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**SILENCE AND  
THE AUDIBILITY OF THE WORD:  
CONTEMPLATIVE LISTENING AS A FUNDAMENTAL  
ACT OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION.  
PART 1: AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF LISTENING**

One of the major themes of Pope John Paul II’s pontificate, the new evangelization, is realized in what he calls contemplating the face of Christ.<sup>1</sup> For, “Christ is the supreme teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught, but of *learning him*”; simply put, Christ is the “true program of the Christian life.”<sup>2</sup> To learn Christ, however, one contemplates his face with Mary by “listening in the Spirit to the Father’s voice, since ‘no one knows the Son except the Father’ (Mt. 11:27).”<sup>3</sup> What does this have to do with

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This article is a (slightly revised) fragment of: J. Marianne Siegmund, *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).

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II refers to this theme in several of his writings. Some of the Holy Father’s works, which develop this theme of contemplating the face of Christ include the following: *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2001), #15–20, 23–25, 28, 59; *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2002), #9–10, 15; *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2003), #53.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, #14, 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, #18.

the new evangelization? The answer is that it is precisely through this contemplative listening that one makes Christ “audible” to the world.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, my article will argue that this act of making Christ audible through contemplative listening is a fundamental act of the new evangelization.

In order to highlight some of the profound implications of this claim, I need to show that contemplative listening to Christ is the inner character of the reception of what *Gaudium et Spes* #22 refers to as Christ’s revelation of man to himself.<sup>5</sup> So much so, in fact, that this contemplative listening becomes a defining feature of the human person as Christologically revealed. Ultimately, this is because the human person enters into the truth of his being by participating in the Son’s own eternal being as contemplative listener. By the same token, it is in our being contemplative listeners in the event of encountering Christ that Christ, in his inmost being, and therefore, the Trinity, is presented to the world. This, I maintain, is the core of the new evangelization.

In the present work, then, I shall develop the assertion that Christ reveals man to himself as a listener. Listening is, as I will argue, a fundamental constitutive feature of the human person. By listening I mean a silent “letting be” that reveals the ontological depth of the person. Now, it is in the encounter with Christ that the person is revealed as a

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<sup>4</sup> One has only to note that a Doctor of the Church since 1997, St. Therese of Lisieux, who was a cloistered, contemplative nun, was declared Patronness of the Missions by Pope Pius XI on December 14, 1927. Therese de l’Enfant-Jesus et de la Sainte-Face, *Histoire d’une ame: manuscrits autobiographiques* (Editions du Cerf et Desclée De Brouwer, 1972), 326.

<sup>5</sup> “Christus, novissimus Adam, in ipsa revelatione mysterii Patris Eiusque amoris, hominem ipsi homini plene manifestat eique altissimam eius vocationem patefacit.” [Christ, the new Adam, in the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling].” While *patefacit* is idiomatically translated as “brings to light,” it literally means, “opens” or “lays open.” Christ “lays open” man’s calling, as we shall argue, at his death on the Cross. “Gaudium et Spes,” in *Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II: Constitutiones Decreta Declarationes* (Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), #22.

listener based upon the model of the personhood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Listener. For, as I will argue, “letting be,” or listening, is rooted in the Son’s eternal being within the Blessed Trinity.

In part one of my arguing for contemplative listening as a fundamental act of the new evangelization, I will explicate the anthropological dimension of listening. That Christ reveals man to himself as listener claims something about the depth of man’s nature as such. To elucidate this anthropological depth, I develop the notion that the human person is *capax Dei*. St. Augustine explains man’s capacity for God in terms of desire, noting that man “wishes to praise” God.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the human person can be fulfilled only in praising God: “he cannot be content unless he praises You.”<sup>7</sup> What, then, is the character of desire such that it can be fulfilled only in praising God? The answer is that desire is the yearning that the Infinite, who is God, would dictate the conditions of one’s own happiness. To be *capax Dei*, then, is to desire to receive the fullness of oneself from God—it is the “awareness” that one’s fulfillment is truly fulfilling precisely because it involves being possessed by God, who remains always greater. Another way of saying this is to assert that to be a *capax Dei* is to be a prayerful yearning to have the Infinite intervene in one’s life to dictate the conditions of one’s own fulfillment. In this anthropological notion of desire, man’s freedom encounters his truth only in encountering Christ, who is that secretly hoped for intervention of the Infinite.

My contention in part one, then, is that the powerful yearning implied in the notion of *capax Dei* can be aptly described as an obedient readiness to listen to the Word. In encountering the Word made flesh, the human person thus enters into the inmost truth of his being—as a listener.

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<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Silence has a negative connotation in our culture today. Indeed, society seeks to eradicate silence by filling public places, such as restaurants or airports, with noise. A reflective person, however, will readily agree that noise is bad for the soul and that each person needs moments and spaces of silence. In my arguing for contemplative listening as a fundamental act of the new evangelization, I want to articulate that silence represents more than a psychological need. I argue, in fact, that silence is constitutive of the very being of the human person. This silence is, at bottom, a listening: both to other persons, with whom one exists in communion, and to God.<sup>8</sup>

Because I claim that silence constitutes the ontological depth of the person, my initial task is to show its anthropological dimension. The first step (Section 1) is to explain silence in terms of listening, for it is attentive perception to the presence of another, which can be described as love in the form of an obedient readiness to receive the other.<sup>9</sup> I assert, however, that listening is more than two people actively willing to communicate; in fact, listening is primarily an ontological reality that constitutes the human person as such. My second point, then, is to explain (Section 2) that listening illustrates the nature of the person before it describes any action that one does. To illustrate my second point, I rely upon Hans Urs von Balthasar's analysis of the dialogue philosophers in *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*.<sup>10</sup> Next (Section 3), I consider Augustine's notion of the internal word, which is a judgment that con-

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<sup>8</sup> The very act of speech signifies that the person exists in relation; another person is already present in the idea of communication itself. Josef Pieper, *Abuse of Language-Abuse of Power*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>9</sup> In light of my understanding of listening as obedient readiness, it is interesting to note the etymology of the word "obey." It is a combination of the preposition *ob*, meaning "toward" and *-oedire*, which is akin to *audire*, the word for "hear." Given the etymology, then, I note that the two words, "listen" and "obey," are practically synonymous.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

forms to the Word.<sup>11</sup> His understanding of the internal word shall provide me with the assistance I need to claim the ontological depth of the person, who is a created word in the Word. The final point of my analysis (Section 4) is to show that, in my own interpretation of Augustine's internal word, I shall postulate that natural desire lies at the core of the person as an obedient readiness to hear the Word Incarnate.

### Section 1: Silence Is Listening

In the world of today, silence is thought of as an absence of noise or of speech. This "absence" is then typically regarded as something negative: as boring, sterile, or the sign of a failure to assert oneself. In reality, however, silence is not simply the expression of an absence. True silence is never just the external absence of sound or noise; true silence is a presence of attention.<sup>12</sup> For example, a person alone on top of a mountain may be physically surrounded by silence, but distracted within, thus preventing the listening presence of the moment to teach him. On the other hand, the solitary climber on the mountain, if he is truly silent, listens attentively to reality because he is alive to the beauty around him.

In *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger offers a few comments about silence. Rather than summarizing his thought, I simply focus upon a couple of sentences, which help me capture the breadth and depth of silence as listening. The key point of Ratzinger's remarks affirms that listening is an inward attention that transforms. Two sentences are particularly striking: "[L]istening must be the medium of an encounter; this encounter is the condition of an

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, IX, 2, 12, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991). To support my claims, I shall depend upon Book IX of this work, while indicating in occasional footnotes that other Augustinian texts lend themselves to the interpretations I suggest.

<sup>12</sup> The distinction between silence as the absence of sound and silence as the presence of attention suggests that, while all silence is not listening, all listening is, in fact, silence.

inner contact which leads to mutual comprehension. Reciprocal understanding, finally, deepens and transforms the being of the interlocutors.”<sup>13</sup> Ratzinger’s remarks from *The Nature and Mission of Theology* shall serve as a springboard to highlight three particular aspects of silence as listening, which comprise my own unfolding of his text. In my presentation, I also refer sporadically to other authors.

The first characteristic of silence as listening is that it is a waiting directed toward another by still, attentive perception toward the other’s presence. If listening is the method or condition of an encounter, as Ratzinger so indicates, then its initial act must be one of waiting.

A second characteristic that I may ascribe to silence as listening builds upon the aspect of other-directed waiting, for such waiting implies readiness to receive the other. This readiness indicates a willingness to welcome the other in the other’s whole being.

While the second dimension of silence emphasizes the listener who welcomes the other, the third dimension highlights the reciprocity of this welcoming. Dialogue is not just an alternation of speaking and listening; it is most fundamentally about what Ratzinger calls a “mutual comprehension.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, mutual comprehension is a shared attitude of being turned toward one another in an event of exchange that takes both people by surprise.<sup>15</sup> This mutual comprehension is what “deepens and

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debates*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 33. My understanding of silence or listening is comparable to what Guardini calls “inward presence.” Romano Guardini, *Preparing Yourself for Mass* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1997), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 33. Max Picard has a similar observation. He speaks of silence as an encounter in which one’s “inner contact” of anticipation and desire “leads to mutual comprehension.” Max Picard, *The World of Silence*, trans. Stanley Godman (South Bend, IN: Gateway Editions, Ltd., 1952), 95–96.

<sup>15</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 34. This “being turned toward” another is perfectly expressed in the Son, who is “turned toward” the Father: “καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν.” Literally, this translates as, “and the Word was toward God,” although πρὸς may also be translated as “with.” *Novum Testamentum*

transforms” those who participate in it.<sup>16</sup> Thus, “after the act of listening, I am another man, my own being is enriched and deepened because it is united with the being of the other and, through it, with the being of the world.”<sup>17</sup> From these dimensions of silence, it follows that listening silence means that one becomes a space for the other, and vice versa. Listening silence is a form of communication, in which the listener gives his being by receiving that of the other.

## Section 2: Listening Is Constitutive of the Person

In the foregoing analysis, I spoke of silence, which is attentive presence as deep as listening. I described this listening primarily in terms of conscious acts of two personal beings. But, listening is not simply a conscious activity. Listening is also—and primarily—an ontological reality that constitutes the human person as such. In order to substantiate listening’s ontological dimension, I first develop the notion of mutuality with which I concluded section one, inasmuch as it points to an event embracing and transcending the conversation partners in their simultaneity. The early and mid-twentieth century “philosophers of dialogue,” such as Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Ferdinand Ebner, suggest how this type of dialogical event is in some way the constitutive matrix of personal existence. A brief survey of their thought will thus help me progress toward locating silence within the core of the person. For my discussion of the dialogicians, I rely upon Hans Urs von Balthasar’s perceptive analysis in his *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*.<sup>18</sup> Among the dialogicians, one in particular, Franz Rosenzweig, will be especially pertinent to my argument.

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*Graece*, ed. Eberhard and Erwin Nestle, with Barbara and Kurt Aland (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1999), Jn. 1:1.

<sup>16</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> von Balthasar, *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*. For the full text of the dialogicians, including von Balthasar’s discussion of Franz Rosenzweig, see *ibid.*, 23–29. Several titles of Rosenzweig have recently been translated into English. Note especially

Rosenzweig explains that the speaker is always first a listener, since he cannot speak unless he is first addressed; and, if he has always already been addressed, he has always already listened.<sup>19</sup>

Rosenzweig defines the human person as one who exists in dialogue. He does so by emphasizing the gift-character of speech: “in ‘spoken exchange’, in which the event of dialogue is withdrawn from the power of both partners and is granted to them only as a gift, what occurs is not merely an interpersonal revelation, but one accorded to both ‘from above’.”<sup>20</sup> For Rosenzweig, then, the speech event “comes down from above,” meaning that it is something that transcends, embraces, and makes possible the dialogical mutuality of “I” and “thou.”<sup>21</sup>

Rosenzweig’s emphasis on the gift-character of speech underscores the radicality of the dialogical event. The person exists enfolded within an already occurring dialogical exchange. He has always already been addressed by “the thou who calls” him.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, he has always already been addressed as a “thou” and only as such has he found himself as an “I.” Only, this “I” exists, from its very roots, “with” the “thou.” In this sense, Rosenzweig can be read as saying that, constituted within the speech event, the person is generated as one who has always already listened and, in listening, opened himself to the presence of the other. Thus, even though Rosenzweig does not speak the ontological language of traditional metaphysics, nonetheless, he shows that listening as communication is at the very root of personal being.

Because dialogue begins “from above,” it has a reality of its own that transcends—yet encompasses—both “I” and “thou.” The “third-

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the following: *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. Paul W. Franks and Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2000), and *On Jewish Learning*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, trans. William Wolf (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> von Balthasar, *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* Picard asserts the ontological dimension of silence as well, for he states that it “belongs to the basic structure of man.” Picard, *The World of Silence*, 15.

ness” of the speech event ensures that what I am calling listening somehow constitutes the person. To be a person means to be constituted in the dialogical speech event as one who has been addressed.<sup>23</sup> Once again, if the person has been addressed, he is, at an ontological level—though the dialogicians do not speak in such terms—a listener.<sup>24</sup> In one respect, I need to go beyond the dialogicians, who do not speak in ontological categories. In this manner, they threaten to let the speech event lose its priority over human action and collapse into a project of constructive will. By providing ontological categories, however, I seek to preserve the dialogicians’ own insight: namely, that listening constitutes the human person in a way that simultaneously enriches traditional ontology.

Von Balthasar observes here that the mutuality of the dialogical speech event gives the “I”–“thou” relation a constitutive openness to something like a transcendent grounding. Although, as von Balthasar notes, the dialogicians’ own theological commitments are sometimes ambiguous, mutual listening constitutes persons against the backdrop of a divine Word. Developing this insight, one could say that God not only speaks the human person into being, but also speaks him into being within a dialogically structured communion. Being spoken into being by God is important because the creatureliness of man in the speech event is needed to secure the ontological depth of listening.

Listening-as-communication is not only something one *does*, but also, and more importantly, as the dialogicians imply, listening is something that one *is* precisely because one has always already been addressed and has listened, within the dialogical speech event. But, to speak of the person as constituted within the dialogical event seems in tension with some forms of traditional metaphysics that posit relation as

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<sup>23</sup> von Balthasar, *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Since the dialogicians believe they aim at the most radical dimension of the person, they concern themselves with what I would consider ontology, though they do not apply this term; for them, “ontology” is static.

external to one's being.<sup>25</sup> In fact, relation cannot be so construed; the dialogue philosophers are correct to point beyond the Aristotelian notion of relation as accidental to show that it is internal, in that listening is at the core of the person. However, the dialogicians err in not using ontological terminology because, unless one has some underlying sense of being, the notion of creation vanishes. With section three, then, I sketch Augustine's understanding of the internal word in order to suggest its dialogical implications, and so to point to the reconciliation and mutual transformation of ontology with the dialogical event.

### **Section 3: The "Verbum Interius" and Man's Being as Dialogue**

Before using Augustine as a resource for my project, I have to consider the objection that Augustine is the champion of a monological view of the person expressed, so it is said, in the "psychological analogy" of the Trinity. Indeed, this "psychological analogy" has led many critics of Augustine to claim that he has given rise to a "modern self," particularly in the "*res cogitans* of Rene Descartes."<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, "contemporary theological critique," which accuses Augustine of "inwardness," actually distorts, according to Michael Hanby, his Trinitarian doctrine.<sup>27</sup> Hanby asserts that one prominent critic of Augustine, Charles Taylor, offers an explication of "Augustinian 'inwardness'

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<sup>25</sup> For Aristotle, since "everything except primary substances is either predicable of a primary substance or present in a primary substance," and, since primary substances are "the entities which underlie everything else," relation is not a substance, but an accident. Aristotle, *Organon*, 2a 33–34, 2b 15–17, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, Inc., 1941). Aristotle speaks of relation as one of the nine accidents in chapter seven of this same work (6a 36–8b 24).

<sup>26</sup> Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (New York: Routledge, 2003), 6. For an extensive treatment of these debates, see chapter one of his book.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

[that] largely neglects” an authentic reading of his Trinitarianism.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Hanby maintains that, rather than opposing Augustine and the Cappadocians as most often happens to Augustine’s disadvantage, a vein of similarity exists between them; both have an interpersonal dimension in their understanding of the Trinity.<sup>29</sup> Thus, I aim to suggest, although unable to develop it in full, an interpretation of Augustine that endorses the dialogical and communal nature of the person as listener.

In an article on the Holy Spirit as *Communio*, Cardinal Ratzinger confirms the interpersonal interpretation of Augustine, which Hanby aims to defend.<sup>30</sup> His key assertion is that, because the Father and the Son are united in the Holy Spirit, the nature of God is intrinsically personal. Some of Ratzinger’s particularly striking texts, which attest to the Spirit’s essence as “the *communio* of Father and Son,” are the following.<sup>31</sup> The “mediation of Father and Son comes to full unity” when it is seen as *communio*, as the Third Person of the Trinity.<sup>32</sup> The Father and the Son are united in the Holy Spirit precisely because, if their “mediation back into unity” was not another person, it “would break up

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Hanby records a passage from Augustine that Charles Taylor uses to support his accusation of Augustine’s inwardness: “Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.” Augustine, *De Vera Relig.*, XXXIX.72, quoted in Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Hanby defends Augustine against the charge of an inwardness that distorts God’s self-communication by arguing the exact opposite: Augustine’s very “starting point” is, in fact, “always a response to God’s self-communication.” Hanby bases such a claim on the fact that, because “Augustinianism begins and ends in prayer,” and prayer is a response to God, one may not validly maintain that his Trinitarian theology lacks an interpersonal dimension. Von Balthasar likewise advocates that Augustine’s “central work, *The Confessions*, [is] an utterance of himself to God in the form of prayer.” Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 13–14; von Balthasar, *Theologic II: Truth of God*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “The Holy Spirit as *Communio*: Concerning the Relationship of Pneumatology and Spirituality in Augustine,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25:2 (Summer, 1998): 324–339.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

the dialogue as dialogue,” for dialogue is confirmed by both returning “into unity.”<sup>33</sup> Ratzinger helps to show, then, that the role of the Holy Spirit as *communio* reveals an interpersonal dimension of the Trinity. Because the Spirit is the unity of Father and Son, who is described as “person as unity, unity as person,” the nature of God is intrinsically personal.<sup>34</sup>

There is, to be sure, an intrapersonal dimension to Augustine’s psychological analogy. However, the intrapersonal analogy of the Trinity presupposes an interpersonal dimension. But further, such an interpretation of Augustine seems to suggest the dialogical and communal nature of the person as listener, for the purpose of the analogy is to explain how the human person can come to know the Trinity. Given the rendering of Augustine, which both Hanby and Ratzinger offer, a dialogical moment arises for the person, who is created as a word in the Word. Because Augustine asserts that God speaks man into being, the person is *imago Dei* as a word in the Word; there most certainly exists a dialogical interpretation of the human person in the writings of Augustine.<sup>35</sup> This dialogical interpretation of the person provides an ontological grounding for listening, even though it is necessary to complement this grounding with an analysis of horizontal communion, which is intrinsic to the image of God in man.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Augustine’s vertical view of dialogue is complemented by a horizontal one. For example, see: Augustine, “Tractates on the Gospel of John 1-10,” in *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 78, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1988): Tractate 1 *On John 1:1-5*; 12, 1; 16, 2; Tractate 5 *On John 1:33*; 2. See also: Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 13, 12, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958). Thomas also touches upon Augustine’s explanation of all things created through the Word. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Part I*, Aquinas Scripture Series, Vol. 4, trans. James A. Weisheipl with Fabian R. Larcher (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1980), Lecture 2, 71. Given the scope of this work, I simply note this fact, rather than develop it.

Rather than Augustine modeling the Trinity on the individual, personal soul as a solipsistic looking into oneself, one may interpret him in a manner that highlights man's dynamism in his activity of fully realizing himself in God. And, one's activity of realizing himself in God is itself a gift that has been given; man's very response to this gift is also a gift. In other words, while it is truly an act on the part of man to realize himself in God, the very core of this action is located in the gift.<sup>36</sup> "Selfhood is doxological. It is only through delight in Christ, a gift of the mutual delight between the Father and the Son, that 'I' can finally be myself."<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the human person is "constituted precisely in activity" because he has the gift of "effusive love" as his origin and his coming to be great is "a consequence of the Father's love of the Son (which is also the Son's love of the Father), being more fully realized in them."<sup>38</sup>

Now, highlighting man's dynamism is relevant to my argument because self-realization as gift involves the internal word, which is the person's own fulfillment of being the word God speaks him to be.<sup>39</sup> Although man generates the internal word, it is, more importantly, something given to him.<sup>40</sup> In contradistinction to a solipsistic Augustine, one finds a dynamic in this interpretation that reflects the person, spoken into being, as listener.

I have just said that Augustine's understanding of the human person as the image of God sheds light on man's dialogical nature. And, it

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<sup>36</sup> Man's response to the gift is itself modeled on Christ, the archetype of the human. In part two, I shall discuss Christ as the model for man.

<sup>37</sup> Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 91.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–91.

<sup>39</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, IX, 2, 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 2, 12–13. In Book IX, Augustine asserts the origin and gift-character of the internal word. It comes "in that eternal truth according to which all temporal things were made" (*Ibid.*, IX, 2, 12). In creating the human person, God gives him the internal word as a gift and this gift distinguishes his very being as a being-spoken-to, which enables him to respond. Thus, one's response is an internal word and the internal word is listening because it reflects how he is created.

is precisely Augustine's concept of the internal word, which reveals this dialogical nature because the human being is a "being-spoken to." After defining the internal word, then, I summarize the role it plays in Augustine's system and its relevance for my argument: that the internal word is a reflection of how one is spoken into being by God's Word.

In order to maintain that the structure of the human person is listening, I briefly sketch Augustine's understanding of the internal word from Book IX of *The Trinity* in light of the passage below.

Thus it is that in that eternal truth according to which all temporal things were made we observe with the eye of the mind the form according to which we are and according to which we do anything with true and right reason either in ourselves or in bodies. And by this form we conceive true knowledge of things, which we have with us as a kind of word that we beget by uttering inwardly, and that does not depart from us when it is born.<sup>41</sup>

For Augustine, thinking is speaking, or producing an internal, spiritual word or judgment.<sup>42</sup> But, in order to make a true judgment one relies on an absolute standard of truth, which comes from the mind of God. In this sense, every internal word that one begets by an inward utterance is a participation in the divine ideas.<sup>43</sup> Since these divine ideas are contained in the Word, it is also a participation in the Word.

The notion of the internal word plays a significant role in Augustine's system because it enables one to claim that the person's very generation of an internal word is his participation in the Word, in whom he has been created. In the mind of God, there is, according to Augustine, an idea of each person.<sup>44</sup> When one forms an internal word, he makes a true judgment not only of God's idea of the world, or of things in the world, but also he lives up to God's idea of who he is, as a human person; for, the person is one who speaks the internal word in conformi-

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

ty with the divine mind expressed in the Word. Insofar as the internal word is formed “with true and right reason,” one conforms oneself to the reason of one’s own being.<sup>45</sup> The internal word, then, can be understood as a gift that “abides within” because, when one generates the internal word, he possesses himself—his word—according to the manner in which the Word desires him to be.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the internal word is significant because, when one utters the internal word, he echoes the fact that he is spoken into being by God himself, through his Word. Man’s participation in the Word shows how the “being spoken to” of the person brings word, or listening to the ontological core of his very nature.

Having noted the significance of the internal word in Augustine’s system, exactly how does the person’s generation of the internal word specify his existence in an ontological act of listening? I have just explained that the internal word is a reflection of how the human person is spoken into being by God’s Word. And, since forming an internal word according to the mind of God is participating in the word God desires one to be, listening constitutes the human person. Augustine’s internal word, then, is not just an inner speaking, but also an inner listening because one’s generation of the inner word is his participation in the Word. But, to participate in the Word is to exist in an ontological act of listening. Thus, Augustine brings listening to the core of the person by showing how the internal word reflects God speaking one into being.

Previously, I noted that the dialogicians improve on traditional ontology concerning relation; if the person is constituted in the dialogical speech event, then relation is internal to the person because he is open to another at the core of his being. Their absence of speaking ontologically, however, easily leads to the collapse of the speech event from gift into construction. In order to reconcile the dialogicians’ in-

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

sight with ontological language, I again employ the assistance of Augustine.

#### Section 4: Man as a “Hearer of the Word”

I have explained that Augustine understands the internal word as a judgment of the person in conformity with the ideas that exist in the Word.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, to be in conformity with the Word indicates that the person fulfills himself as a word spoken by God in the Word, which suggests, as I have shown in section three, that listening constitutes the ontology of the human person.<sup>48</sup> It remains, then, to show in this fourth section, that, in my interpretation of Augustine’s internal word, the human person’s natural desire for God lies at the core of the person as an obedient readiness to hear the Word. I develop the role of appetite in the generation of the internal word on the hypothesis that appetite corresponds to the natural desire for God (*capax Dei*). But, if appetite does correspond to natural desire, then one may claim that desire for God lies at the core of the person as an obedient readiness to hear the Word. Thus, in order to demonstrate that listening as communication specifies the person’s desire for God as an obedient readiness to hear the Word, I again appeal to Book IX of Augustine’s *The Trinity*.<sup>49</sup>

Referring to Augustine’s text on the internal word in section three, this word is a judgment one makes which conforms to the ideas that exist in God’s mind.<sup>50</sup> But further, the person fulfills himself as a word spoken by God in the Word.<sup>51</sup> And, to be fulfilled in the Word implies that one’s generation of the internal word is itself a participa-

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> With this following section, I shall draw almost exclusively on the second chapter of Book IX from Augustine’s work, *The Trinity*.

<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, IX, 2, 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

tion in the Word.<sup>52</sup> Because the person has been spoken into being by God, his ontological constitution is to be in communion with him as a participation in the Word. And, to participate in the Word by whom one is created implies that listening is constitutive of the person. The generation of an internal word is listening *to* the Word, or listening *to* the world *in* the Word.

My next task is to confirm that man's listening to the Word is a participation in the Word. In order to understand how the person's listening is a participation in the Word, however, I need to explain the role of love in the formation of the inner word. "Before" the internal word is actually formed, love is at the origin of its formation as an appetite. In chapter two of Book IX, Augustine speaks of the inner word, begotten in love. He says: "This word is conceived in love of either the creature or the Creator."<sup>53</sup> Love is at the origin of the internal word, for Augustine claims that it impels the birth of the word inside the person.<sup>54</sup> My interpretation of this impulse of love is listening. It is precisely this listening which is at the core of one's being because listening precedes the word as an appetite, for one is fully a little word who listens himself into being by participating in the divine Word. Because the human person desires to be truly what God would have him be, the generation of the internal word occurs in a natural love of God that is a listening.

Although some mistakenly claim that Augustine places love after the word, the issue is, in fact, more complex. Augustine sees love from two different perspectives. On the one hand, love is the matrix in which the word is formed and makes sense: "this word is conceived in love of

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<sup>52</sup> One participates in the Word as a word because he is a reflection and a response to God's creative act of calling him forth. Because God calls him forth, listening reveals the person as both a word and a listening of that word. Similarly, God utters the divine Word, but also the Word listens to the Word that he is. He proceeds from the Father by whom he is spoken and this corresponds to listening and silence in the human person.

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, IX, 2, 13.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

either the creature or the Creator.”<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, love is focused activity of the will that presupposes an articulated word: “love, like something in the middle, joins together our word and the mind it is begotten from, and binds itself in with them as a third element in a non-bodily embrace, without any confusion.”<sup>56</sup> One may interpret this distinction in the following way. Love in the first sense, as the matrix in which the word is formed, is actually an ontological silence in the sense of a constitutive readiness or obedience. The second aspect, however, is—at least ideally—a conscious recapitulation of the first.<sup>57</sup> Thus, one finds a link to the notion of natural desire as obedient readiness because the movement of love, from the first aspect to the second through the word, is an expression of the desire to be a participation in the Word uttered into being through the Word. Therefore, one may claim that listening is the innate, ontological desire of man that God speak to him.

Augustine’s two-fold understanding of love highlights how the human person is characterized by listening. If one’s generation of an internal word is an interior echo of his being spoken into being, then one may conclude that the word (speech) coincides with “silent” receptivity of one’s very being as a word-like participation in the Word; indeed, it reflects how one is created. Thus, love is both the root of the internal word and the person’s desire to participate in the Word. But, in my interpretation of Augustine, one’s desire to participate in the Word is the same as the natural desire to see God. I interpret this natural de-

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> I illustrate Augustine’s two-fold distinction of love with a quick glance toward the Blessed Trinity. The Father begets the Son in Love, who is the Holy Spirit. The Word is begotten in Love. And, it is precisely the Holy Spirit (Love) who “binds together” the Father and the Son, from whom he is spirated as from a single principle. Note, as well, a Conciliar statement from Lyons II: “We confess faithfully and devoutly that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from Father and Son, not as from two principles but from one, not by two spirations but by one only.” The Second General Council of Lyons: *Constitution on the Blessed Trinity and on the Catholic Faith* (1274), #321, in *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. J. Neuner, S.J., and J. Dupuis, S.J. (New York: Alba House, 1990).

sire as the obedient readiness to hear the Word. And, if man's natural desire to see God is the same as obedient readiness, one may claim that listening constitutes the human person.

Although modern critics have argued that Augustine's Trinitarian theology is monological, I have shown, with the help of Hanby, Ratzinger, and Augustine, himself, that one may articulate the opposite position. Augustine's concept of the internal word gives rise to a more dialogical account of the human person, for it demonstrates how one is spoken into being as a word by the Word. This dialogical interpretation of the human person spoken into being by God provides an ontological grounding for listening, despite the fact that it needs to be complemented with a horizontal analysis of man in communion with others. Specifically, Augustine helps one to see that one's very generation of the internal word, conceived in the love of God, is his participation in the Word. And, one's participation in the Word is the ontological act of listening. Because I have interpreted the internal word as one's natural desire for God—which is an obedient readiness to hear the Word—love, as the matrix in which the word is formed, is an ontological listening as a constitutive readiness or obedience.

While Augustine focuses upon the person as spoken into being by God, the dialogicians locate listening at the ontological core of the human person as such. Maintaining that the speech event embraces, yet transcends, those in conversation, they argue that it constitutes the matrix of one's existence. With both the dialogicians' claim that listening lies at the ontological core of the human person and Augustine's account of man as spoken into being by God, I may assert my central argument: listening constitutes the human person as an obedient readiness to hear and to obey the Incarnate Word.

Because listening is located at the level of one's existence, man's deepest being is an ontological readiness to receive and obey God's Word. It is precisely this desire that is the heart of what is meant by "natural desire" to see God. At the core of the person, there is not just a

restless striving for the infinite, but also there is a remaining “serenely-listeningly” in God’s hands, at his disposal. Augustine helps to show, therefore, that the human person exists as a created word who has been given the word he is by being called into existence; such ontology radiates the love of God in the person’s very structure.

The Christian understands his “existence as answer to the word, the *logos* that bears up and holds all things.”<sup>58</sup> For, he is “a being called (by grace) to hear and believe God’s Word. But, as part of this call, he is also summoned to proclaim this Word ‘even to the very ends of the world’.”<sup>59</sup> And, man proclaims the word by being a word; it is precisely in his encounter with the Word made flesh that man enters into the inmost truth of his being—he is a listener in the eternal Listener, Jesus Christ, who is the model for man’s listening.

### Conclusion

The above analysis shows the ontological depth of listening in the human person. This ontological depth automatically opens to revelation, because it is ultimately a readiness to hear God’s Word. The dialogicians point to this ontological depth even though they do not use ontological categories, for they claim that the human person exists in dialogue. In fact, they hold that listening so constitutes the person that it describes who he *is*, before it says what he *does*. The dialogicians, then, are helpful in their characterization of the person as constituted by the

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<sup>58</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 43.

<sup>59</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 75. Von Balthasar quotes from the Book of Acts. The full reference is, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts: 1:8).” It is interesting to note that the Greek word for “witness” is μαρτυρεω, which means, among other possible renderings, “to bear witness, testify, attest, be a witness.” The English word “martyr” comes from μαρτυρεω. The Greek Bible I use throughout this work is the following: *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle and Aland.

dialogical speech event. However, their failure to use ontological categories with the reality they describe ultimately makes their own insight, that listening constitutes the human person, unsustainable. The ontological depth of listening, however, is maintained when the creatureliness of the human person in the speech event is taken into account. For, the reality of the speech event retains its priority over human action when the person is understood as a creature.<sup>60</sup> Further, traditional ontology ought to benefit from the insight of the dialogue philosophers. Describing listening at the core of the human person offers a dynamic that opens the person to relation with God and with others by one's very structure. This openness to relation means that, in one's very constitution, the person is in communion—with God, and with other human beings.

To remedy the situation of the dialogicians, I turn to Augustine, who provides the ontological depth I seek in his notion of the internal word. By producing the internal word, one realizes the “the form according to which” he is because that form is precisely a speaking in internal words that reflects the Word and the ideas of creatures in the Word.<sup>61</sup> The notion of the internal word, then, helps me to secure the ontological depth of listening by describing the person as a created word in the Word. Augustine helps with a second point as well. In order to show that listening has an ontological grounding, one sees how it specifies man's natural desire for God, which lies at the core of the person as an obedient readiness to hear the Word Incarnate. Given this anthropological understanding of desire, one is able to posit that the human person faces the truth of his being by encountering Christ, who is the secretly hoped for intervention in his life.

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<sup>60</sup> The fact that man is created signifies that he belongs first to God. Because creation means that the human person is *given*, it indicates that he is open and listening from the core of his being.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, IX, 2, 12.

Augustine alone, however, is not sufficient to see the depth of man's ontological listening because he does not speak of the horizontal dimension of the human person as one in communion with others. Both the dialogue philosophers and Augustine together, however, enable one to see that the person's very substance is dialogical horizontally (dialogicians) because it is dialogical vertically (Augustine).

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**SILENCE AND THE AUDIBILITY OF THE WORD: CONTEMPLATIVE LISTENING AS A FUNDAMENTAL ACT OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION. PART 1: AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF LISTENING**

SUMMARY

In part one of her arguing for contemplative listening as a fundamental act of the new evangelization, the author explicates the anthropological dimension of listening. Her analysis consists of four sections. Section one explains silence in terms of listening, for it is attentive perception to the presence of another, which can be described as love in the form of an obedient readiness to receive the other; listening, however, is more than two people actively willing to communicate: it is primarily an ontological reality that constitutes the human person as such. Section two claims that listening illustrates the nature of the person before it describes any action that one does; it relies upon Hans Urs von Balthasar's analysis of the dialogue philosophers in his *Theo-logic II: Truth of God*. Section three considers Augustine's notion of the internal word, which is a judgment that conforms to the Word (Jesus Christ); the author argues that to be in conformity with the Word indicates that the person fulfills himself as a word spoken by God in the Word, which suggests that listening constitutes the ontology of the human person. Section four shows that the human person's natural desire for God postulates his obedient readiness to hear the Word Incarnate.

KEYWORDS

contemplative listening, new evangelization, listening, silence, obedience, ontology, reality, human, person, nature, relation, dialogue, dialogicians, Augustine, internal word, the Word, God.

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