

J. MARIANNE SIEGMUND

**SILENCE AND
THE AUDIBILITY OF THE WORD:
CONTEMPLATIVE LISTENING AS A FUNDAMENTAL
ACT OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION
PART 2: JESUS CHRIST, THE ETERNAL LISTENER***

While part one of my arguing for contemplative listening as a fundamental act of the new evangelization shows that man’s ontological listening is an obedient readiness to hear the Word,¹ the present part claims that this readiness is modeled upon the eternal Listener, Jesus Christ.

The context of my argument concerns what it means to say that Christ reveals the human person to himself as a listener. Of primary importance is that one’s listening is based on the model of Christ’s own personhood. The first point I need to secure, then, is how the Son is a Listener. Explaining that involves showing first that the Son’s possession of divinity *as received* from the Father does not imply subordina-

J. MARIANNE SIEGMUND — Holy Apostles College and Seminary, Cromwell, CT, USA
e-mail: msiegmund@holypostles.edu ▪ ORCID ID: no data

* This article is a revised fragment of J. Marianne Siegmund’s *The Human Person as Silent Listener*, S.T.L. Dissertation, directed by Adrian J. Walker (The Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, The Catholic University of America, 2004).

¹ J. Marianne Siegmund, “Silence and the Audibility of the Word: Contemplative Listening as a Fundamental Act of the New Evangelization. Part 1: An Anthropology of Listening,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no. 4 (October–December 2017): 585–607.

tionism, but a perfection. Some texts from Thomas Aquinas will help show that reception in God is a perfection.

A second step is necessary in order to see how one may speak of the Son as a Listener, namely, that reception implies a kind of obedience. Since the Son receives the divine nature from the Father,² he can accurately be called obedient, precisely inasmuch as he possesses divinity *as received*. With the help of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who, in turn, develops Saint Thomas Aquinas, one shall see the importance of showing that reception implies an obedience. In addition, von Balthasar will also help show that the Son's obedience is not subordinationism.

Granted that the Son is obedient, my third step is to see how the Son's obedience is analogous to listening, and that the Son is the Listener, *par excellence*, in the Trinity by the very manner in which he possesses divinity. With my final point, it becomes clear that man is a listener based upon the model of the Son, for man's orientation to the Word is a form of listening.

Receiving: A Perfection in God

The eternal Word is not only what man is created to hear, but he is also the uncreated model of man's hearing. This implies that the Word is not only Word, but is also the Listener to the Word that he himself is. Saying that the Word is also the Listener to the Word that he is makes a seemingly novel claim that I will need to justify. I do so by showing that there is something like obedient readiness in the Son's generation from the Father. Of course, this raises a question with re-

² The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of God as "the first origin of everything and transcendent authority [primam omnium esse originem et auctoritatem transcendentem]." Further, as mentioned in the tenth footnote in the *Introduction* to this work, the Father is referred to as the "fontem et originem totius divinitatis [source and origin of all divinity]." Concilium Toletanum VI (anno 638), *De Trinitate et de Filio Dei Redemptore incarnato*: DS 490, in *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae* (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), #239 and #245.

spect to classical Trinitarian theology. How can there be something like obedient readiness in the Son, given that he is God? Is he not exempt from obedience by nature? The first step that will enable me to address these questions will be to show that Thomas provides an opening, which allows me to make the seemingly radical claim that receiving is a perfection in God. Such an entryway is found in his concept of the divine persons as subsistent relations. For my discussion of subsistent relations in God, I first survey the whole of question twenty-nine in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*, in order to provide a context for article four, which is my main focus.³

In question twenty-nine, Thomas is trying to show that the Boethian definition of *person* applies to the Trinity. Articles one and two explain and defend the validity of the definition. Article three argues for its application to God. However, when Thomas arrives at article four, he faces a problem: we speak of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as if they were three, distinct, individual substances, and necessarily so, inasmuch as they are indeed three distinct persons. And yet, as Augustine teaches, the persons differ, not as distinct substances, but as distinct relations. The question then, is this: does *person* in God signify the divine substance as essence or as relation? Thomas' answer is that *person*, applied to a Trinitarian person, signifies a relation as subsisting: "In God, 'person' signifies relation as subsisting."⁴

Thus follows several ontological implications for Thomas. That is, the persons have distinct being, but that distinction is relation. For example, the Father is his relation of paternity. In fact, he is a sheer paternity that is, simultaneously, the *suppositum* of paternity without

³ *S.Th.*, I, 29, 4. My analysis of the following Thomistic texts will be a continual comparison between the Latin edition and the English translation.

⁴ *S.Th.*, I, 29, 4: "Persona igitur divina significat relationem ut subsistentem."

metaphysical complexity.⁵ Thomas' use of *suppositum*, or subject, shows that the relation *is* the ontological subject that bears the relation. Divine paternity is God the Father, who is a divine person.⁶ And, just as God the Father is paternity, so also God the Son is filiation, or being begotten.⁷

Thomas asserts, then, that the Son is his sonship, and his sonship is his act of being begotten. My next task is to qualify this assertion because, according to Thomas, a rational distinction exists between the Son being his sonship, and sonship being his act of being begotten. The distinction that qualifies my position, then, is Thomas' differentiation between notional acts, or acts that characterize the divine persons, and their relations, which are conceptually distinct from the notional acts.⁸ When Thomas speaks of a notional act as that which characterizes a divine person, he means, for example, that "begetting" is a notional act that characterizes the Father. Similarly, "being-begotten" is a notional act that characterizes the Son. Although Thomas indicates that notional acts are conceptually distinct from the divine relations, he implies that they are the same, substantially. Thomas teaches, "the relations *according to our mode of understanding* follow upon the notional acts."⁹ While both paternity and begetting describe the Father, there is a

⁵ *S.Th.*, I, 29, 4, ad. 2. The *suppositum* is the substance looked at from the logical point of view as bearer of the properties, that is, as the subject of the predicate. Applied to God, when we say that the Father is the *suppositum* of paternity we mean that he not only *has* paternity, but that he *is* paternity.

⁶ *S.Th.*, I, 29, 4: "Sicut ergo deitas est Deus, ita paternitas divina est Deus Pater, qui est persona divina [Therefore, just as the Godhead is God, so is divine paternity God the Father, who is a divine person]."

⁷ *S.Th.*, I, 30, 2: "Paternitas igitur subsistens est persona Patris, et filiatio subsistens est persona Filii [Therefore, subsisting paternity is the person of the Father, and subsisting sonship is the person of the Son]."

⁸ *S.Th.*, I, 40, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.* The translation is given above for the Latin original: "relationes, secundum modum intelligendi, consequuntur actus notionales."

rational distinction between the two: the notional act of begetting belongs to the Father, but generation precedes the concept of paternity. Likewise, while the Son is his sonship, being begotten precedes the concept of filiation. However, substantially, the Son is both his sonship and his being begotten. Therefore, just as one may speak of the Father as identical to his paternity and to his act of begetting, so also may one speak of the Son as identical to his sonship and to his act of being begotten.

Joseph Ratzinger helps show how Thomas' argument, that the three divine persons *are* their giving and receiving, implies an "ontological revolution" in our understanding of the Trinity. As opposed to a merely intrapersonal understanding in the Trinity, this "ontological revolution" signifies the dynamism of interpersonal communion. If the Son is his sonship and his being begotten, then he "stands in complete relativity of existence toward the one who sent him."¹⁰ Ratzinger explains that the Son's very existence is "being from someone and toward someone," because the Son is "absolute openness of existence without any reservation of what is merely and properly his own."¹¹ In other words, the Son is "nothing" more or less than his openness to the Father, ontologically. If the Son is relation and "exists only *as* relation," then his existence in relation implies that his receiving is a perfection.¹²

One might wonder whether the Son's act of receiving himself from the Father really is, in fact, a perfection. In the *Summa Theologiae* I, 27, 1, ad 3, Thomas implies that it is. He teaches,

¹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio International Catholic Review* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 446. Here, Ratzinger cites Jn. 20:21 as an example of the Father sending the Son. In the Gospel according to John, the theme of the Son being "sent" is prevalent. It appears, for example, no less than six times in chapter seventeen alone (Jn. 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25), while in the Gospel itself, it is mentioned at least thirty-five times.

¹¹ Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," 446.

¹² *Ibid.*, 444.

To proceed from a principle, so as to be something external and different from that principle, is irreconcilable with the idea of a first principle; but to proceed from what is intimate and without diversity by way of intelligence is included in the idea of a first principle.¹³

In this text, Thomas teaches that, in God, when the Son or Spirit proceed from the Father, or first principle, their intimacy with the first principle is necessarily held intact. The relevance of this text is evident: because the Son proceeds from the first principle, while remaining within the first principle, the Son's act of receiving himself is a perfection. Thomas concludes that, in the perfection of the divine existence itself "are contained both the Word intelligibly proceeding and the principle of the Word, as whatever belongs to his perfection."¹⁴

One may object that, because whatever is generated, "receives its existence from the generator," the Son derives his existence from the Father as a creature.¹⁵ In order to answer this objection, Thomas speaks of the similarity and difference between being created and being generated. After providing a couple of texts from the *Summa Theologiae* I, 27, 2, ad 3, I comment upon them in order to show that the Son's act of receiving himself does not mean that he is created, or that he is in any way subordinate to the Father.

Thomas teaches that on one hand, "what is generated in God gets (*accipit*) its existence (*esse*) from the generator, not as though that existence (*esse*) were received (*receptum*) into matter or into a subject,

¹³ *S.Th.*, I, 27, 1, ad 3. The Latin for the above translation reads, "procedere a principio ut extraneum et diversum, repugnat rationi primi principii: sed procedere ut intimum et absque diversitate, per modum intelligibilem, includitur in ratione primi principii."

¹⁴ *S.Th.*, I, 27, 2, ad 3. "In ipsa enim perfectione divini esse continetur et verbum intelligibiliter procedens, et principium verbi; sicut et quaecumque ad eius perfectionem pertinent . . ."

¹⁵ *Ibid.* The Latin for the above translation reads, "accipit esse a generante." Note that Thomas uses the word *accipit* for "receives." I note the significance of its use in the next paragraph.

which would conflict with the divine self-subsistence.”¹⁶ Clearly, then, what is created comes from God, but, although sustaining creation, he remains distinct from it. In other words, the creature receives a perfection—of existence—to which it is not identical.

In the same text of the *Summa Theologiae*, I, 27, 2, ad 3, once Thomas has spoken of how God creates, he next discusses the different way the Son is generated from the Father, for the Son is not created. He explains, “when we speak of [the Son’s] existence (*esse*) as gotten (*acceptum*), we mean that he who proceeds from another has divine existence (*esse*) not as if he were other than the divine existing *esse*,” for the Son is of the same substance as the Father.¹⁷ In both this text and the text in the preceding paragraph above, Thomas distinguishes between “getting,” or “accepting,” [*accipere*] and “receiving” [*recipere*]. He speaks of the Son “getting” his divinity, not “receiving” it. Thomas’ distinction points to a specific use of “receiving” to indicate getting a perfection that is not identical to oneself. Creation “receives” its existence in such a way that its existence is not itself. Unlike creation, however, the Son “gets” *esse*, but in such a way that he *is* identical to the *esse* he “gets.” Moreover, the Son *is* the *esse* he receives because there is no interval between receiving *esse* and being that *esse*. Therefore, the Son “gets” divine existence—so he does “receive” in a broad sense of the word—but he receives it in such a way that he is this *esse*. The distinction between “getting” and “receiving” supports our point: that the Son’s act of “receiving” divinity from the Father is a perfection, because it indicates his reception of divinity as that which is himself.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* The Latin for the above translation reads, “quod est genitum in divinis, accipit esse a generante, non tanquam illud esse sit receptum in aliqua materia vel sebiecto (quod repugnat subsistentiae divini esse).”

¹⁷ *Ibid.* The Latin for the above translation reads, “hoc dicitur esse acceptum, inquantum procedens ab alio habet esse divinum, non quasi aliud ab esse divino existens.”

By describing the divine persons as subsistent relations and the Son as his being begotten, Thomas prepares the ground for saying that receiving is, indeed, a perfection in God. But, if receiving *is* a perfection, how might one maintain that the Son's self-reception is analogous to listening? How can the eternal Son *listen*, as if to say that he is characterized by obedient readiness? Consequently, how may one claim that the Son *obeys* without falling into subordinationism?

The Son's Self-Reception: An Obedient Readiness

Having seen with Thomas that the Son *is* subsistent self-reception by way of generation, I will proceed by showing the Son's self-reception as obedient readiness by relying on von Balthasar's development of the Son as subsistent relation to the Father.

By showing that obedience characterizes the Son as a divine person—and that such obedience is not subordinationism—I shall be able to argue that his obedience is intrinsically analogous to listening. And, if the obedience of the Son is analogous to listening, then the human person as listener—created on the model of Christ, who is the “true fulfillment of the idea of the human person”¹⁸—finds a theological grounding.

Let's begin with an important passage from *A Theology of History* by von Balthasar, which presents his view of the Son's inherent obedient readiness.

The Son's form of existence, which makes him the Son from all eternity (Jn. 17:5), is the uninterrupted reception of everything that he is, of his very self, from the Father. It is indeed this receiving of himself which gives him his “I,” his own inner dimension, his spontaneity, that sonship with which he can answer the Father in a reciprocal giving. In the same way that the Father's

¹⁸ Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 450.

act of generation is not an outpouring into emptiness, but terminates in the begotten fruit; so the self of the Son is not the reception of something eternally alien . . . but the bestowal upon him of that which is most his own. But his communion with the Father is not merely like that of a human son with the one who has begotten him—simply a communion in their common human nature—but is a communion in the eternally uninterrupted act of his own generation, in which alone he is image and word and response. In the selfsame act in which he receives himself (and hence his divine understanding) he receives, too, the entire will of the Father concerning God and the world, and assents to it as his own.

But if, as Saint Thomas has it, his mission in this world is the manifestation, conformed to this world, of his being begotten (*generatio*), then his mode of being here on earth will simply be the manifestation in the created sphere, the translation into creatureliness, of this heavenly form of existence: existence as receiving, as openness to the will of the Father, as subsistent fulfillment of that will in a continuous mission. The Son in heaven . . . and on earth . . . [is] he who is open, he who receives, he who obeys . . . Just as the Son in heaven never interprets and uses his being a person in such a way as to shut himself off, but only as an arena of reception and response, so the incarnate Son's "self-consciousness" never becomes an object for him (for he has it only as something to give to God and to men); for the man Jesus, his hypostatic union with the Logos is not a religious entity, a theme in its own right; rather, the form of his human self-awareness is the expression, in terms of this world, of his eternal consciousness as Son.¹⁹

In a manner of speaking that differs from Thomas, von Balthasar's explanation of the earthly attitude of Jesus, which reveals the character of his eternal person, describes him in a concrete, lively sense of personal exchange. While von Balthasar does not explicitly comment upon Thomas, he is, in fact, "putting flesh" on the notion of subsistent

¹⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 30–2.

relation. He particularly helps one see the richness of the Son as his act of being begotten.

In the passage above, von Balthasar emphasizes that the Son is not only his own. Indeed, he is the Son “from all eternity,” uninterruptedly receiving “his very self from the Father.”²⁰ Further, von Balthasar explicitly speaks of the Son receiving divinity from the Father, the source and origin of divinity. In receiving divinity, the Son reciprocates that generosity back to the Father and it is their communion in “the eternally uninterrupted act” of the Son’s generation.²¹ Next, von Balthasar makes it clear that the Son is not subordinate to the Father, for he receives divinity as *his own*. Because divinity belongs to the Son by divine right, as “that which is most his own,” he is not subordinate to the Father. One may conclude, then, that the Son is co-equal, co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father, as Nicaea teaches.²²

Von Balthasar speaks of the Son receiving divine will and of obeying in some sense. In fact, the Son’s obedience to his own self-reception from the Father is obedience to the very form of his existence, which von Balthasar describes as “receiving, as openness to the will of the Father.”²³ But further, the Son receives divinity as *his*, but always with a relation to the Father that he is. Always receiving himself from the Father means the Son always consents to the Father’s will; such radical consent embodies the Son’s constant readiness. Evident in all of this, one has the liveliness of an event happening now. This dynamic self-reception of the Son is simultaneous with his reception of “the en-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

tire will of the Father concerning God and the world,” to which he “assents . . . as his own.”²⁴

How may one understand the Son’s reception of the divine will as obedience without subordinationism? The divine will of the Son manifests his obedience to the Father because he receives will with his divinity precisely as *given from* the Father. By possessing the divine will with his divinity as *received*, the Son *obeys* the form of his existence, and in readiness, he consents to it as his own.²⁵

To speak of the Son receiving the Father’s divine will seems to suggest that he is subordinate to the Father. This is not true, however, for in the Godhead, there is only one will. To speak of the Son receiving the Father’s will, then, means that he *receives* it as his own will, which is the same will as that of the Father. The same will that begets, is the same will that is begotten. And, the fact that the divine will is always the Son’s will, means that his reception of it is a perpetual event.

The Son’s obedience in the Trinity, however, is not a human obedience; it is manifested in a human mode in the obedience of Jesus, who embodies the eternal attitude of the Son. The earthly attitude of Jesus’ obedience is the incarnate expression of an event within the divine Godhead. The Son’s earthly “form of existence” signifies his Trinitarian life.²⁶ Because the life of Jesus on earth is one of human obedience, von Balthasar precisely specifies his existence “as receiving, as openness to the will of the Father, as subsistent fulfillment of that will in a continuous mission.”²⁷

²⁴ *Ibid.* There is one divine will in the Blessed Trinity. The Father possesses the divine will as *origin*, whereas the Son possesses the divine will as *received*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The Son's Obedience and Listening

Granted that the Son receives divinity from the Father as that which is given, yet always possessed, and granted that the form of the Son's existence is receptive obedience, how does the Son's self-reception imply listening? What does it mean to say that the Son is both the Word and the hearer of the Word that he is? The task of this part of my argument is to elucidate the sense of the Son's self-reception as listening, since, as obedient sonship, he is both Word and hearer of the Word.

How is the Son's obedient readiness analogous to listening? First, the Son is the Word. But also, the Word receives himself. To say that the Word receives himself means that the Son wants to be nothing but what the Father says. For, the Word is not only from the Father and toward the Father, but also *the Word* is "existence that is completely path and openness," which I have described as obedience.²⁸ That the Son wants to be what the Father says implies a fidelity to the intention of the Father speaking that is analogous to listening. In fact, the Word *is* that act of listening, precisely because he is the perfect expression of the mind of the Father; he wants to be only what the Father wants him to be. Therefore, to say that the Son obeys the Father by his self-reception as Word—for he receives himself as "image and word and response"—is to say that the Son's self-reception is listening.²⁹ Because the Son, the Word of the Father, receives himself in obedience to the Father, he listens to the Word he is. This enables us to conclude that, in the Trinity, the Son is the Listener *par excellence*.

Some of the Fathers of the Church, such as Ignatius of Antioch, speak of the Father as the silent ground of the word. After providing some texts from Ignatius' Epistles both to the Magnesians and the

²⁸ Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," 446.

²⁹ von Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 31.

Ephesians, I comment upon them in light of von Balthasar's remarks in *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*.

First, Ignatius speaks of "God, who has revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ" who is the "Word of his own from silence proceeding."³⁰ Second, Ignatius speaks of three secrets "brought to pass in the deep silence of God," namely, Mary's virginity and childbearing, and the death of Jesus.³¹ Having been "prepared in the silence of God," these mysteries could then be "proclaimed aloud to the world."³² In these texts, Ignatius draws upon the fact that the Word reflects in himself the depth of paternal silence. Commenting upon these passages, von Balthasar first notes that, "the deeds of the Incarnate Word were performed 'silently', in a manner corresponding to the unity of speech and silence in God."³³ Proceeding from the silence of the Father, the Son "gladdened the heart of the one who sent him" in his very being.³⁴

³⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle to the Magnesians," #8, in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (New York: Dorset Press, 1986), 85–92.

³¹ Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," #19, in *Early Christian Writings*, 72–84. Scriptural references for Mary's childbearing include the following: Mt. 1:20–21, 2:1; Lk. 1:42, 2:5–7. Scriptural references for the death of Jesus include the following: Mt. 27:50; Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46; Jn. 19:30. A Scriptural reference, which refers to Mary's virginity is Lk. 1:27. Here, Luke uses the Greek word, *παρθενος*, meaning "virgin," or "unmarried girl" rather than *γυνή*, which means "wife," or "woman." The Vulgate uses *virgo* ("virgin, maiden"), which is even more specific. For additional documentation on Mary's virginity, see the following: Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution Defining the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1995), 4; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, #39 (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1995). The Latin Vulgate we use in this work is the following: Aloisius Gramatica, ed., *Bibliorum Sacrorum, Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, Nova Editio (Citta del Vaticano: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1913).

³² Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," #19, n. 17, in *Early Christian Writings*, 72–84.

³³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 63.

³⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle to the Magnesians," #8, in *Early Christian Writings*, 85–92.

Second, von Balthasar reflects that, “the one who truly possesses Jesus’ word can also hear his silence”;³⁵ third, this hearer of the word himself ‘works by means of his word and is known by means of his silence’.³⁶

Von Balthasar not only adds that the divine Word reflects the depth of paternal silence, but also, the human person who hears the Word likewise reflects something of the silence of God by his own listening to the Word. It is precisely through listening to the Son that one understands his silence such that the person’s “own words have the force of actions and his silences the significance of speech.”³⁷ Indeed, such a person manifests the Word in his own words. A concise summary of Ignatius’ remarks is his comment that, “it is better to keep silence and be than to talk and not be.”³⁸ Interpreting Ignatius, one may claim that the human being who listens to the Son *is* more fully *person* than one who does not listen.

³⁵ von Balthasar, *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*, 63. Although the reference is not cited at this spot in von Balthasar’s text, this particular quotation is from Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle to the Ephesians,” #15, in *Early Christian Writings*, 72–84.

³⁶ von Balthasar, *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*, 63. Although not specifically noted by von Balthasar here, the last quotation that he cites is found in Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle to the Ephesians,” #15, in *Early Christian Writings*, 72–84.

³⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle to the Ephesians,” #15, in *Early Christian Writings*, 72–84. N.B. To say that one’s “words have the force of actions and his silences the significance of speech” is an example of the effect that the human person’s embodiment of the silence of Christ on the Cross has upon himself and upon others.

³⁸ von Balthasar, *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*, 63. This quotation of Ignatius is taken from von Balthasar since his text has a much smoother translation than Staniforth’s rendering of the same phrase in “The Epistle to the Ephesians,” #15. Ignatius’ observation that one is able to “be” in silence is significant because it is precisely a realization of who he is, which is who Christ reveals him to *be*: a silent listener. One discovers the truth of his being (as a listener) in silence. However, he not only recognizes the truth of his own being, but also he is able to recognize truth itself, for “truth can be recognized only from silence.” Romano Guardini, *Preparing Yourself for Mass* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1997), 14.

The Eternal Listener: A Model

If Christ is a Listener because his existence is openness to the Father, then the theological reason that the human person is a listener is because he is created, also in openness to the Father, upon the archetype of the eternal Listener. Indeed, since “relativity toward the other constitutes the human person,” he models Christ in his relation (intrinsic openness) to God and to others.³⁹ Thus, if man is created in the Word and as hearer of the Word, and if the Word is the eternal Listener, then I have a specifically theological basis for the claim that the person is ontological listening. One also begins to see that man’s ontological listening is an encounter in listening with the Listener, Jesus, the Incarnate Word.

Silence has an ontological dimension, which the nature of the person embodies, for he arises within the dialogical speech event.⁴⁰ Although the dialogicians do not use ontological categories, their insistence on the fact that the person is affected by relation gives me a necessary key: all human substance, in its ontological depth, is affected by dialogue because the person is created as a word in the Word. Augustine’s contribution to the notion of the person unites ontology and dialogical listening because, if man is created as a word in the Word—in the love of God—then ontological listening, which specifies man’s constitutive desire for God, lies at the inception of his very personhood.

If listening silence is an ontological readiness patterned on the eternal Listener, then it not only constitutes the human person, but it also connects anthropology with theology: the person is a listener in Jesus Christ, the eternal Listener; indeed, listening permeates his entire being. For, not only is he begotten from the Father, but also his being is

³⁹ Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 452.

⁴⁰ See Siegmund, “Silence and the Audibility of the Word . . . Part 1: An Anthropology of Listening.”

his being begotten; aptly is the Son described as an “arena of reception and response.”⁴¹ The eternal Son’s self-reception from the Father constitutes him simultaneously as Word and hearer of the Word.

If being a human person means being addressed by another within an already ongoing communion, then the Son grounds this reality in his communion with the Father. In the “eternally uninterrupted act of his own generation,” he receives the Word he is.⁴² But how, precisely, is the human person a listener in the eternal Listener? Man’s ontological listening reaches its fulfillment by participating in the Son’s listening to the Father, not as *the* Son but as an *adopted* son.⁴³ The act of adoption occurs also as a participation in the Cross with Mary: “Woman, here is your son.”⁴⁴ In fact, the Son’s obedient death (cf. Phil. 2:8)

⁴¹ von Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 32.

⁴² Cf. Siegmund, “Silence and the Audibility of the Word . . . Part 1: An Anthropology of Listening;” and von Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 31.

⁴³ Examples of Scriptural references, which refer to “adoption” include the following: Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:5–7. In his first “Homily on Ephesians,” John Chrysostom emphasizes Christ’s role. “Do you observe how that nothing is done without Christ? Nothing without the Father? The one has predestinated, the other has brought us near . . . For great indeed, are the blessings bestowed, yet are they made far greater in being bestowed through Christ; in that he sent not any servant, though it was to servants that he sent, but the Only-begotten Son himself.” John Chrysostom also comments upon Gal. 4:5–7. He refers to our “promotion to sonship” as one of the effects of the Incarnation. He explains, we have become sons because we have “put on Christ, who is the very son” and “we have received the Spirit of adoption.” He continues, “Had not we been first made sons, we could not have called him Father.” See John Chrysostom, “Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 1: Ephesians 1:1–1:10,” in *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians and Homilies on the Epistle to the Ephesians of S. John Chrysostom*, vol. 5 (London, England: Oxford, 1840), Eph. 1:4–5, and also *ibid.*, Galat. 4:4–7. Examples of Scriptural passages, which speak of the notion of the human person expressed in terms of “sonship” or “childhood” in his relation to God include the following: Lk. 6:35, 20:36; Jn. 1:12, 21:5; 1 Jn. 3:1–2.

⁴⁴ Jn. 19:26. It is interesting to note the original Greek for both verses twenty-six and twenty-seven of chapter nineteen: “γυναί, ἰδε ὁ υἱὸς σου . . . ἰδε ἡ μητέρα σου [Woman, here is your son . . . here is your mother].” The Greek word, “ἰδε” can also be translated as, “Listen!”

on the Cross in accord with the Father's will is the ultimate earthly moment, which concretizes his eternal listening. By his death in obedience to the Father's will, his sonship is made visible: having received himself from the Father, he returns that act of love by his own outpouring.⁴⁵

Conclusion

In part two of my arguing for contemplative listening as a fundamental act of the new evangelization, I highlighted Jesus Christ's act of listening as a revelation of his eternal sonship: he is the eternal Listener *par excellence* in the Trinity and, as such, he is the eternal archetype of the human. While many speculative issues surface on account of such a claim, I focused upon the notion of how listening as obedient readiness may be predicated of the eternal Son even though he seems naturally exempt from obedience. As an expression of traditional metaphysics, I developed—with the help of von Balthasar—Thomas' notion of the divine persons as subsistent relations. My key assertion is to maintain that, if the Son is the subsistent relation of sonship, then he receives himself from the Father. But such self-reception implies, as I showed, the Son's obedient readiness, which may be characterized as listening since the Son is both the eternal Word and the eternal listener of the Word he is. The ultimate theological reason that one is a listener, then, is because one is created on the model of Christ, the eternal Listener.



⁴⁵ For Scriptural passages referring to the theme of “outpouring,” see the following: Jn. 3:16, 19:34; Rom. 5:5; Phil. 2:6–8.

**SILENCE AND THE AUDIBILITY OF THE WORD: CONTEMPLATIVE
LISTENING AS A FUNDAMENTAL ACT OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION
PART 2: JESUS CHRIST, THE ETERNAL LISTENER**

SUMMARY

In the second part of her arguing for contemplative listening as a fundamental act of the new evangelization, the author turns to the theological perspective of Jesus Christ as the eternal Listener and, thus, focuses upon his act of listening, which is the unique personal form of his eternal divinity.

The author addresses the following issues. Granted that listening has to do with obedient readiness, how can one say it is in the eternal Son, who, being God, would seem to be naturally exempt from obedience? In order to answer this question, the author looks at the Balthasarian “enfleshment” of Thomas’ notion of the divine persons as subsistent relations. In brief, to say that the Son is the subsistent relation of sonship means that the Son receives himself from the Father. But this self-reception implies, the author argues, an obedient readiness. And, since the Son is Word, this obedient readiness translates into a “listening.” The Son is not only the eternal Word. He is also the eternal listener of the Word he is.

Within the Godhead, each person is his relation (of “opposition”) to the others and there is no difference between the person and his action. For example, the Son is his relation of sonship to the Father. But, one might ask, how could one speak of the Son’s obedience? How does one avoid subordinationism? The key is to see how the Son’s possession of divinity is compatible with a reception of it. If the Father is the “source and origin of all divinity,” the Son does, in fact, receive his divinity from the Father while, at the same time, he is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. That the Father generates the Son does not mean, as Arius asserted, that there was a time when the Son was not. Rather, the Son always possesses his divine sonship as being given from the Father, while the Father possesses divinity as being given away. Divinity is compatible with relationality in the mode of reception. In the Godhead, reception is perfection. There are a number of texts from Thomas that the author presents in favor of this argument. Having established that reception is perfection in the Godhead, the author develops how this receptivity encompasses obedience and listening. For, in his receiving, the Son performs an act that, by an intrinsic analogy, one may describe as the taking of the gift of the Father into himself. In this sense, the Son is obedient to the “sense” of the Father’s self-gift. But, in the case of the Son, he is the gift. Not only that, he is the gift as Word. This suggests, as the author argues, that the obedience that characterizes him as a divine person is something intrinsically analogous to listening. Here, then, we find the ultimate theological reason that we are listeners: we are listeners because we are created on the model of Christ, the eternal Listener.

KEYWORDS

Jesus Christ, listening, revelation, sonship, Trinity, God, metaphysics, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Thomas Aquinas, divine person, subsistent relation, human person, substance, obedience, the Word.

REFERENCES

- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. Torino, Italy: Edizioni San Paolo, 1999.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 1. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 5 vols. Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981.
- Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*. Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997.
- Gramatica, Aloisius, ed. *Bibliorum Sacrorum. Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*. Nova Editio. Citta del Vaticano: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1913.
- Guardini, Romano. *Preparing Yourself for Mass*. Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1997.
- Ignatius of Antioch. "The Epistle to the Ephesians." In *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*. Translated by Maxwell Staniforth. New York: Dorset Press, 1986, 72–84.
- Ignatius of Antioch. "The Epistle to the Magnesians." In *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*. Translated by Maxwell Staniforth. New York: Dorset Press, 1986, 85–92.
- John Chrysostom. "Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 1: Ephesians 1:1–1:10." In *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians and Homilies on the Epistle to the Ephesians of S. John Chrysostom*, vol. 5. London, England: Oxford, 1840.
- John Paul II. *Redemptoris Mater*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1995.
- Pius IX. *Ineffabilis Deus*. Apostolic Constitution Defining the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1995.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology." *Communio International Catholic Review* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 439–54.
- Siegmund, J. Marianne. "Silence and the Audibility of the Word: Contemplative Listening as a Fundamental Act of the New Evangelization. Part 1: An Anthropology of Listening." *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no. 4 (October–December 2017): 585–607.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *A Theology of History*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*. Translated by Adrian J. Walker. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.