

THEOLOGY AS THE LANGUAGE OF THE EIGHTH DAY

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It is with great emotion and sincere joy that I respond to the honour extended to me by the Ecumenical Institute of the Catholic University of Lublin, in inviting me to contribute to the special volume being prepared by friends and colleagues to mark the 70th year of my dear friend Professor Waclaw Hryniewicz OMI. Such participation, I feel, is at any rate an obligation on my part, as it was Professor Hryniewicz who had assumed the *laudatio* with brotherly enthusiasm during the official ceremony at which I was made an honorary doctor of the Catholic University of Lublin.

I had the blessed opportunity to come to know him as a person, as well as his deep theological insight, throughout the years we were privileged to collaborate in the official Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches (1980-2000).

Perhaps never before had so many distinguished theologians and Church officials from both sides co-operated with such a high degree of enthusiasm and sacred zeal. This was before the fall of the so-called Iron Curtain allowed the revival of Uniatism, which led the Dialogue meeting in Baltimore, USA, to a tragic impasse, even though it had been preceded by a praiseworthy 'joint rejection' of Uniatism as a method of re-unification, with mutual trust and braveness, in an official text of the Dialogue (Freising, Munich 1994).

In the anniversary year of 2000, the entire Christian world of east and west was called to joyfully celebrate two whole millennia of the Church's historical presence on the world scene. So it was of course the greatest irony for us all that, at the same time, we were destined to give the most disheartening testimony – following the breakdown of talks in Baltimore – concerning how little the Incarnation of God the Logos had transformed the life of the 'natural person' – even in the Church replete with Pentecost!¹

Yet it may well be that this most humbling experience was also the most beneficial and necessary lesson. Not only in order to realise, but above all in order to confess that, unless our theology, already from this life, is 'the language of the Eighth Day'², it will be unable to reconcile us – whether as individuals or as ecclesiastical entities – either with each other or with God, while ensuring the peace 'which surpasses all understanding' (Phil. 4:7) and which is precisely the *preludium* of the eternal rest of the Eighth Day.

The general overview of the present article therefore arises quite naturally, as I will attempt to present the main co-ordinates of theology. In this context, theology is to be understood not as a theoretical occupation of only a few 'professional specialists', but rather as the collective function *par excellence* of diverse gifts since the foundation of the world.

It is self-evident that, this 'cosmic liturgy'³ which is held together from above 'at various times and in various ways' (Heb. 1:1), is unceasingly led by God Himself who has called all things into being 'out of nothing'. This is also the reason for which the 'grace of theology'⁴ is inexplicably life-giving for those who are near and those who are far, and often regardless of the conventional or canonical limits of the historical Church.

Accordingly, the main co-ordinates of theology shall be presented below in three sections, obviously deriving from and, at the same time, merging in two major conceptual levels as follows: (a) the uncreated and self-revealing God as the 'creative' but also the 'final' cause of theology in the single plan of divine Economy; and (b) the human person created

‘in the image and likeness of God’ as partaker in the communion of ‘deification’ by grace.

God and the human person – the ‘twofold’ subject of theology

Theology is by definition, and should remain, the untainted ‘word of God’⁵, unceasingly affirmed by the infinite uncreated energies of the divine essence, no matter the degree to which these energies radiate throughout the history of the world as tangible forms of created activity. If this is true, then it should be beyond doubt that the articulation of the word of God in any language and time could never be isolated to the point of being regarded as the ‘word of man’.⁶

If and when this might occur, it would be a diabolical fall from revealed truth; that fall should be seen not merely as a form of monophysitic ‘heresy’, but rather as an intolerable apostasy in the form of pure idolatry.⁷

Regardless of what the focal point may be in each historical instance, that is the special content of the word of God, perpetually self-revealed through all things ‘at all times and for all’ for the gradual accomplishment of the ultimate goal of Creation made out of nothing, it is certain that *theandricity* is always the foremost ‘constant’ in the journey of the Church’s theology, both as a given and as an objective. That is to say, it is on the one hand a ‘gift’ from the outset, but also a pious feat of ‘synergy’ for the fulfillment of divine promises on the other.

It may therefore be categorically stated that, from the foundation of the world until the consummation of the age, theology develops in stages – but not uniformly – having as its central axis the mystery of theandricity.

This means that the ‘meandering’ course of the ‘history of salvation’ - precisely because it is a journey of historical relativity, ever driven “through honour and dishonour” (2 Cor. 6:8) – could not possibly continue

as a hopeless game, given the saving 'ballast' of the divine Economy's underlying constant of charismatic theandricity.

The fact that the Apostle Paul described the mentioned mystery as the 'secret kept since the world began' (Rom. 16:25), clearly indicates that no devout and right-thinking person could justifiably restrict 'theandricity' to the framework of God the Word's Economy in the flesh.

A possible 'narrowing' of the spiritual horizon in this way would not simply signify an impoverishment of the love of God; it would at the same time unavoidably lead to major dualist heresies of Manichean nature. The main forms of such latent tendencies include not only the arbitrary fragmentation of created beings – according to the intransigent categories of the 'sacred' and 'profane' – but also the very essence of the uncreated God.

Unless we categorically 'fortify' right from the outset both the non-negotiable integrity of all created things⁸, as well as the unchanging essence of the uncreated God which is totally beyond the realm of this world, then it is certain that the following three divisive and accordingly 'blasphemous' conclusions will be reached in the consciences of the faithful – including those who 'theologise':

- (a) a more or less latent 'demonisation' of a portion of creation, as if this was not created freely by the same God!;
- (b) even between both Testaments of extraordinary divine Revelation, the mere temporal differentiation is perhaps sufficient to reach the point of mutual exclusion. This would tend to unilaterally favour at least the rejection by the Jewish people of the already incarnated Messiah-Christ 'according to the Scriptures'; and
- (c) any departure from the mutual inner connection between the Old and New Testament means not only a division of the single 'word of God', as well as of the one 'people of God'. It also signifies to the same degree a 'conceptual' division in the very essence of God, as if one God 'created' the world and another God 'was incarnate' in order to 'redeem' and 'deify' His creatures (*cf.* Rom. 8:30).

However, let us now turn to theology in its dual hypostasis: on the one hand as a perpetually renewed expression of Faith in love, and on the other, as an unceasing prayer, with all that is understood through Biblical and Patristic definitions of both the terms 'Faith' and 'prayer', especially with regard to their direct and innermost correlation.

Theology as obedience

The multifaceted and continually specialised nature of today's so-called 'academic theology' in various fields and subjects should never overlook or underestimate the deeply 'charismatic' character of theology in and of itself. For this precise reason, the driving force of all theology could not possibly be other than 'Faith', and moreover in the radical form in which it has been defined for all time through the Epistle of Jude as being "once for all entrusted to the saints" (1:3). Similarly, we have the ever-unsurpassed Apostle Paul who, in specifying Faith also according to its 'essence' rather than to its 'form' alone, stated: 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1).

Theology at any rate, as the word that emanates from God, and the unreserved reception of this on the part of fallen man through Faith, is characterised from the outset by humility and obedience⁹. Indeed, Paul goes further by relating 'Faith' to 'obedience' as the unshakeable foundation of authentic theology. The Pauline phrases 'obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5) and 'faith comes from hearing' (Rom. 10:17) have justly been appreciated in terms of their absolutely binding character, even by the most radical Protestant theologians of the 20th century.¹⁰

Arising and functioning in this way, Faith, seen here in terms of the presentation of doctrinal truths, should not be understood merely as a means of informing. More importantly, it aims – above all – at convincing, thereby possibly renewing the listener to the degree at least that it also convinced and renewed the speaker. We could therefore state that the task of theology in general, and doctrinal theology in particular,

is epigrammatically prescribed through the verse of Psalms: 'I believed, therefore I spoke, for I have been greatly afflicted' (Ps. 116:10)

As we can see, therefore, this does not concern a 'presentation of ideas'. Nor is it a 'presentation of past acts'. Rather, it is above all about divine sufferings ('suffering the divine'). This is why the phrase 'I have been greatly afflicted' simultaneously expresses the method of achieving experience (keeping in mind that the prefix of the Greek term for prayer, *προσευχή*, signifies movement), as well as the fruit of that experience, namely the 'good transformation' (*καλήν ἀλλοίωσιν*). A more careful observation, however, would convince us that, if humility born out of affliction is the initial presupposition and *conditio sine qua non* – in order for one to believe and to be enabled to speak, that is to confess – then the qualification 'greatly' here comes as an indication of an advanced stage, and as the first blessed fruit of faith and confession. For this very reason it manifests the good transformation. In this, it is always hoped that, with God's help, divine vision and deification will follow.

But let us return to the two fundamental functions which are presupposed, yet also distinct from one another in the methodic presentation of Faith, having a causal relationship with each other: (a) to believe; and (b) to speak. Both these terms require further clarification in order to fully appreciate the responsibility in God of the theologising Church and the individual faithful.

In the entire process of 'believing', the external influences are of decisive significance, so that the believer does not become caught up in 'old wives' tales' (1 Tim. 4:7) and the general illusions of subjectivism. If Heraclitus, even by way of philosophy, sought a stable foundation not in the individual mind, but in the 'common *logos*', how much more should the faithful who seek to speak of the living God come out of the isolation of luciferian self-sufficiency, dominated, as it is, by the vicious cycle of maintaining 'death' through 'incommunicability', and 'incommunicability' through 'death'?

So when the Apostle Paul, or the New Testament generally, emphasises that 'faith comes through hearing' or speaks about the

‘obedience of faith’, this is in fact to underline the character of Faith as a communion of persons. And when Faith is described in the Epistle of Jude as having been ‘once for all delivered to the saints’, it is apparent that only by communing in trust from generation to generation are all subsequent people enabled to receive the faith unchanged.

Given that ‘believing’ creates a very deep existential solidarity between persons, expressed – as a common heritage – in ‘giving’ and ‘taking’¹¹, then ‘speaking’ and ‘believing’ inevitably follow, such that we do not interrupt even for a moment the flow of life, which always emanates from the word of God, as stated by the Lord who said ‘I have come that they may have life and have it to the full’ (Jn 10:10).

In this relationship nonetheless of ‘believing’ and ‘speaking’, the mentioned ‘flow of life’ moves not only in one direction, that is from Faith to word. It also moves in the opposite direction, from ‘speaking’ to ‘believing’. For Faith, as a deep conviction and assurance which penetrated the conscience of the whole person, allows the tongue to speak accordingly and more extensively concerning all that the conscience has received in mystery and compunction. However, this development through *ex*-pression greatly consolidates and advances the Faith which exists in the depths of one’s conscience both positively and negatively. Positively, as a ‘comprehensive knowledge of the essentials’¹² and, negatively, on account of the even greater awe caused by the mysterious truths of Faith, when one ascertains anew not only their intellectual inconceivability, but also their phrasal ineffability – a barrier which no amount of linguistic dexterity will ever be able to overcome.

Without overlooking, then, the golden rule of the Apostle Paul that ‘we know in part and prophesy in part’ (1 Cor. 19:9), we may well claim that it is not only the above verse of the Psalms which holds true (‘I believe, therefore I spoke’), but equally also the converse, namely that I have spoken, therefore I feel greater compunction! Perhaps in this spirit would the words “I believe, Lord, help my unbelief” (Mk 9:24) have been spoken, as well as Luther’s *simul justus et peccator*. Only through this dual

aspect of ‘theologising’ in an orthodox manner can the classic description of pure Christian theology as ‘apophatic’ be completely justified.

Theology as prayer

If theology, as the articulated word from God and to the glory of God, is an almost unprecedented and bold endeavour of fallen man – even when this theological expression comes as a faithful ‘*con*-fession’ – then it must follow that prayer¹³, as the most direct and ‘ceaseless’ form of communication with the superessential God, is to be considered an even greater privilege, but also the most demanding function of the entire person.

It is highly characteristic that two of the most ancient Neptic Fathers of eastern monasticism are credited with an epigrammatic phrase which places theology and prayer, not merely in direct parallel or a causal relationship, but rather in absolute equivalence: Evagrius of Pontus laconically proclaimed that a ‘theologian is one who truly prays, and the one who truly prays is a theologian’ (PG 79:1180 A-B). The second writer to whom this most spiritual axiom of incomparable neptic insight was also attributed is Nilus the Ascetic.

Yet despite the everlasting validity of the above axiom, we cannot consider it the *exclusive* privilege of monasticism to be in a position to experience this charisma of prayer which is blessed from above. The great ascetics never claimed such a ‘monopoly’ for themselves. On the contrary, through the frugality and precision of the desert, they proclaimed the golden rule of prayer and theology (i.e., doxology) for ‘every person who comes into the world’¹⁴.

We have learnt throughout the ages, from all men and women who led holy lives in the world, that prayer was never ‘safe’ or ‘easy’. And it is not without special significance that even the Apostles themselves felt the need to ask for a ‘helping hand’ from the only Teacher in the difficult undertaking we call prayer: ‘Lord, teach us to pray’ (Luke 11:1).

A better appreciation of the plenitude of prayer as ‘theology’ and the sacredness of ‘theology’ as prayer can be gleaned through the triple exhortation of the Apostle Paul to all faithful: ‘Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks’ (1 Thess. 5:16-18). This categorically shows that only through lasting and steadfast orientation of the faithful towards the *immutable* God, as opposed to the *mutable* world, can rejoicing be ‘always’, and prayer be ‘without ceasing’, and ‘giving thanks’ be possible at all times and under all circumstances.

Having noted the particular loftiness of the substantial relations involved within the mystical content of the gift of prayer given from above, we vitally touch upon the eschatological character (which is to say the atmosphere of the ‘Eighth Day’!) of all prayer and all theology.

In conclusion, we can now state by way of summary that, indeed, unless theology in every age comments directly – that is in accordance with God’s will and with love for the human person – upon the unchanging ‘Word of God’ for the triple purpose of the purification, illumination and deification of all people, then it inevitably degenerates into mere ‘babbling’ (*cf.* Matt. 6:7) and, therefore, an exercise in vanity. For even demons may possess Faith and ‘tremble’ (*cf.* James 2:19), rather than feel gratitude. Likewise, slaves exercise the humility of obedience out of necessity, without meaning that they harvest the fruits of peace. And the sanctification offered by prayer can easily be degraded to the self-love of the Pharisee.

Consequently, only on account of the mentioned co-ordinates can we possibly hope in the mercy of God, foretasting already from this life the blessedness and eternal Sabbath of the Eighth Day.

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NOTES:

- ¹ It is thought that St John the Evangelist, compared with the other authors of the New Testament, and especially the other three (Synoptic) Evangelists, has written the 'spiritual' Gospel, because he placed particular emphasis upon the description of God as Logos before His Incarnation in time (*cf.* the Prologue of that Gospel).

If we also take into consideration that the eschatological vision of Revelation declares the same 'pre-eternal nature' of the divine Logos in the form of the 'Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8), then we can see that John is rightly called 'the disciple of love'. Not because he used the single word of love to describe God ('God is love', 1 Jn 4:8) but above all because he was the preacher *par excellence* of the fullness of divine love, since he equally praised the incarnate presence of the Logos as well. Who else had spoken with such doxological assurance about 'that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled ...' (1 Jn 1:1), leading to the triumphant exclamation 'and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' (Jn 1:14)?

Therefore, whenever there is no sense of the unshakeable coherence and the direct correlation between the transcendent pre-eternal glory and the historic incarnate kenosis of God the Logos, the life of the Church is subject to the judgement and condemnation of the local Churches, as St John the Evangelist again describes in the Book of Revelation (2:2)!

- ² The topic of peace in God is of course a major presupposition of the 'eternal Sabbath' and 'rest', which is the characteristic ambience of the 'Eighth Day'. Just as the uncreated God infinitely differs from the created world, so it is that the 'Ruler of Peace' and 'Father of the age to come' (Is. 9:6) proclaims a peace that is altogether different to the fluid conditions of everyday existence, as an ongoing struggle towards perfection and sanctification. This is why the peace of God is described as 'surpassing all understanding'.

Yet it was not only the Risen Lord who formulated the essential differentiation in the 'peace of God', as the first good received immediately after the Resurrection, followed by the words 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn 20:22). It is noteworthy that all Biblical texts, as well as the subsequent Patristic literature, proclaim as their main *content* and *aim* the synonym of peace, which is 'reconciliation'. This is why the preaching of the 'word of truth' is continually named a 'ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:18). It has often been said that peace and reconciliation in God primarily means peace with one's fellow human being, whereby peace is secured with God, but also with our own

self. Given that this 'tripartite' nature of peace in God is the quintessence of the eternal Sabbath of the Eighth Day, it was only natural that the Risen Lord and victor over death would especially underline this uniqueness by saying to His disciples: 'My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you' (Jn 14:27).

- ³ As known, this title was chosen by the sharp-minded and deeply profound scholar of St Maximos the Confessor, Hans Urs Von Balthazar, in an effort to highlight the breadth and depth of the vision of this leading mystic of Byzantine literature and spirituality.

By way of explanation, it must be pointed out that, since the constant 'presence' of God-Logos was 'active' throughout creation and history even before the Economy in the flesh, it was impossible for it to go 'unnoticed' as it even caused a worldwide sacred 'relay race'. Therefore the more mystical Prophets and Apostles of the one, unified Revelation (in the Old and New Testament), but also the later Apologists, Theologians and Fathers, discerned in all created beings the *logoi* in spermatic forms (*ratio seminalis*), constituting a very deep 'solidarity' and 'coherence' in all Creation, such that any related 'wound' or 'fault' cannot remain without consequences. A striking confirmation of these invisible bonds is undoubtedly the shocking ecological problem of our time. However it was not only the mystics (as the most sensitive servants of the Word of God in all times and places) who spoke of the 'rationality' in the depths of nature and history. Physicists and scientists from ancient times right through to the top researchers of so-called 'modernity', including Einstein, were amazed by the direct logical correlation among matter - the first datum of their observations.

- ⁴ This original and truly imaginative title was given by the late D. Koutroubis in his comprehensive book on theology (Domos, Athens, 1995), which from beginning to end admittedly 'breathes' the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, to be enjoyed by the faithful servant of God 'with simplicity of heart' (Acts 2:46) far from any dry 'academic' approach. Precisely because of this, it would be incorrect to translate his book title into English as 'The Gift of Theology', since this may easily mislead anyone who has neither read the work, nor has knowledge of the author, to believe that it refers to the gift of an individual member of the Church to 'theologise'. However, if we translated it instead as 'The Grace of Theology', we would then indicate more accurately the 'charismatic atmosphere' which belongs to theology in and of itself, arousing compunction and wonder in one who approaches theology in a God-pleasing manner.

- ⁵ Given the enormous variety of usages and shades of meaning which the phrase 'Word of God' and 'word of the Lord' present (firstly in Biblical texts, but also in Patristic literature as well as in the history of theology until today) it

would be particularly useful to recall always the all-embracing and accurate definition of the theologian, given by the German theologian Coccejus (17th cent.): 'The theologian is the one who speaks of God, from God, in the presence of God and to His glory'. It is not of course a coincidence that the famous Karl Barth emphatically used this definition in the very first pages of his voluminous work on Church Dogmatics. It is also not a coincidence that Coccejus formulated his definition in Greek, for the obvious reason that the compound term 'theologian' comes from two original terms of incomparable significance (Θεός and Λόγος), which no European language at least has tried to translate, thereby silently admitting the futility of such an attempt.

- 6 The radical difference between the 'word of God' and the 'human word', as well as the inner affinity between them when the favour of God intervenes (purifying and enlightening 'by grace' the human word in service of the unspeakable will of God) is dramatically described by the Prophet Isaiah throughout the 6th chapter of his book.
- 7 Here it must be noted that the Church's experience of Monophysitism as a highly dangerous heresy in the field of Christology (as related to the 4th Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon's fundamental defining terms of 'unconfusedly' and 'indivisibly' concerning the hypostatic union) stems ultimately from its denial, more or less, overtly or covertly, of the fixed 'constant' of the mentioned theandricity even before the Incarnation of God the Word. In spite of this, however, any monophysitic departure from the healthy Faith and teaching concerning theandricity is far from the apostasy and desertion of the living God, whereby we erect in His place any idols whatsoever, including our own selves very often! How else would we classify the huge modern conglomerates of supposedly inspired preachers of the word of God, who are correctly denounced for their 'marketing of the Gospel' from their American base, if not as idolatry?
- 8 Respect for the integrity of all created things, regardless of which part of the ontological scale they belong to (angelic beings, animals, plants, minerals, heavenly bodies *etc.*) naturally derives from their being created 'out of nothing', which is also by definition the fundamental 'relationship' between them (namely their common createdness!). There are two significant points here to which modern man appears not to have paid sufficient attention, even when acknowledging the truths of the Bible.
 - a) The Revelation of John, which describes as a vision the final things (*eschata*) of humankind and the world, that is the 'transfigured' world of God, speaks not only of a 'new person', but also of a 'new heaven' and a 'new earth' (Rev. 21:1).

It would be superfluous to say that the entire so-called 'ecological problem' of the modern world would have been averted, or at least made less acute and serious, if all people possessed what Chemistry Professor Burch praised at the 5th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches as the 'eucharistic perspective' of the Orthodox.

b) In Orthodox iconography, as we know, there is not only the human form (even if this is the Theotokos, the Theanthropos Himself or the angels), but also mountains, rivers, animals and buildings are depicted as part of the 'transfigured' world - the immediate environment of the human being.

⁹ A more precise evaluation of the meaning of both these terms can easily be made on the basis of the Biblical substantiation of exercising the mentioned gifts to the glory of God, but certainly also by a purely etymological analysis of the terms. This makes most clear the infinite ontological superiority of the uncreated God *vis-à-vis* the created human person.

¹⁰ One of the 20th century's most distinguished Protestant specialists on doctrine, E. Brunner, when commenting on the deep interdependence between 'Faith' and 'obedience', wrote 'Just as Christ is always proclaimed as Lord, so it is that Faith is always at the same time obedience' (*Dogmatik* III, p.59).

For more extensive commentary on this innermost relationship, *cf.* my doctoral thesis, especially the chapter 'Justice and Church or Law and Gospel' (Archim. S. Harkianakis, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, Athens, 1965, pp. 51-59).

¹¹ Precisely due to this mutual faithfulness necessitated from above, the earliest Church Fathers of east and west especially underlined the correlative twin terms 'Tradition-Succession', upon which the unity, continuity and identity of the Church in the world is primarily built.

¹² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VII, 10

¹³ Concerning the character and the various types of prayer, as well as the related place of tears, *cf.* Archbishop Stylianos of Australia *Concerning Prayer* (bilingual edition, ARMOS, Athens, 1999).

¹⁴ Perhaps there is no more comprehensive or authentic prayer in the *Efchologion* of the Orthodox Church than the following one, which the author has for some decades customarily used before commencing any lectures in theology, regardless of whether these are delivered at an Orthodox Theological College or at the academic podium of another denomination. This prayer to God incarnate, then, is reproduced; while simple in formulation, it is very deep in terms of its many spiritual messages:

“Christ, the true light, who enlightens and sanctifies every person coming into the world, grant us a sign of the light of your countenance, so that in this we may see the unapproachable light; and guide our footsteps to fulfil your commands, through the prayers of your most pure Mother and all your Saints. Amen.” (*Horologion*, Service of the First Hour)



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