

The Ingathering of Being, Time, and Word and the Inbreaking of a Transcendent Word

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NOW THE BOY Samuel was ministering to Yahweh in the presence of Eli; it was rare for Yahweh to speak in those days; visions were uncommon. One day, it happened that Eli was lying down in his room. His eyes were beginning to grow dim; he could no longer see. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying in the sanctuary of Yahweh where the ark of God was, when Yahweh called, “Samuel! Samuel!” He answered, “Here I am.” Then he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, since you called me.” Eli said, “I did not call. Go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down. Once again Yahweh called, “Samuel! Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, since you called me.” He replied, “I did not call you, my son; go back and lie down.” Samuel had as yet no knowledge of Yahweh and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him. Once again Yahweh called, the third time. He got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, since you called me.” Eli then understood that it was Yahweh who was calling the boy, and he said to Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if someone calls say, ‘Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears.’”¹

It is not so wondrous that God—being God—speaks, but that man hears. How is it that human language can serve as a vehicle for the communication between God and man? To this question philosophy can offer only a modest contribution, but perhaps an illuminating one. For it leads us to a reflection upon the relation between human language and the impact of the revealed Word upon such language. That in turn calls for a visitation

¹ 1 Sam 3:1–9, *The Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1966); the last sentence is from the *Revised Standard Version* (Oxford, 1965).

to and integration of a special understanding of language that is available to us. Therefore, most of the present reflection will be given over to suggesting an integrated understanding of language that has been pursued in fragmentary fashion throughout the more than two thousand years of what is known as western culture and that only awaits integration. If I am to be clear, however, I need to set forth several specifications in regard to the present reflection on language, specifications that both narrow the horizon of these reflections while at the same time adding a certain concentrated depth to them.

No doubt, these philosophical reflections will be placed in a larger context through subsequent interactive discussion. This is especially so because my remarks have been shaped by a particular role that a certain use of language has played in what has been called western culture. This cultural “bias” is the first specification. I might well say: a specification of “so-called” western culture, since its roots lie mostly elsewhere—in ancient Egypt and among the Indo-European-speaking peoples of Persia, Greece, and Rome, as well as among the Semitic-speaking peoples of the Hebrew lands and the territories of Islam—and eventually serve as the learned discourse of medieval and modern Europe.

The principal agency of my story, then, in personified form, is this manifold western culture, which in its contemporary form is largely Euro-American and which now exerts increasing global impact. It passes under the somewhat pretentious name of “modern” culture or “modernity”; but then other present-day cultures are modern, too. Obviously, the choice of this term is not simply chronological, but implies a set of values among which novelty and a certain understanding of freedom are cherished.

Human language, taken broadly and in its bewildering variety of cultural expressions and applied uses, is a versatile instrument of expression and communication. For it serves the aims of description and proscription, of praise and blame, joy and sorrow, love and hate, prose and poetry, memory and hope. And so we arrive at a second specification. For within this so-called western culture, I will focus upon what I take to be its understanding of the role of learned language. Now, learned language is a special modification of language. It does not enjoy the geniality of casual conversation, but is a more distilled mode of discourse, high in epistemic values. So, from the manifold of linguistic uses, I have selected for consideration the *theoretical* use of language, by means of which we strive to understand our world and ourselves through explanation and interpretation, that is, by *giving an account*.

With this I arrive at a final specification, which in the prominence we give to it today is a relatively recent modification of theoretical discourse;

it is that of dialogue. Now dialogue differs from debate in that it hopes for eventual mutual understanding shared by both parties, rather than the pursuit of an argumentative victory of one over the other. In this dialogue, we are called to bring certain dispositions of respect and willingness to listen and to learn, and to better understand each other. But, even beyond that, we also seek something more: As we hope to grow in our mutual understanding of one another and through that of ourselves, we hope also to advance toward a better understanding of how we understand our relation to one another. This is no easy task, since the modes of discourse, for example, those in use in the Catholic Christian tradition and those in Rabbinic Judaism, take different forms. It will be my argument, however, that—whatever the reshaping that occurs in and through our dialogue—something like “giving an account” of that relation (in this thematic, the relation of the two Covenants) will in some degree retain the features of the theoretical modality of giving an account. To sum up: The horizon of the present reflection is that of so-called western culture, its manifold usage of language, and within language the development of theoretical discourse and its interplay in dialogue.

The reflection proceeds in three steps: I will begin by setting forth the context that I think is helpful in understanding the evolution of learned language. That done, I will pass on to what I have called the “ingathering” of three aspects of language that have been explored in western culture and that only stand in need of integration. Through such an integration they can be brought into play with one another in such a way as to form a very rich understanding of the use of language—not in all respects, of course, but insofar as language is put to the theoretical or speculative aim of understanding the reality that surrounds us and our situation in it. Finally, in a brief coda I will suggest how such an integrated philosophical understanding of language lies open to the “inbreaking” of the sacred Word.

The Context

It is important to make clear, once again, that what follows is not a general theory of language—whatever that might be! Rather, it is an attempt to set forth the essential character of the special use of language that seeks to serve the theoretical or speculative aim, that seeks to provide an intelligible account of the way things are.

In the struggle to understand itself and the world, the polyglot complex that has become western culture has traveled down four paths. It is significant that all but one of these four bear Greek names, and the subordinate members of the fourth bear Greek names as well: for it was

the ancient Greeks who first discovered these paths and set us on their way. Indeed, we retain the marks of their birth in the recall we make of their names. These four paths of understanding do not exhaust the vocabulary and range of language, since words serve a manifold of other functions besides that of providing an explanation—as when poets celebrate, lovers sing, sufferers beseech, penitents pray, merchants bargain, generals command, and councilors advise. But these four modes of expression serve the hunger to understand reality and our place in it by providing an explanatory account of ourselves and the way things are. Such use of language is, first of all, a theoretical enterprise, provided that we understand the term “theory” in its original sense. We tend to use the term theory more abstractly today to mean the application of a coherent system of ideas to selected data. But if we are to recover the original sense of *theôria* we need to understand it as the disposition whereby we place ourselves at the deepest source of the reality that embraces us and erupts within us. It is in this sense that these four modes of understanding serve the theoretical aim of awakening us to and within reality.

What are they, these four modes of understanding? Let me give them names appropriate to our current understanding of them, for they are very much with us today. They have served us, and continue to serve us well in our search for understanding. The mother of this family of modes is grammar—another Greek name! Now, grammar does not stand for the eloquent use of language, since every culture, literate and preliterate, can boast of masters of fluency. Grammar is a specific attitude toward language that emerged in the eighth century B.C. out of the Greek appropriation and transformation of the Phoenician alphabet. It contains within it a simplification of the elements of language, and attaches these elements—vocables and letters—to acoustic rather than visual correlates.² But more important by far is this: By freeing the elements of language from visual imagery—as they were confined in hieroglyphics and pictographs—grammar freed the mind and its language to take up a new attitude toward itself and the way it addresses reality.

This new attitude bears yet another Greek name “analysis,” and precisely, *conceptual* analysis, that is, the distinction of elements or facets by means of concepts (*analysis*: to unloose, separate, distinguish, and by extension, to set free in the domain of thought). It ought to be said, however,

² Simplification: The Greek alphabet was reduced to twenty-four letters; acoustic: the letters, alpha, beta, gamma, etc. matched the sounds of the spoken words but bore no connection with pictorial imagery—or quickly lost what minimal connection some letters may have had. This development was attended by the formation of concepts, preparatory to conceptual analysis in the four modes.

that concepts are not simply ideas; presumably the mark of being human is to entertain ideas, and many cultures (such as the symbolisms of the Chinese and the systems of Hindu and Buddhist thought) have developed extremely sophisticated systems of meaning, to say nothing of preliterate myths. But concepts are a particular way of forming ideas, and they are an invention of the Greeks. Also, by analysis I do not mean the highly abstract precision of modern logical or linguistic analysis that is characteristic of certain present-day systems: Such systems are a special modern development of analysis. I mean, rather, the more robust and direct engagement with reality as the Greek thinker encountered it.

It is not insignificant to our topic that the Greek term *theôria* is associated in its origins with unaltered religious reportage; and that the attitude and practice of *theôria* had its origins in the reception of religious oracles.³ But the Greeks took the notion in a new direction. *Theôria* now unfurled itself before the Greek in a fourfold discursive manner. (I must concede that it is not clear why it should have uncoiled in this fourfold way or why these four modes have been the only modes of understanding, that is, of giving a theoretical account of a situation, though I can be pressed to speculate about it.) It is time, however, to name these four modes of understanding, in no particular order, however, since we are ignorant of that order.

In taking up these modes of understanding the mind removed itself a half-step from its immediate, ordinary, and largely pragmatic involvement with lived reality. This half-step back into the mind freed it to reflect in a fresh way upon that immediate involvement and to initiate an articulate development along one or another path (*met'hodos*, along the way, that is, the path toward). Because this development occurred in close association with their lived situation, the Greek returned to reality with a fresh and invigorating understanding of it.

This is what happened as the Greeks transformed Egyptian land-measurement (*geômetria*) into *mathematics*, that is, into learned enquiry within the field of numbers and numerical relations. The original meaning of the verb (*manthanô*) points to the activity of second-order reflective thought and enquiry:⁴ the desire to learn and to know, *mathêsis*. Among the Greeks, of course, one thinks of Pythagoras and his followers as representative of this

³ Cf. *theôros*, a designated officer to the religious festivals, appointed to witness and faithfully report the words of the priestess, or again, in a not wholly dissimilar atmosphere, the results of the athletic games.

⁴ Second-order reflective thought: The analytical half-step back out of the immediacy of lived encounter set the elements of meaning free to be understood both in and for themselves, but also as embedded in the complex realities of experience.

modality. But the disclosure of zero in India and, later still, a better notational system permitted the original intuition to develop still further in remarkable ways. This mathematical path demonstrated the illuminative power of numbers to shed meaning on the human situation. In the earlier centuries this mode paid dividends of understanding especially in astronomy. More recently, in modern western culture, it has come to represent the model and paradigm of exact and progressive reasoning.

A second mode of understanding bears the name “history” (*istoria*), and is associated with Herodotus and Thucydides. If number is the focus of the mathematical mode, *time* or *temporality* is the avenue along which history defines its units of meaning as *events* and provides an explanation in terms of such units.

A third mode is that of language itself. Beginning in *grammar*, it exfoliated into the *organon*, comprising *logic*, *rhetoric*, *topics*, and (in the Arabic tradition) *poetics*,⁵ though—unlike the other modes—this mode now bears the Latin name *linguistics*. The earliest document we have is that of Prodicus in the fifth century B.C., but grammatical analysis itself undoubtedly already had a considerable past.

We come at last to *philosophy*. Originally, among the earliest philosophers, this mode took form as *fundamental enquiry*. It is important that we retain this understanding of philosophy, since in its actual career—in distinction from what one or another philosopher has thought philosophy should be—philosophical enquiry has undergone a shifting—if not a shifty—career, adopting now one form or mode, now another. Nevertheless, it has always done so in the interest of arriving at an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality, knowledge, and action. It is remarkable that we still honor these pioneers of reflective thought for their spirit of comprehensive enquiry, since their answers have not passed the test of time: for example, water, air, the boundless, fire—although it is significant that something of Heraclitus’s *logos* still prevails. It is not, however, until the term being (*ôn, ontos*) was taken up by Parmenides and enriched by Plato and Aristotle that philosophy found one of its preferred modes of expression: *ontology*.⁶ No doubt the comprehensive range and the intensive and

⁵ The modern edition by Bekker excludes both *poetics* and *rhetoric* from the canon of the *Organon*. This exclusion is followed in modern western culture and rests upon a largely unexamined presupposition regarding the nature and role of language.

⁶ I say “one of its modes,” since if one follows the actual career of philosophy in its historical embodiment, it is best to recognize that its abiding concern is *fundamental enquiry*. Like a chameleon or camp follower, it has adopted the coloration of the several eras it has passed through. If we attend to the principal forms that philosophy has assumed, without denying a continuing complexity, we can say that for almost two millennia its preponderant, though not exclusive, modality

intimate presence of the term “being” recommended it as providing an open horizon and an inner depth to all that is.⁷

So far, then, we’ve examined the four explanatory and interpretive modes.

In terms of the attempt to understand ourselves and the reality that surrounds us, western culture has developed these modes in sophisticated ways, often forming hybrids out of them. Thus, sociology employs both statistics and history (that is, both number and time); while psychology uses both statistical tests and developmental therapy; and some versions of hermeneutics combine both ontology and history. Nevertheless, in entering into alliance with one another, each mode preserves its fundamental integrity, anchored in one of the four aspects, either in number, event, word, or being. These seem fundamental. Wisdom in our present culture entails the discretion to know when and in what way and to what degree one or another modality is properly and fruitfully to be used in illuminating the increasingly complex *Sitz im Leben* that has become the heritage of modern western culture.

The Ingathering

I turn now to the way in which these fragmented modalities offer an integrated understanding of language that suggests new possibilities both within language and in the relation of language to Revelation. As we turn to the theme of our dialogue, these modes play out their roles in western culture in a significant way that provides the ground for the interplay *within* the language of philosophy and also for the interplay between the language of philosophy and the use Revelation makes of language.

So first, we need to clarify the interplay of being, time, and word within human language, and especially as they can shape an integrated learned discourse. I have called this interplay “ingathering,” insofar as that term represents an integration of the modes within learned language, modes that have developed often in separation from one another through the long history of western culture. This constitutes the second and central

was ontological or metaphysical. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in modern western culture, however, it took on a largely mathematical form, while in the nineteenth it took up an historical interest, and in the twentieth a linguistic and hermeneutical turn. It is my conviction that it is time for philosophy to return to its ontological origins, renewed and transformed by what it has gained through collaboration with the other modes throughout these later adventures. If I am right, then Dame Philosophy is meant to return to her early love.

⁷ In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri Hermeneias*, St. Thomas refers to *esse* as *intimius* within each being.

part of my reflection. Only then, in a brief indicator (looking toward a proper theological reflection on the language of Revelation, from a theologian I might say!) dare I offer some remarks in this context about the interplay between human language and its appropriation, transformation, and elevation by Revelation.

Considered from the vantage point of philosophy, we can only say that neither interplay is predetermined—neither the interplay within human language among the modes, nor between human language and the use Revelation makes of it.⁸ The twofold interplay happens in time where all is at root contingent, but nothing is without meaning.

As we look at the struggle of Plato and Aristotle seeking to disclose the inherent intelligibility of being (*to ên, ousia*), we see their desire to know leaping ahead of the capacities of their language. For, like all Indo-European languages, Greek uses a single verbal stem to give expression to both attributive and absolute predication. By attributive predication, I mean attributing a property or quality to something, as when I say that the table is brown or wooden; and by absolute predication, I mean asserting unqualifiedly that the table exists. This undifferentiated double use of the single verbal stem in Greek was by no means helpful in the effort to recognize the absolute value of existence as such, and thereby benefit from the range and power of being as such.⁹

You can watch Aristotle struggle with the question: *ti esti?* No doubt, there was operative an implicit sense of the actuality of existence, already in Parmenides's rigorous separation of being from non-being, in Plato's contrast of forms, and in Aristotle's eliciting of relative non-being (*mê ên*) from absolute non-being (*ouk ên*). It seems, however, that the clear endorsement of the absolute assertion of existence awaited the firm disclosure of *creatio ex nihilo*, which was given emphatic expression in early Christianity, although already articulated in the Hebrew Scriptures. I am inclined to speculate that the clarification, already implicit in the absolute Lordship of God celebrated in the Hebrew Scriptures, received fuller clarity with the experience of new life in the Risen Lord. It is a disclosure that simultaneously gives insight not only into the actuality of existence but also into the radical non-existence at the root of contingency so that this claim of

⁸ I am aware that there are no unforeseen coincidences from God's point of view!

⁹ See the comparative linguistic studies in the volumes on the verb "to be" in *Foundations of Language: Supplementary Series*, ed. Morris Halle and Benson Mates (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company). Of especial interest are the volumes by Charles H. Kahn on ancient Greek and James Barr on biblical Hebrew and biblical Greek. See also Charles Ferguson, vol. 14, 78–79; and Peri Bhaskararao, 204–5, 226–27.

contingency—insofar as the claim is taken as a factual assertion in history (without reference to its deeper truth-value)—highlighted the primary value of existence. It did this through the revealed understanding of God as the Source of created being, Who in the Fullness of his Being is both present in the world yet not of it.¹⁰

But in history thought took another longer and slower route to the disclosure of the absolute actuality of existence (*esse actu*). For as philosophy left Athens with the closure of the schools (A.D. 527), fundamental reflection passed over from Greek into Syriac and then into Arabic, that is, into Semitic languages that have separate verbal stems for attributive and absolute predication. As the medieval Latins learned from their more sophisticated Arabic neighbors, and in particular St. Thomas Aquinas from Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Latin found a way, often awkward¹¹—a way for giving mind and voice to that toward which Aristotle had struggled, namely, to the absolute value of existence at the heart of being itself.¹²

This learned acquisition was passed on from medieval technical Latin to the vernacular languages of western culture. As a result of the dynamics of the verbs and the relationality of the prepositions and adverbs operative in these languages, our present-day learned discourse in them can

¹⁰ We see a glimpse of this radical notion of creation *ex nihilo* in 2 Mc (7:28: *ex ouk onton*), derived from the absolute Lordship of the God of Israel (cf. Is 44:24). For further discussion, see K. L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982), 15–31; also cf. Philo (Quod deter., 44, 160), as cited in F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 142; Philo, Works, ed. and trans. F. H. Colson et al., 10 vols. (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1929–). The insight received explicit attention in and through Christian thinkers of the first and second centuries. But this was a gift of Revelation. The philosophical development of the insight took further centuries, coming to a decisive fruition in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 2), though principally through the mediation of Avicenna, or precisely through his language.

¹¹ Thus, how clumsy it is in English to speak of “the to-be” (*esse*) of something! Instead we substitute the word “exist,” but that has a different root sense, namely, that of standing “outside of its causes” (as in Suarez: *extra causas*), or, as in Kierkegaard’s use of the term, to indicate the *process* of becoming or emerging out of a prior condition. Neither of these notions grasps the *actuality* in being as such; for *esse* is not merely a *state* of factuality nor an emergent process, but the most dynamic principle in being (*actus essendi*). We have acquired this insight into the primacy of actuality (*esse actu*) from medieval technical Latin, but not the ease of language with which to express it.

¹² Cf. *ST* I, q. 44, a. 2; but also *Summa contra Gentiles* II, 52–54, in which the term *praeter esse* refers to “everything else” in the being except its actuality; the *praeter* highlights *esse* as the first intrinsic, constitutive principle of a being.

now carry along both the actuality and the intelligibility (both the existential and the essential significance) of its expressive encounters with reality and with ourselves.

But this occurs more fully and concretely only insofar as we recognize the interplay and integration of the historical and the ontological modes of understanding—only insofar as being itself is grasped historically, and history is grasped ontologically; in other words, only insofar as being itself is understood to be immersed in time—swimming, so to speak, in and through time itself and thereby endowing time with ontological values. It is false to conceive of being as some static, unchanging, and empty concept. Rather, every finite thing that happens comes into being or passes out of being as part of the history of being. In that history are included both transient and stable, both evanescent and permanent realizations of being. History, as a distinct mode insofar as it is an account in terms of time, is nonetheless immersed in ontology. The modern appreciation of history as an explanatory mode is associated with Vico in the early eighteenth century and comes to prominence in the various disciplines of the nineteenth century.¹³ But this new appreciation of time and history offers a contribution to a new way of understanding ontology as well. For the temporal events accounted for by history are permeated by and grounded in the historicity of (created) being itself.

Against the background of this new consciousness it is possible, therefore, to benefit from the inroads made by phenomenology at the dawn of the last century—whether in Husserl, Heidegger, Pfänder, or others—and to develop an integrated mode of discourse that permits us to revisit language and find in it the interplay of word, time, and being (of language, history, and ontology), so that three of the four modes are integrated into a fruitful, threefold mode of understanding.¹⁴ What is most significant for our theme, it seems to me, is the way in which temporality is placed in the context of being and given ontological value. It is Husserl who has shown us the way through his analysis of time.

If Aristotle, despite his struggles, never arrived at a philosophical appropriation of the absolute value of existence, so too, his theory of time, while effective—even indispensable—for his causal analysis of change, was also

¹³ I refer to geology, biology, and the human sciences, including even the history of religion and of mathematics, and by no means least the development of the historical-critical method.

¹⁴ It is not entirely irrelevant that Husserl's earlier work was in the philosophy of arithmetic, a discipline that undoubtedly heightened the clarity and precision of his analyses. We may acknowledge, therefore, that the mathematical mode made its contribution, if only indirectly.

relatively impotent in illuminating the relation of being to time. It is this that Husserl accomplished in his account of time—I might say, without some of the inconveniences of Heidegger's analysis. He opened up our understanding of time to its interior complexity, and offered us a look into its inner character and constitution (*Wesensschau*, eidetic intuition of the essential nature of time).

It is paradoxical that Husserl, not known for his interest in the history of philosophy,¹⁵ should unleash the inner structure of time. For time is more than the measure (*arithmos*) of successive nows. Rather each moment, each now, embraces within itself the wholeness of time, though not the whole of time—that is, not in the perfectly complete manner in which eternity does, but rather in a manner that—dare I say it?—participates in eternity and foreshadows it. Each passing moment, each now, is situated within the whole essence of duration and is not merely a discrete and isolated moment. In and through its complex transience, time participates in the fullness of duration, even as it imperfectly adumbrates it. For each now is not a non-complex atomic moment, analytically distinct from all others, simply coming into being and passing away in the flow of successive measurable moments. Time is more than clock time.

That “more” constitutes the very essence of the moment. For each now, while it does pass away, carries with it what Husserl notices as *retention* and *protention*. It is sometimes objected that this adds too much consciousness to the mere physical passing of measured moments, but time is not simply a physical phenomenon. Even according to the Aristotelian definition, consciousness is present as that which measures the successive flow of events and requires both memory and expectation. What Husserl's analysis comprehends is the inner connection within this flow. For retention is not quite the same as memory, nor is protention quite the same as expectation. Retention is the immediate passage of the living past into the present, contributing to the constitution of the present moment, whereas memory is the conscious retrieval of the past as an absence in the present. Protention is the immediate intrusion of the future into the constitution of the present now, whereas expectation is the prefiguration of a future happening that is as yet absent in the present. With Husserl's insight into the manifold interior constitution of time,

¹⁵ Except, of course, for intensive study of Hume and critical studies of selected philosophers, mostly contemporary. There is a story that upon greeting his teacher on arrival from Paris after giving the Paris Lectures, Heidegger reminded Husserl that he had left out one consideration in his lectures: historicity. His last work, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, however, is sensitive to the historical condition of present-day knowledge.

we see that both past and future are carried as factors, along with presence, to constitute the complex moment that is the transient now.

What needs to be added to integrate this understanding of time with traditional metaphysics is to grasp this constitution in terms of its ontological character. This is accomplished through the recognition of duration as a mode of being at the heart of eternity. Eternity is often understood as timeless and, indeed, it is not to be confused with the evanescent character of temporal succession; but this does not imply the mere absence of duration, for eternity is, above all, the fullness of time as the indwelling “measure” of the Fullness of Being. St. Thomas puts it well enough in speaking of three modes of duration, each resident in its own mode of being: *Time* is the transient mode of that which comes into being and passes away; *aeviternity* is that mode of duration proper to purely spiritual beings who receive their being and retain it without end; and *sempiternity* is that Fullness of duration that simultaneously embraces and is present to and within all being.¹⁶

Now Husserl’s threefold interior constitution of time foreshadows, adumbrates, and participates in the fullness of time, though in an imperfect way. Each now actualizes the wholeness of time as duration, though not the whole of time, and this wholeness is important for the reception of the transcendent Word. Each passing moment is an image of eternity; and in the incomplete richness of its interior constitution, each now adumbrates and participates in the fullness of its Source and the wholeness of eternity. Each moment is so constituted as to be open to the fresh advent of eternity. Each word lies open to the incoming of the Eternal Word by framing an *abode* in which the eternal Word can dwell. It is this that makes the integration of being, time, and word preparatory soil for the gratuity of a quite different Word. So far, then, this is an account of language that provides a receptive human basis for Samuel—and in different direct and indirect ways, for us—to hear the Word.

The Inbreaking

Yet, as we turn from the immanent ingathering of being, time, and word in human language to the interplay between such a philosophical understanding of language and the use Revelation makes of language, we must

¹⁶ See his discussion at *ST* I, q. 10. The designation I have given of aeviternity is an accidental, but not incorrect, characteristic of this mode of duration; as he says (*ST* I, q. 10, a. 5, c.): “aeviternity has [a possible] before and after without innovation and veneration,” in today’s English we might say: “without aging.”—Also, that eternity is not simply to be conceived as timeless but rather as fully durational is true of God Whose eternity “includes all times.” *ST* I, q. 10, a. 2, ad 4.

be cautious. For the Revealed Word is an eruption of light, judgment, and love that obeys its own directive and follows its sometimes surprising, and even unsettling, rhythms. When Revelation comes to dwell in language, it outstrips anything philosophy may have dreamed of. Still, because the inner complexity of being, time, and word, of which we have been speaking, has been created by the same Revelatory Source, human language has been so made that language as worded-being-in-time is already gifted to receive the transcendent Word as a grace that forever overflows it on all sides and to immeasurable depths and heights.

In acknowledging the eruption of Revelation into and within human language, we may well ask: How can the transient fragility of the moment be invested with a lasting significance, with a meaning and value that outstrips finitude and time, with a word that gives new life for all time, and—to speak to our present theme—to Covenants that still covenant? Faced with such questions, we need to recall our origins as well as our destiny. We might begin by recalling that in being created, man—his mind, spirit, and language—is already constituted as one who, having received being through an original and originating gift, is thereby open to further receptivity, to gifts that are not his to demand. The initial receptive creation (disclosed in Genesis, but also in other ways in the myths of origin) already provides an opening for a transcendent Word. God has so created man—his being, time, and language—that he is able to receive the Word to which he has by nature no right or even any innate possibility.

It is this Word of which *Gaudium et spes*, number 22, speaks, when it affirms that it is through the Word who is the Christ that the true nature and destiny of man is revealed. This disclosure comes about through the open horizon and inner depth of man's being, which is disclosed in the incomplete wholeness of its existential duration. That wholeness is the measured unit of the moving integrity of each human being, for each human person is *a unitary flow of events, a life being lived*. This wholeness is embodied in the gifted constitution of each momentary now that comes to expression in human language. Being, time, and human words serve each other in preparing for the reception of the transcendent Word. This antecedent receptivity preserves the distinctive autonomy of grace, because this original receptivity does not give to human language or human nature the *possession of a potentiality* or capability to receive a transcendent and utterly gratuitous Revelation. It is not as though we could receive it as a right by virtue of our given nature. Still, that initial created receptivity does remove the *impossibility* or *absurdity* of such a reception. For a creature is, from its beginning, a received receptivity, that is, an original receptivity open to further receptivity.

However “inconvenient” and extraordinary the revealed Word may sometimes be, Revelation does not demand an absurdity. But Revelation is so freely given that, having said so much, I even hesitate to say that the creature holds within himself or herself the *inborn* or *native possibility* to receive such a Word, except perhaps insofar as his created origin is joined with his gifted destiny. It is enough perhaps to preserve the transcendence of the Revealed Word to say that hearing the Word does not amount to an impossibility, does not commit us to an absurdity. (Tertullian wrote: “credo quia ineptum” not “credo quia absurdum.”)¹⁷ Indeed, to the contrary, the revealed Word sheds an ecstatic light that makes everything that seemed ordinary into something wondrous and more deeply intelligible than philosophical insight has direct access to. The Word spoken to Samuel, and indeed to the whole of Israel, vindicates this in an exemplary way.

But, if I have read *Dominus Iesus* and the documents of Vatican II correctly, the Word has manifested its presence in ways other than the Scriptures recorded in biblical religion, and it has done this without prejudice to the privi-leged¹⁸ gift of those Scriptures. That is, the Source has not withheld its voice or hand from what the document refers to as the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the preliterate myths of the *Urzeit* symbolize eternity in and through the past, and the preliterate myths of the *Endzeit* prefigure eternity in and through the future. So, too, the symbolisms of the sacred in the variety of cultures also adumbrate eternity, however mixed with other elements they may be. Indeed, metaphysics with its emphasis on actuality also participates in eternity in and through the actuality of the present.

Revelation, then, is an “inbreaking” originating from the fullness of Being, an inbreaking that endows the human word with a duration that raises language to the values of eternal truth, to that Truth that is identical with the Fullness of Being (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*). Such “inbreaking” redeems the negativity inherent in transience and endows the moment and the human word with the promised fullness that points to the eschaton and the *parousia*. This energy of love is the signifying power of the Revealed Word and of Sacrament. We are pilgrims on the road to Emmaus, and the narrative we hear is not ordinary discourse, like sand running through the fingers, nor even the deeper human ingathering of being, time, and word. Rather, this extraordinary language gives forth revelatory iconic glances of the sacred, glimpsed through the adumbrated imperfect fullness that is held in the human words and in the temporal moments that serve as vessels of grace.

¹⁷ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, ch. 5.

¹⁸ The hyphen is meant to preserve the normative aspect of law (*lex, legis*) that is inseparable from the language of Divine love.

What can a philosopher think of this ecstatic revelatory language? So far I have referred to the integrated complex of human discourse as an ingathering of being, time, and word. This speaks to the integrated discourse that is now available to us over the more than two thousand years of adventure through which the polyglot western culture has lived. In that adventure, if I have understood its career, the several modes are ready to come together in the harmonious interplay of being, time, and word, of philosophy, history, and linguistics to form the richness of an integrated language. At the same time, that richness is open to a quite different Word.

Speaking as a philosopher but also as a Christian, I am aware of the language of Revelation as a fact in history. This leads me to speak also of the “inbreaking”—not the “ingathering,” but the “inbreaking”—of the Revealed Word—in Word, in Time, and in Being, as it is expressed in Christian revelation. In this way, the human word that plays out its role in the ingathering is called into service to bear a quite *other Word*: to bear a burden in both the sense of a weighty lightness and the theme of an eternal song of praise—a burthen. Such words give voice to the loving disclosure spoken from the very Source of all that is real, true, and good.

That Word, too, is an ingathering, but of quite another sort; for it is an ingathering of peoples on the heights of the Holy Place and in the presence of a Truth that overflows human words on all sides. The philosopher can stand in wonder at the inexhaustible mystery that unfolds, and be astonished at how the very meaning of meaning itself undergoes more than a transformation. For the Revealed Word lays claim to the radical, yet gentle, power of a love of life that overcomes the darkness of death and of a weakness that is more powerful than any other power we know. Language takes on new properties that disclose unexpected paradoxes, such as the rescue of good out of evil, the simultaneous wedding of judgment and mercy, the wholeness of unitary simplicity and radical diversity, and finally, the reconciliation of death arising to new life. The philosopher can learn from these paradoxes, while he yet remains true to his humbler task of gathering in the moments of being, time—yes, and number too—into an enriched and open human word. N·V