were uttered. Does this mean then that the word of Jesus was different from other human words? Or could it be the case instead that this word might actually cast light on the phenomenon of language in general?

It was this second possibility that inspired us to look at “the word” as studied by contemporary philosophy, giving explicit consideration to the relationship between the word as idea and the word as corporal expression. We concluded that the basis of the word is the affective world of the person. While the affect moves in time between the attraction provoked by the loved object and the desire to unite with it, the word gives this same movement a greater amplitude by revealing its transcendent goal in the face of the Other.

Philosophical analysis has served then to remove the obstacles that from the start prevent any consideration of the word as mystery, that is to say, as revelation of the divine within the historical structure of human events. If every human word attempts to pronounce the meaning of the whole of our existence, we can now investigate the mystery of the words of Jesus, not in opposition to but in consonance with our human words: his words will be the fulfillment of our words, while at the same time they transcend and judge our language.²³ In order to understand the word of the New Testament (3.2), it is necessary to listen to that of the Old (3.1).

²³For the use of these categories of continuity, newness, and judgment in order to explain the relationship between Christology and anthropology, cf. the International Theological Commission, “Theology, Christology, Anthropology,” in *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969–1985*, ed. Michael Sharkey (San Francisco, 1989), 207–223.

3.1 *Word and pathos in the Old Testament*

“God said, ‘let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gn 1:3). In the opening pages of the Bible we encounter the story of creation by the word. Various other peoples developed similar narratives in which the divine word appeared as the foundation of reality.²⁴ The fact that God creates something simply by naming it, is interpreted as his immediate presence in the world of men. Each event is then a divine prodigy, each dawn a new miracle, and each storm the ratification of a threat.

In Scripture, too, God creates by the word, thus establishing the order of reality. What newness, then, does the biblical vision bring with respect to primitive myth? To answer this question, we recall that the story of creation is understood in light of the establishment of the covenant. As the first man is called to remember the creative word that gradually separates him from the rest of nature and establishes him in the image and likeness of his Maker, so Israel will always remember the actions of God, which separate her from the other peoples. As the Lord entrusted the Law to Israel so that through obedience she would reach the promised land, so he gives a commandment to the first man (cf. Gn 3:16–17), that he may attain life forever under the blessing of God.

We have here the typical form of the divine word in Scripture.²⁵ This word is present to the world, as it was in the mythical conception of the primitive peoples. But, contrary to the word of myth, this word does not impose itself upon man and the world, but rather opens a space for man to answer. The form in which both words, the divine and the human, are articulated is the time of the covenant, understood as the time of God’s love for his People. God’s love is close to man both as the foundation of his existence and as the goal toward which man’s life is directed. The divine word remains present as the remembered origin and the future promise that structure man’s history. Yahweh is not encountered face to face, but he is known to be present as much because he has passed by (and remains in the living memory of Israel)

²⁴Cf. Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 372–375.

²⁵Cf. Paul Beauchamp, *L’uno e l’altro testamento. Compiere le Scritture* (Milan: Glossa, 2001), 131–132.

as because he will return (and remains in the form of expectation and promise.)²⁶

The Word of God, then, does not annihilate the word of man, as Adam's task of naming the animals makes clear. This relationship between divine word and human words continues throughout the history of Israel. Those who lived the closest to the divine word—the just and the prophets of the Old Testament—are the privileged place of this manifestation. A prophet utters a divine oracle and the two words, the word of God and the word of man, draw closer again. What about the risk that the human voice, overwhelmed by the divine, might cease to be heard altogether?

Let us consider the concrete example of Jeremiah.²⁷ His mission does not simply involve transmitting a message from the divinity; he is called instead to put his whole person at the disposal of the task that has been entrusted to him. This consists in making present the way in which God is affected by the sin of his people.²⁸ The anger and the pain of the prophet, his anxiety and his joy, his lamentation and his enforced dumbness are the only form in which the divine oracle can be communicated.

We could sum up his mission by saying that the prophet conveys the divine *pathos*, if by *pathos* we understand the capacity shown by the God of the Bible to react to human history, to be affected by human sin, and to rejoice when Israel, having repented, returns to the bosom of the covenant.²⁹ God speaks to us because our

²⁶Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 105: “the three dimensions of time are linked: obedience to the will of God is referred to a Word that has been uttered, which is now a datum of history and has to be realized anew in obedience. By this obedience, which makes part of God's justice present in time, we go forward into a future in which God will gather together all the fragments of time and incorporate them as a totality into his justice.”

²⁷Cf. Ulrich Mauser, *Gottesbild und Menschwerdung* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, vol. 43) (Tübingen, 1971), 102–113.

²⁸“Die Klagen Jahwes sind also ihrer Intention nach nicht epische Gedichte, in denen ein vom Leid gepackter Dichter die Bedrängnis seiner Seele in Gestalt von Gottes Leid ausspricht, sondern Verkündigung, die sich an die Öffentlichkeit wendet. Jerusalem muss vom Schmerz Gottes unterrichtet werden. Denn Jahwes Leid ist keine Privatsache Gottes, vielmehr die in Gott durch die Untreue seiner Menschen hervorgerufene Bewegung, über die das Volk erschrecken soll” (ibid., 103).

²⁹This is the sense in which the term is used by Abraham J. Heschel: “Pathos in all its forms reveals the extreme pertinence of man to God, His world-directness,

story interests him, because our disdain angers him, and because our attentiveness moves him. His *pathos* is his decision to adapt to the rhythm of the covenant.

What happens to Jeremiah is that he shares in the divine *pathos*.³⁰ This is his vocation: it is given to him to experience the way in which the behavior of Israel affects God, so that he will be capable of making it visible to the People. We can now understand how the prophet utters the word of God. The word of Jeremiah is born from his *pathos*, from his experience of pain and gladness, of anxiety, fear, and hope. Because the actual *pathos* of God is present in the prophet's life, the word of the prophet is a divine word.³¹ Far from coming down directly from heaven, then, this word of God has to go through the existence of Jeremiah: it is born from the love that unites the prophet with his God and his people.

The terrain of encounter between God and man is thus not the world of ideas. If it were, the human idea would pale before the divine, as the brightness of a star is overwhelmed by the light of the sun. Union with God takes place in the prophet not directly in his understanding but first in his *pathos*, in his affectivity: his reactions to the covenant take the same form as those of God. What makes this terrain of affectivity so eminently suitable for a union with the divine that the human does not disappear within it?

What is characteristic of this union is that in it we encounter the same temporal mediation that allowed the word of God to make itself present to man from the beginning. Here we see the significance of what we said earlier about the temporal dynamism of the emotions, which begins by being affected by the Other and continues as an impulse towards transcendence, thus furnishing the measure and the rhythm of human time. Prophetic *pathos* is the place in which the presence of God can be experienced as origin of life and promise of fulfillment, in the form in which God desires to draw near to man in the covenant, while at the same time respecting man's own integrity.

attentiveness, and concern. God 'looks at' the world and is affected by what happens in it; man is the object of His care and judgment" (*The Prophets* [New York: Harper Perennial, 1962], 618).

³⁰“Jahwe und sein Prophet, vom selben Zorn beseelt, mit demselben Spott gehöhnt, sind beide in der Situation der Entfremdung von einem Volk, das das Gericht verlacht” (Mauser, *Gottesbild*, 108).

³¹This *pathos* can also be called *nah*, spirit: cf. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 332, 403.

This unity of *pathos* allows us to explain the birth of the word. The inner emotion of the prophet is not enough for his mission, nor does it suffice to externalize it in shouts of pain or joy. What then is the role of the word? The word is indispensable if the temporal rhythm of emotion is to find its wider horizon in the complete history of the covenant.

In Jeremiah's case, it is only the word that allows him to measure the time of patience. In fact, the prophet's oracle is not fulfilled; his enemies seem to triumph while God appears to be silent. There is a hiatus between the present, in which Jeremiah is persecuted and suffers calumny and insult, the past, in which God revealed himself as Creator and Redeemer, and the future, in which judgment will come to fulfillment. This time can only be measured thanks to the word that reminds the prophet of the covenant and gives him hope for what is to come. Jeremiah thus has a guide in the hours of solitude and anguish. The word helps him to situate his emotions between the past and the future, making concrete what these mean within the global horizon of the loving revelation of God; it furnishes guidance and meaning to his feelings in the midst of tribulation. Through this conjunction of word and *pathos*, the prophet is the man who knows what time it is, because he lives that time as divine presence and action. The word of the prophet thus locates the concrete events of his life and of the life of Israel in the broader context of the covenant with God.

Hence we may conclude that prophetism signifies a new step in the revelation of the Word of God, which begins in creation and continues with the election of Israel. The same structure may be observed throughout: God is always present in the form of memory and promise and, therefore, in the form of a love that is offered to man and allows human response and participation. The novelty of the prophet is that the terrain of encounter is the prophet himself and, more concretely, his affectivity. A word matures from this point on, a word of orientation for the People on her way toward God. Taking our cue from the experience of the prophets, we can now move on to consider the preaching of Jesus.

3.2 *On Jesus' emotions*

"You have heard that it has been said . . . but I say to you . . ." (Mt 5:21). The preaching of Jesus brings to fulfillment all that

God has revealed in the Old Testament. The question we now want to raise is whether the way in which Jesus preached, the rhythm of his words and their different emphases at various points of his life, are not also a form in which the Scripture is brought to fulfillment, signaling the summit of the divine oracle's maturation.

The possibility of studying the connection between the words of Jesus and his life emerges from the very structure of the New Testament. Notice that the Church has not preserved any book composed exclusively of the sayings of Jesus: his words have not reached us in isolation, but are interlinked with the course of his life, the description of his personality, and the way in which he reacted to new encounters. This means we are in a position to follow the path opened up by the Old Testament, which shows us the connection between word and *pathos* in the prophets. Will the *pathos* of Jesus give us the key to understanding the relationship between his word and his work?

a) The gospel writers chose to write about the emotions of Jesus at key moments in their narratives.³² Mark's example is typical.³³ He frequently dwells on the reactions of those who listen to Jesus or witness his actions, but he pays equal attention to the emotions of the Master. Before curing the deaf-mute by saying "Ephphathá," Jesus breathes deeply (Mk 7:34). Inviting the rich young man to abandon his wealth, the Lord can look at him with love (Mk 10:21). In the garden, the "Abba" that synthesizes the preaching of the kingdom is spoken in the throes of sadness and distress (Mk 14:33). The other gospels likewise note the emotions of Christ.³⁴

How are we to interpret the presence of these emotions in the life of the Lord? It is crucial to notice that, in one way or another, many of the emotions of Jesus anticipate the events of his

³²Cf. Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel. Human or Divine?* (Library of New Testament Studies, vol. 284) (New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

³³Cf. Brian J. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel* (Biblical Interpretation Series, vol. 65) (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 248–249. The following passages in Mark speak of the emotions of Jesus: Mk 1:43; 3:5; 8:12; 8:17–21; 9:19; 10:14; 14:33.

³⁴For an analysis of the emotions of Jesus in the synoptics, cf. Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions*, 48–49. Of particular interest is the evocation of the Passion of Jesus in the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 5:1–10).

final hours. They are presentiments during the public life of the Passion that draws near.

The clearest example is in St. John's gospel, which concentrates Jesus' emotions into particular sections of the narrative. This is particularly evident in Jesus' last conversation with the disciples: the Last Supper. The emotions of Jesus strongly convey the love he bears toward his own, and also indicate the closeness of his "hour," toward which he is urged on by the will of the Father (cf. Jn 12:27; 13:21; 15:11; 17:13; 2:17). Chapter 11 of John, as well, also picks up on Jesus' weeping and distress before the resurrection of Lazarus; here again we see an anticipation of the emotions of his decisive hour.³⁵

John, who presents Jesus as King during the Passion, shows the pain of the last moments anticipated in various episodes of the public life of Christ, particularly in his conversations with his disciples and with Lazarus' family. In this way the emotions accomplish a special synthesis between the word of Jesus and his Passion and death. The emotion with which Jesus uttered his words is conveyed in order to emphasize the fact that his preaching is not situated in a vacuum, but is rather part of a story that unfolds on the way to his last hour, where his capacity for *pathos* is made most manifest. Word and event thus appear to be united in the actual preaching of Jesus, and the emotions are the key element of their articulation.³⁶

It has been said that the most characteristic element of the Passion narratives is that they are at once preaching and narrative: a message is made into a story and a story turned into a message.³⁷ We may add that this also applies to the public preaching of Jesus, and precisely with respect to his emotions, which anticipate his final

³⁵Cf. Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions*, 82.

³⁶What we have said could be affirmed equally as well of the synoptic writers, who link the emotions of Jesus with his works; cf. Voorwinde's conclusion: "In the Synoptics there is therefore a high correlation between Jesus' emotions and his miracles and passion" (*Jesus' Emotions*, 49).

³⁷Cf. Paul Ricoeur: "Il me semble en effet que le trait le plus frappant du récit évangélique consiste dans l'union indissociable du kérygmatisé et du narratif; mais il ne suffit pas de l'affirmer, il faut encore montrer par quel procédé littéraire est obtenue la forme du récit évangélique, à savoir celle d'un récit kérygmatisé ou d'un kérygme narrativisé" ("Le récit interprétatif. Exégèse et théologie dans les récits de la Passion," *Recherches de science religieuse* 73, no. 1 [1985]: 17–38; 19).

hours. The *pathos* of Jesus helps to reveal that his preaching is always embedded in the events of his life.

This gives us a first conclusion: the emotions of Jesus show the connection between his word and his concrete life, particularly the paschal mystery. A study of the relation between word and *pathos* in Jesus' preaching is therefore a first step toward the clarification of the connection between word and event in Christianity.

b) In order to take a closer look at this relation we will refer to a particular text in the gospel of Luke. In it we find Jesus' words at a crucial moment on his way to Jerusalem, when he glimpses the Holy City for the first time: "If you too had only recognized on the day the way to peace! But in fact it is hidden from your eyes! Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all around you . . . they will not leave one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation" (Lk 19:42–44).

These words show that Jesus is aware that he brings messianic fulfillment to his People. Jerusalem could not recognize the divine *kairos*, the moment when God visited it through the coming of the Messiah. Here we can see the eschatological dimension that is characteristic of the preaching of the kingdom, which we touched on briefly above.

What does this eschatological awareness of Jesus actually mean? Some have denied the importance of the concrete situation in which the Lord pronounced the message. According to them, these words should be interpreted as an urgent call to inner conversion, which is necessary and applicable at any point in life. The claim is that divine revelation, eternal as it is, cannot be bound to any particular moment of history.

However, no interpretation of Jesus' eschatological awareness can ignore the emotion with which Christ utters these words: the gospel writer tells us plainly that he was weeping (cf. Lk 19:41). It is essential to take these tears into account, even for the sake of grammatical analysis. Indeed, various exegetes detect a particular stylistic figure here: aposiopesis, which exploits an irregular syntax to make the faltering rhythm of the words express a strong emotion.³⁸

³⁸Cf. Stephen Voorwinde, "Jesus' Tears—Human or Divine?" *Reformed Theological Review* 56 (1997): 68–81; 79–80.

If it is essential to take account of Jesus' weeping in order to make sense of the syntax, *a fortiori* will it be necessary to consider it if we are to discover the content and scope of his message. And indeed Jesus' strong emotion does clarify for us what his words mean. If viewed in isolation from Jesus' concrete emotions, these words could alienate us by the harshness with which they proclaim the implacable judgment of God; however, another interpretation opens up in light of his weeping. Jesus' words are to be read against the background of the prophecies of Israel; Jesus weeps and speaks in the same way that Jeremiah wept and spoke (cf. Jer 8:21–23).³⁹ As the prophet shared in the pain of God at his rejection by the people, so Jesus reveals in his weeping how much the Father is affected by the sight of an impenitent Jerusalem. His pain is born from his union with the Father and with his fellow human beings.⁴⁰

From this point of view, the words of Christ do not appear as a simple condemnation of the people. Even as they express judgment they allow us to see, by way of Jesus' weeping, that God is deeply affected by the rejection he has suffered at the hands of Israel. Spoken in the midst of tears, Jesus' words reveal a wider horizon that will only be displayed later, in the Passion narrative. In the *hour* of Jesus, God himself will take on the sin of the world in order to reconcile man with himself. So it was that the last words of Jesus could be a petition for divine forgiveness: "Father, forgive them: they do not know what they are doing" (cf. Lk 23:34).

Again, we have to conclude that the words of Christ cannot be disconnected from the emotions that accompany them. This helps us to see that the eschatological character of Jesus' message is not reducible to an existential call to immediate conversion, linked only to the subjective time of each person and so independent of the rhythm of our common history. Jesus can truly say that the definitive judgment on Jerusalem is at the gates only because he feels its arrival within himself, and because it will take place in his own suffering flesh.

³⁹Cf. John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary—Luke*, vol. 35c (Dallas: Word, 1993), 930.

⁴⁰Cf. in this regard what Sulpicius Severus writes in his life of Martin of Tours: "Thereupon he broke into tears, for he was a man in whom the compassion of our Lord was continually revealed."

This brings us to an important conclusion about the character of Jesus' preaching. Would it not have been possible for Jesus, as the Logos of God, to have preached the totality of his message from the beginning of his life on earth? This would indeed have been the case if it were a matter solely of communicating a message whose validity was independent of the course of history. But the word of Jesus seeks to be born as a truly human word. And for this word to be true it needs to be consistent with the *pathos* of the one who utters it; it needs to be in union with the truth of his own body and the events of his life.⁴¹ It is not enough then for the word to come down from heaven: it must also be born from the flesh. Hence it cannot be uttered all at once; it cannot dispense with the lapse of time required by the entire life of Jesus. What must happen, as St. Augustine says, is "that the Word of God . . . utters the voice of the flesh."⁴²

From the foregoing we may now conclude: the word of Jesus resounds in the same tones that we heard in the prophetic word. Here the New Testament follows the path opened up by the Old. The word of Jesus is born from his emotions, and these are conceived in union with the same divine *pathos* that is affected by the sin of the people and resolves to save them from their alienation. Because it is a word that is accompanied by tears, the word of Jesus cannot be uttered all at once. The eschatological character of his mission does not consist in an atemporal idea disconnected from the common time of men: it develops first of all in the actual body of Jesus, hence showing that it refers to the shared human history in the flesh.

c) As was the case with the prophets, emotion is not enough on its own to reveal the Father's plan for history. What does the word add to the *pathos* of Jesus? We can find an answer to this question in another text, this time from the gospel of John. The Lord says: "Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (Jn 12:27–28).

⁴¹According to the epistemology sketched out by some second-century Christian authors like St. Justin. Cf. the study by Alberto D'Anna, *Pseudo-Giustino. Sulla Resurrezione. Discorso cristiano del II secolo. Letteratura Cristiana Antica. Testi* (Brescia, 2001), 202: "the human Logos submits to the criterion of knowledge of the truth, which is the manifestation in the body."

⁴²St. Augustine, *Sermo* 185, 1: "Natalis Domini dicitur, quando Dei Sapientia se demonstravit infantem, et Dei Verbum sine verbis vocem carnis emisit."

Again we see how Jesus' words are driven by strong emotion. The distress of his soul can be explained as anguish before the approaching Passion. In this text we find both the coming of the hour, which indicates the definitive (eschatological) character of the mission of Jesus, and the reference to the Father, which is so crucial in all the preaching of the kingdom.

It is from this agitation of Jesus that the word is born. This locates the word, then, in the context of his personal relationship with the Father. This relationship is experienced here as desolation and anguish, as the necessity of accepting a cup of suffering. It is in such strong emotions that these words of Jesus have their origin; the emotions are again the ground from which the words emerge.

But the word in turn will have its own crucial role: it will help to place the emotion within the wider framework of Jesus' mission. "It is for this very reason that I have come." "Glorify your name." These words, which are the resolution of Jesus' struggle, situate his suffering inside the overarching horizon of his life, from his being-sent by the Father to his return to the Father's glory.

Here the word explains the emotion, orients it, gives it a meaning, and so enables it to sink its roots in the memory of the covenant and the promise of its fulfillment. In this way the word—both in its origin and in its endpoint—supports the emotion on the way to its ultimate truth: the love of the Father, in which Jesus anchors himself for the utterance of his definitive "yes." Only when the emotion is converted into word is it capable of turning itself into a definitive promise and thus the giving-over of the entire being.

The text of John's gospel gives testimony to the process by which the Word is incarnated in that concrete moment in the life of Jesus. There is a call to union with the Father through the acceptance of the Cross, which brings Jesus to a state of profound anguish. The word of decision springs from this internal struggle: "It is for this very reason that I have come, glorify your name." The eternal Word (that of the dialogue between the Father and the Son), passing through the emotions of the flesh, has given birth to a word that is fully human. This word lets us hear the meaning of Jesus' mission, from his being-sent by the Father (for this I came) to the return to Him (glorify your name). We are present at the process by which, after the Word has been made flesh, the flesh is gradually becoming Word.

Now we may conclude: born of his emotions, Jesus' words preserve the temporal structure that is proper to them. At the same time, his words allow the emotions to move forward toward their final goal, by placing them in the broad framework of the covenant between God and humanity. If every human word illuminates the affects by establishing them within the context of personal love, the word of Jesus acquires a singular fullness here. From the *pathos* that unites Jesus with his Father, a word is born that is capable of explaining, not only the course of his human life, but the total meaning of the divine plan for history.

d) Let us now examine this exceptional claim of Jesus more closely. We have established that his emotions are the substratum on the basis of which he utters, not only a word granting meaning to a particular human life, but the definitive word that explains the whole of history, revealing its origin and total fulfillment.

The prophets' capacity to reveal the divine design was based on a special closeness to God's *pathos*. Their word was supported by it as a building by its foundations. What is the case then with Jesus, who claims to reveal God's plan for the whole of history? The identification between the *pathos* of God and the *pathos* of Jesus attains a totally new intensity here, since the word built upon it aims to give the definitive interpretation of all of history. The *pathos* of Jesus reveals the love of God for his people—the way their sins affect him, the way their conversion causes him to rejoice—to an unsurpassable degree. This is possible only because Jesus shares the very life of God in his flesh.

This interpretation of Jesus' emotions leads us to a deeper understanding of his body. The human body reveals—in the dynamism of the emotions—a primordial meaning: it points to a first origin and goes beyond itself to a transcendent fulfillment. In the case of Jesus, this original reference of the human body allows the revelation of the entire divine plan for the world.

The New Testament attests to this meaning of Christ's body. Consider, for example, the following sentence that the letter to the Hebrews ascribes to Jesus, his first words upon entering into the world: "Sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. . . . Here I am, I am coming . . . to do your will, God" (Heb 10:5–7). In place of the sacrifices of the Old Law, God takes pleasure in the obedience of the Son. Why is the preparation of a body mentioned here? It places emphasis on the fact that the body comes from God and that it has been modeled by the Creator

down through all the generations of Israel's history. In this way the body of Jesus refers to the origin, to the Father from whom Jesus comes. Therefore this primordial meaning of the body offers the first possibility that the words of Jesus may reveal the total meaning of history, that is to say, that they refer totally to the Father. The body of Jesus becomes the foundation on the basis of which the Son, by his obedience, will reveal the Father as the origin of everything.

Another fundamental text that clarifies the relationship between body and word is that of the institution of the Eucharist: "This is my body, given for you" (Lk 22:19). These words have to be understood in terms of the connection that we are outlining here between body and affectivity. The gift of the body refers in the first place to the concrete suffering that begins with the agony in the Garden. This means that Jesus' decision to give his life for men is built upon the primordial meaning of his corporal affectivity. This is possible because human destiny is inscribed, in an embryonic fashion, within the body. It is here that we find the initial steps of the path that leads beyond ourselves in the self-gift of love. St. Augustine compared the affects to feet by means of which we draw near to God, inasmuch as they make man come out of himself in pursuit of the loved object.⁴³ The words of Jesus can reveal the ultimate meaning of history only because they are built upon this first transcendence of the body. The utterance of the word reveals then the wider context wherein the suffering of Jesus acquires meaning.

The words of the institution of the Eucharist also stress the fact that Jesus' words bear a judgment with respect to every human word. There is no unbroken continuity from the word of man to the revealed fullness in Jesus; the path passes through the region of suffering unto death. Justin Martyr, commenting on the Passion of the Savior, says that at this moment the fountain of his powerful word dried up; the one who had never been at a loss for a wise rejoinder to his critics abstained from words at the moment of the final accusation.⁴⁴ The mystery of the preaching of Jesus is

⁴³Cf. St. Augustine, *Enn. in Psal.* 94, 2: "Unus ergo idemque homo corpore stans uno loco, et amando Deum accedit ad Deum, et amando iniquitatem recedit a Deo: nusquam pedes movet, et tamen potest et accedere et recedere. Pedes enim nostri in hoc itinere, affectus nostri sunt. Prout quisque affectum habuerit, prout quisque amorem habuerit, ita accedit vel recedit a Deo."

⁴⁴Cf. *Dialogue with Trypho* 102, 5.

indissolubly linked to the mystery of the silence of his last hours, culminating in his death, the silence of the body.

The silence is not definitive, however, for it will be transformed into the praise Jesus addresses to the Father at the Resurrection. With this, Jesus brings to completion the truth about the human body, the truth that furnishes the primordial meaning on which his words focus. As we have said, this meaning points first to its origin, to God the creator (“a body you prepared for me”); second, it refers to the body’s ultimate vocation, its destiny to be delivered up for men and so to return to the Father (“my body given”). The body’s capacity to utter the word confirms its incipient reference to the Creator and its vocation to final fulfillment in communion with God. The meaning of human language is fully understood solely in the Resurrection, a moment when Jesus reveals the Father as the origin of all things (cf. Acts 13:33, “This day I have begotten you”) and final fulfillment of history. This means that in every word spoken in truth the human body confirms its origin and destiny: every word we utter is a foretaste of the resurrection of the flesh.

3.3 Word and Spirit

We need to consider yet another important dimension of Jesus’ words, the fact that he preached in the Holy Spirit. The baptism in the Jordan, when Christ was anointed with the Spirit, indicates the starting point of his public activity in word and deed. Justin Martyr expressed the Spirit’s presence in Jesus’ words by comparing his preaching to a plentiful fountain, which fills the desert with living water. What does this presence of the Spirit bring to the Master’s preaching?

It may be useful here to consider what Pannenberg wrote regarding the typical human experience of conversation on the basis of Ervin Goffman’s research.⁴⁵ Participants in a conversation, when it proceeds successfully, experience a particular enrichment; they are, in a sense, carried along by the dialogue. We witness then an affective unity between the speakers, which Goffman calls a *trance*,

⁴⁵Cf. Pannenberg, *Anthropologie*, 359–365. For Goffman’s work, see *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* (Somerset, N.J.: Aldine Transaction, 2005).

in which the participants feel transported beyond themselves to discover truths that they could not have found alone. Conversation takes on a life of its own, so to speak, and follows a course that goes beyond the control of the participants; it thus appears as an open reality that engenders a newness of meaning.

Pannenberg notes that Goffman speaks in this regard of a “spirit of conversation,” and he connects this remark with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is indeed the dynamic force that animates the growth of all reality toward God, both respecting the integrity of creation and causing it to grow beyond itself. This openness of the conversation, which is proper to its own nature, allows us to see how the divine word can emerge within human words. The Spirit can act in the conversation in such a way that he respects the integrity of the human words and also pronounces in their midst a word that is divine. The patristic and medieval tradition knew that in dialogue guided by charity God reveals unknown truths both to the disciple and to the master. He who gives gratis what he has received gratis deserves to receive higher gifts.⁴⁶ In conversation, affectivity (the ground from which the word emerges) finds itself in the context of an interpersonal encounter and is open to a newness of meaning: the possibility for divine words to resonate in human hearing. This could be an example of how the divine word is able to be borne by the medium of human words without violating their autonomy. God is able to act within a conversation without imposing himself on those who are conversing because human dialogue is by its very structure open to a higher sphere of meaning.

What Pannenberg says regarding the “spirit of conversation” helps us understand Jesus’ preaching in the Spirit. It is during his conversation with Nicodemus that Jesus refers to the Spirit that “blows where it pleases” (cf. Jn 3:8). If by its very constitution every conversation is open to the divine action, all the more so will this be true of the conversation of Jesus, to whom the Spirit was given without measure (cf. Jn 3:34).

This has to be applied first to the dialogue between Jesus and his Father.⁴⁷ Here the affective world of Jesus becomes the field of the Spirit’s action to become radically structured according to the

⁴⁶Cf., for example, St. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* I, 1.

⁴⁷According to Luke, Jesus received the Spirit when he was praying (cf. Lk 3:21–22).

Son's relationship with the Father. The Spirit of conversation allows this dialogue between Jesus and the Father to advance toward its plenitude in the flesh; from the peaceful nights of prayer in Galilee, to the night of Gethsemane, to the night when the Risen One breaks out in praise to the Father. By bringing about this union with the Father in the flesh, the Spirit allows for the perfect identification of Christ's *pathos* with the divine *pathos* from which the preaching of Christ springs.

The experience of conversation also helps us understand the form in which the word of Jesus is communicated to his disciples and then transmitted to the Church. How can the disciples understand the words of Jesus, constructed as they are on the substratum of his union with the Father? Even while they retain the structure of human words, surely they far exceed them. Are they not then inaccessible?

Precisely this path, then, remains open for the communication of Christ's words to his disciples. The Spirit who acts in conversation is capable of uniting the hearts of the participants so that the word of one is shared by all. The spoken and written word in which the gospel is communicated, says St. Augustine, are the work of the flesh; but they are moved by the Spirit.⁴⁸ From this continuous dialogue in the flesh that the Church maintains with her Lord, the Spirit continues to make new words emerge through history.

John, who presents Jesus' preaching mostly in the form of dialogue, emphasizes this in Jesus' final conversation with his disciples. This is the moment when Jesus' emotions are expressed with the greatest force, the moment when he bestows his legacy upon the disciples and speaks to them of the Spirit who will remind them of everything. If the word of Jesus has been pronounced in the flesh through the slow action of the Spirit in the relationship between Father and Son, it is only possible to arrive at this word by

⁴⁸Cf. St. Augustine, *In Ioannem*, 27, 5: "Nam si caro nihil prodesset, Verbum caro non fieret, ut inhabitaret in nobis. Si per carnem nobis multum profuit Christus, quomodo caro nihil prodest? Sed per carnem Spiritus aliquid pro salute nostra egit. Caro vas fuit; quod habebat attende, non quod erat. Apostoli missi sunt; numquid caro ipsorum nihil nobis profuit? Si caro Apostolorum nobis profuit, caro Domini potuit nihil prodesse? Unde enim ad nos sonus verbi, nisi per vocem carnis? Unde stilus, unde conscriptio? Ista omnia opera carnis sunt, sed agitante spiritu tamquam organum suum. Spiritus ergo est qui vivificat, caro autem non prodest quidquam."

entering into a dialogue based on this affective union. At this point, we may be able better to understand Irenaeus when he insists that Jesus' message can only be accessible to man when it is pronounced with a human voice and heard with human ears.⁴⁹ Only this concrete listening to him makes our heart burn within us, as happened to the disciples at Emmaus (Lk 24:32), and brings us to understand God's plan of love for the world in the Scriptures.

Christian preaching cannot be conceived then as instruction based only on ideas; what is required instead is, as we have described, a union of hearts between the one who preaches and the one who hears the word. This is the way in which the Spirit creates a space to transmit the message of salvation. The liturgy, in which the person participates in body and soul, is revealed as a privileged place of ecclesial dialogue with Jesus, where the conversation of the upper room is continued through the centuries.

3.4 Toward the divine word

What we have said is important for understanding the Christian confession of faith in Jesus as the divine Logos. When St. John identifies Jesus with the Logos, he does not start out from a prior philosophical concept but rather from the actual preaching of Jesus, the *logoi* pronounced by him, which confirm and bring to fulfillment the word of the Old Testament. It is by listening to Jesus' preaching that the evangelist confesses that he is the divine Logos.

This connection is also present in the writings of St. Justin, who is at the origins of Christian theology of the divine Logos. The Martyr confesses Jesus as the Logos in person and offers the power of Christ's preaching as proof. This link between the preaching of Jesus and the divine Logos is essential for a proper understanding of the theology of the Logos, which is, in turn, an essential part of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Today there is a desire to silence the Christian logos; it is accused of enslaving the other words that come from a pluralist society and is requested to renounce its status as the definitive word on history. The affirmation that Christ is the divine Logos is

⁴⁹Cf. our earlier discussion of Irenaeus in part 1, with reference to *Adversus Haereses* V, 1.

understood in terms of power, as an attempt to dominate the other words of men. This is based, however, on a lack of understanding of the crucial fact that the *logoi* of Jesus spring from the flesh and, in doing so, determine our understanding of the divine Logos. Why is this?

According to Justin Martyr the power of Jesus' teaching is evident in the superiority of his words over those of Socrates. Where the great Greek philosopher managed to offer only a few rays of light, the words of Jesus carry conviction. The difference lies not simply in the message communicated, but in the actual form in which it is expressed. This is so because the divine Logos does not appear in Jesus as the communication of a set of ideas, but as a word that springs from the flesh. Jesus' revelation of the Father's plan for the world is rooted precisely in Christ's *pathos*, in the emotions from which it springs.

This means that the utterance of his word is built upon the dynamism toward transcendence proper to human affectivity. Emotions, as we have said above, move us beyond ourselves, helping us understand our life as a way of love. The function of language is precisely to move this dynamism of transcendence forward by giving our emotions a broader horizon of meaning: between the primordial origin from which we come and the ultimate fulfillment toward which we walk. We see then that love and logos are not in opposition. Love is in need of the logos in order to mature, to open the way to real transcendence, to be freed from enslavement to the ups and downs of our emotions. The logos, on its part, is born from within love and is always contained by love.

What is special about the words of Christ is not that the dynamic they follow differs from that of the words of man. If they are different, it is due to the fullness of meaning they convey. What they reveal is not only the limited meaning of a human life, but the whole divine plan for history, from its beginning to its end. Jesus' words, by revealing the Father as origin and fulfillment of history, give a definitive explanation of history in terms of love.

This helps us see the form that the Logos, the divine Word, takes in Christianity. The eternal Logos is consistent with the words (*logoi*) pronounced by Christ. Far from being abstract rationality, this Logos is born in love and serves to express the full realization of love. At the same time, the divine Love is never without the Logos. This Love certainly overcomes mere knowledge and is capable of expressing more than an abstract thought, but at the

same time it is always—as Pope Benedict reminded us in his widely noted lecture at the University of Regensburg—the love of a God who is Logos.⁵⁰

This vision of the word that springs from the flesh is also essential for understanding the Church’s mission in the world. Jesus’ disciples are called to transmit the words of their Master in the form in which they received them from him. Jesus was able to utter the words that give meaning to our existence because he assumed our flesh and blood and shared in our sufferings. In the same way, the Church can hear these words only if she shares the bodily Passion of her Lord; the Spirit who inspires the conversation of the upper room enables the disciples to comprehend what their Master communicates. On the other hand, only by sharing in the suffering of men will the Church in turn be able to transmit the divine words to the world. The word preached by the Church springs also from the flesh. This means that it knows the patience of what must mature from within and does not impose itself from the outside. Charles Péguy sang the greatness of this Christian word, a word that can be transmitted from generation to generation only if it is kept ablaze in our hearts:

Jesus Christ, my child, didn’t give us canned words
 To keep;
 Rather, he gave us living words
 To nourish.
 ...
 As Jesus took, was forced to take a body, to take on flesh,
 In order to pronounce these (carnal) words and to have them be
 understood,
 So he could pronounce them,
 Thus we, similarly we, *in the imitation of Jesus*,
 Thus we, who are flesh, we have to take advantage of this,
 Take advantage of the fact that we are carnal in order to preserve
 them,

⁵⁰Lecture delivered 12 September 2006: “God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf. Certainly, love, as Saint Paul says, ‘transcends’ knowledge and is thereby capable of perceiving more than thought alone (cf. Eph 3:19); nonetheless it continues to be love of the God who is *Logos*. Consequently, Christian worship is, again to quote Paul—“λογικὴ λατρεία,” worship in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason (cf. Rom 12:1).”

in order to warm them up, in order to nourish them in us,
alive and carnal

...
Mystery of mysteries, this privilege that was given to us

...
To keep alive the words of life,
To nourish with our blood, with our flesh, with our heart
The words which, without us, would collapse fleshless.

...
In these carnal hearts, in these precarious hearts, in these vagrant
hearts,
In these hearts that break
A word is preserved, is nourished
Which will never, for all eternity, break.⁵¹

—Translated by Cyprian Blamires.

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⁵¹Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. D. C. Schindler (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 59–62.