

Personal Relationship between God and Human Persons : in the Center of our Human Reality and Christian Theology

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**Boston College School of Theology and Ministry
Brighton, Massachusetts**

Personal Relationship between God and Human Persons
– In the Center of our Human Reality and Christian Theology –

STL THESIS

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of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree
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INTRODUCTION

Looking back to the fourteen years of my religious life and within seven years of theological studies I found a well-recognizable process of seeking and finding God, and a deep desire to express in words for others what I was experiencing, how God was present in my life, and how this experiences were related to the philosophical and theological insight we were studying. Looking back to this process, I have to admit, that my experiences of God and the deep desire for coming closer to God formed the starting point of this thesis. As a result, in the last few years of theological studies I have been looking for a deeper understanding of our human reality and of the nature of the personal relationship with God that is at the center of Christian theology and spirituality. Reflecting on our Christian tradition through the research and readings of these years, and also through my experiences of personal changes in my relationship with God, I came to the conclusion that the reality of how one actually sees God and one's relationship to God is going to influence one's desires, one's decisions, and the habit of one's life. The whole person changes in one's relationship with God. The centrality of this subject matter in my personal life is the first reason I have chosen to reflect and work on this topic.

Beyond my personal interest, however, there is currently a more comprehensive and cultural issue as well; namely, the process of depersonalization in our western societies, as Max Weber describes it, through which people are becoming more and more objects of consumerism and not the persons they originally are. This is the reason why these two topics – the important role of personal relationships in our human life, and how our human identity formation is influenced by a personal relationship to God – came more intensively into the center of my interest in these last few years. I was looking for a basic understanding of human reality, upon

which it is possible to build our Christian theology and spirituality. The starting point of my research was the conviction and the well-known statement from the Book of Genesis, that God created us in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26) and continually works to draw us into a community with Godself and with one another. The main questions behind the research of my thesis were: What does it mean from our Christian tradition that we are created in the image of God; and how does such an image of God influence our image of ourselves as human persons? How does our encounter with God change us as disciples, including our desires and our self-understanding? Is there any possibility to describe this deepening and transforming process of our relationship with God? During my reading and conversations about these topics I encountered a great diversity of approaches. Some people do not believe in God at all and think that belief is just a matter of fantasy and illusion. Others see God as an independent energy which they can experience but to which they cannot really relate. Others believe in a personal God, who relates to them and cares about them, and so forth. But there are other people around me who are seeking a personal experience of God and a personal relationship with God. The topic of my thesis arose from a realized sense that this is a crucial question for many people in our western culture. Thus, I have a certain hope that this study will offer a systematic reflection on the topic of a personal relationship between God and human persons and that it may help the reader to reflect one's own personal relationship with God and help us all to come closer to God.

My thesis has three chapters. In the first chapter I am going to introduce a philosophical approach to personhood, which looks for an answer of the process of depersonalization in our modern western societies. In contrast to approaches that rely on philosophical perspectives on the human person that stress independence, individuality, and autonomy, my approach will rely on the work of the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray. Moving beyond the individualism of

the Cartesian self (“I think”), he begins with human persons as agents (“I do”), because as persons we are always in relation with others. Human being is essentially, radically interpersonal; we are persons in relation.

In the second chapter, I am going to move over to a theological approach to personhood. Using the Trinitarian theology of John Zizioulas, I turn to the Christian understanding of the triune God and examine its consequences for Christian anthropology. The Christian faith holds that God is one and, at the same time, God is relation in Godself; in other words, God is Trinity. Based on Zizioulas research on the Cappadocian Fathers and their insights, I am going to present a theological approach concerning personhood and its consequences in Christians’ lives.

In the third chapter, lastly, I am going to turn to the deepening relationship between God and human persons, which based on the call initiated by God. First of all I will have a closer look at Jesus and His way of calling and relating people, in which Jesus reaches the whole person, not just one’s mind, or the intellect. This is the reason why I am going to turn to the human body which seems to play a very important role in our relationship with God. The whole person is involved in this personal relationship. Finally, I am going to examine the process of this relationship with God. A process, which transforms people from a selfish “I” to a person who becomes more and more capable of accepting love and of loving others in a way that manifests the self-giving love of God. When these words are not simple words but a genuine personal experience in one’s life, one’s relationship with God becomes the center of one’s whole human reality. God has given us everything God has. This divine self-giving can draw us out of ourselves and out of the temptation to be individuals closed in on ourselves. We begin to realize that we are not alone on our way; God is with us. When we experience this love of God, we begin to change. Our desires, our self-understanding, and all of our relationships change as well.

In the third and final chapter of this thesis, I will reflect on this process of change and transformation in light of our bodily existence.

CHAPTER ONE: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO PERSONHOOD

In the beginning of the 20th century, Max Weber, the German sociologist and political economist, called many people's attention to the ongoing process in the western societies. He points out that the bureaucratic administration becomes more and more dominant in these societies as a consequence of the developing monetary economies. While Weber analyzes the several advantages of bureaucratic organization (like precision, speed, unambiguity, continuity, unity, strict subordination, etc.¹), he also points out that bureaucracy leads the society to depersonalization. He says, "In the bureaucratic state apparatus, the political man acts just like the economic man, in a matter-of-fact manner 'without regard to the person,' *sine ira et studio*, without hate and therefore without love."² In the bureaucratic system there is no place for emotions, for personal relationships; the understanding about the person as a relational being does not matter anymore. In this system the person becomes more and more an independent individual. This thought is strengthened by those modern existentialist philosophies which are based on the Cartesian thought of the person. This bureaucratic scheme leads to depersonalization, which is, in Weber's view, one of the biggest problems of the modern societies and going to be a real challenge in our modern age.

Weber's good friend and the influential Protestant German theologian Ernst Troeltsch gives a theological answer for this challenge of the modern age. The essence of his answer is that

¹ Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology* (New York: New York-Oxford University Press, 1958), 214-216.

² *Ibid.*, 333-334.

Christ is the one who saves us from depersonalization. In his ‘*Glaubenslehre*’ Troeltsch emphasizes the incarnation of Christ, because the incarnation insists that all human beings can experience God as another person. “The ancient dogma pursued the metaphysical path vigorously, believing that the true solution lay in its doctrine of the incarnation.”³ It means, if we can experience God as person, our personal relationship develops with God, which personal relationship leads us to the communion with God, and also with other people. Troeltsch emphasizes this by predicting that the historical character of Christianity as a religion of personality will develop according to the following idea: “Human souls redeemed and sanctified through communion with the living God, raised up to God and bound to a realm that comes from God and is directed toward God, a realm of personalities inseparably bound together by religious love.”⁴ This is the hope and the good news in Troeltsch’s theological thought, which the Church can offer today to the people in the modern societies.

Moving in the same direction of Ernst Troeltsch’s theological insight, the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray opens up a philosophical approach, which is going to contrast the approaches that rely on different perspectives on the human person that simply stress independence, individuality, and autonomy. Moving beyond the individualism of the Cartesian self (“I think”), he begins and looks at human persons as agents (“I do”), because as persons we are always in relation with others. Human being is essentially, radically interpersonal; as a consequence, we are persons in relation. This is the core of Macmurray’s approach to the human person, which he expressed in his Gifford Lectures (1953-54). His way of thinking gives a new understanding how we look at the human person and his/her relation to the world and not lastly

³ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 100.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

his/her relation to God. In the following steps, I am going to go deeper into the details of this approach and its consequences. First of all, I examine the field of the personal reality of human beings; what this personal field means from a philosophical and practical perspective. Secondly, I regard the understanding of community from the human personal relationship. Finally, I am going to reach the religious dimension of the human personal existence.

I. The Field of the Personal

The philosophical tradition in the past centuries – based upon a principle from Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* – had a profound influence in the development of human thinking and continues to influence our thinking as well. In the first volume of Macmurray’s work: ‘The Self as Agent’, the author criticizes that philosophical tradition as being too theoretical and egocentric; and as a result, this basic principle was the main cause which leads in the middle of the twentieth century to “the crisis of the personal.”⁵ What does Macmurray understand by this expression crisis of the personal? He sees especially two signs of such a crisis. First, it has shown up in the decline of religious belief. In the 20th century atheism and agnosticism emerged throughout the western world. Second, the increasing threat to the failure of personal freedom as the result from imperialist policy and unbelief. In my reading these are the two main reasons why Macmurray is looking for a different basic principle of philosophical thought in the field of the personal.

Breaking with the former way of the philosophical tradition Macmurray shows that the core of the human self is primarily ‘agent’ rather than ‘subject’. In this terminology the self-as-agent acts while the self-as-subject knows. This basic distinction is the starting point in Macmurray’s conception that pure thought is secondary in relation to action and depends upon

⁵ John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 17-38.

action. He says, “Our knowledge of the world is primarily an aspect of our action in the world. We can only think about what we already know. This primary knowledge is the knowledge that arises in action.”⁶ The primacy of action is central for Macmurray because of the important role of the other person. The possibility that one can act is dependent upon other beings as agents. He is convinced that the Self is a person and because of this fact, his/her personal reality is constituted by its relationship with other persons.

Before we consider the nature of the basic human personal relationships, let us first reflect on what Macmurray understands by the expression ‘field of the personal’. He says: “The field of the personal is defined by a personal attitude to other persons. The personal attitude is the attitude we adopt when we enter into personal relation with others and treat them as persons.”⁷ Our knowledge of persons as persons – and not just simple objects – is the complete and right knowledge of the personal other. Impersonal knowledge about somebody, or about the world, has some validity in it, but it is not the fullness of knowledge we could have of someone precisely as a person. Martin Buber, the great German religious philosopher, made the same distinction. He called them “It-experiences” (Es-Erfahrungen) and “Thou-experiences” (Du-Erfahrungen). These are two different kinds of experiences. In the first type of experience one experiences something, a kind of object, something which is to be found as an “It” in the world of things. However, Buber argues in a manner similar to Macmurray, that there are other types of experiences as well; there are the experiences of ‘I and Thou’. Buber establishes that “this is the perfectly simple matter that is different in kind from an experience that we can at first, just for a moment, call Thou-experience. This is the simple fact of being confronted by a Thou

⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁷ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 40.

[Gegenübertretens eines Du].”⁸ In this basic experience one faces his/her human being in a field of the personal. From this field of the personal, the primary world is becoming in terms of “I-Thou” relations, and consequently other human beings are not merely things among other things anymore, but other human persons, with whom we are in personal relation, and with whom we have an interplay.

The basis of the human reality which Macmurray has presented, and which is basically different from the Cartesian point of view, provides a direction in the future we have to move through our human development. This deep personal relationship is there from the beginning in our human existence, since we were born all from a mother – without a personal relationship to her we would not exist. “The Self exists only in dynamic relation with the Other and this relationship is necessarily personal.”⁹ The basic human relationship to our mothers shows that there cannot be something personal until there are at least two persons in communication.

Basic Relationship: Mother-Child

Let us take a closer look at the most basic field of the personal in the archetypal relationship between a mother and her baby. This relationship is the starting point of all human life; and for this good reason, it brings us near the nature of our human personal reality. Following John Macmurray’s thoughts there are two main elements I will highlight in the mother-child relationship: *defenselessness* and *belonging to someone*.

First of all, it seems to be unambiguous that the baby cannot think for herself, someone else must think for her. The baby cannot provide for her own needs, she must be provided by

⁸ Phil Huston, *Martin Buber’s Journey to Presence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 204.

⁹ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 17.

someone else. Macmurray points out that it means not just simply physical needs, beyond them there is the need of being cared for of being in the presence of the mother. In this case there is no clear functional purpose in it, says Macmurray. “This is the evidence that the infant has a need which is not simply biological but personal, a need to be in touch with the mother, and in conscious perceptual relation with her.”¹⁰ As a consequence, the baby must depend for her life on the thought and action of others. From this fact, Macmurray draws the following conclusion: “The conclusion is not that the infant is still an animal which will become rational through some curious organic process of development. It is that she cannot, even theoretically, live an isolated existence; that she is not an independent individual. She lives a common life as one term in a personal relation.”¹¹ The truth that we are not independent individuals is true for every human person, but this fact is obvious in the life of a baby who is clearly not independent from her mother.

The second element from this basic mother-child relationship is *belonging to someone*. This element is not independent from the first aspect; it just gives a deeper insight to it. The baby experiences the love of her mother and she knows she brings joy to her.¹² Her body, her care, her language and presence are lastly for belonging. Jan Vanier, the Canadian Catholic philosopher, also sees this element of belonging as a most important element in discovering who we really are. He says: “Belonging is a school of love where we learn to open up to others and to the world around us, where each person, creature, and thing in our world is important and is

¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹¹ Ibid., 50.

¹² We are talking about the relationship to the mother, but we have to add that the Father has also a very important role in this relationship. However, our goal is to show the personal dependence of human beings looking this fact on baby-mother relationship, and not describe the different role of the parents to the child.

respected.”¹³ Vanier’s insight is very close to Macmurray’s argument in this sense, for we do not discover who we really are from ourselves; we discover it through mutual dependency, where we also experience our human weaknesses. We discover ourselves in the context of *belonging*.

The interpretation of the basic mother-child relationship may be summed up in the argument of Macmurray; namely, that personal existence is not an individual existence, but at least two persons in mutual relation.¹⁴ We are persons not because we are capable of thinking and existing alone, but because we are in relation to one another.

The Pattern of Personal Motivation

We have examined the basic mother-child relation and from this first relationship we stressed two main elements from our original personal relationship. Macmurray says that these elements are not just starting points from our human reality that change as the child grows up, but they will continue to be a fundamental pattern of personal motivation throughout our human life. He says: “The original pattern of motivation is a communication to another person, unconscious to start with on the infant’s part, but understood and responded to by the adult.”¹⁵ What are these motivations? Macmurray propounds that the orientation to the other person differs in positive and negative motivation. In other words, we identify the original motives of personal action with love and fear. “Love is love for the other, fear is fear for oneself. But this fear for oneself refers to the behavior of the other.”¹⁶ It means in the original ‘I and Thou’ situation that the realization of my personal desires depends not simply upon me, but depends

¹³ Jan Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998), 41.

¹⁴ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

also upon the other person. It means, in our human life there will be always present the possibility that my desire for love or for help may not always receive a response from others. Consequently, one's personal success depends upon other people's intentions as well. "Since the 'You and I' relation constitutes both the 'You' and the 'I' persons, the relation to the 'You' is necessary for my personal existence. If, through fear of the 'You', I reject this relation, I frustrate my own being."¹⁷ Macmurray points out here that the fundamental notion in our personal relations is basically the battle between fear and trust. Experiencing the human defenselessness in our mutual relationships is often frightening; however, it can open up the way to finding ourselves and finding the freedom for which we were made. Jean Vanier also emphasizes: "[The fundamental notion in our personal relations] is the trust that comes from the intuitive knowledge that we are safe in the hands of another and that we can be open and vulnerable, one to another."¹⁸ In this understanding, trust is not simply one act among many other human acts, but a fundamental attitude. I will address this further when I discuss sin in the third chapter of this thesis. In brief, trust enables us to grow and to get deeper in our relationships, but it also can be wounded if somebody abuses it. Trusting in each other is the fundamental attitude which leads us to the reality of larger personal actuality, to the reality of human community.

II. From a Personal Relationship to the Community

On the preceding pages I introduced a philosophical approach, which states that we are not isolated individuals, but persons in relations. This approach emphasizes that human beings cannot exist without relationships; for this reason, being in relation is a primary feature of a

¹⁷ Ibid., 74.

¹⁸ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998), 43.

human person, from the beginning of our lives. Our first and perhaps most important experience is of the mother-child relationship in its unity. The child discovers herself as a self in a process of developing differentiation of this original unity. “The child grows to be aware of itself as the one who is different from and in relation with, first with its mother and then other persons in a larger matrix of other relationships.”¹⁹ The mother-child relationship – as we have seen – is the first and basic form of community we experience as children; and this is the basic relationship which is opening in ever wider interweaving circles of relationships.

Turning to the wider community, John Macmurray says that the community is the unity of persons with their relationships. “Any human society is a unity of persons,” he says.²⁰ This simple statement implies that we are not present in our communities as puppets, but as persons who freely act and have intentions in the community. This concept is going to be crucial in our further thinking about the community, since in this understanding, the community is not some organic unity that has an independent process, but its continuity is a continuity of action of persons. This is why Macmurray states that “the unity of the personal is, then, to be sought in the community of the ‘You and I’, and since persons are agents, this community is not merely matter of fact, but also matter of intention”.²¹ However, our intentions could be very different and sometimes even opposed. For this very reason, our mutual relationships are the fountain of the greatest possibilities but also the place of defenselessness, since we are dependent upon each other. Pointing beyond Macmurray’s thoughts, in the following steps I am going to highlight some contributions and challenges which are given to us in the human community. In these highlights I will already start introducing some fundamental personal attitudes, to which I will

¹⁹ John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 61.

²⁰ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 127.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

come back from different perspectives in the second and in third part of this thesis as well, making our thesis for one unity.

The Paradox of Human Being

The paradox of human being is that we need others to live a happy life and be our selves. I cannot become myself without others, without somebody who also wishes it and communicates it to me. John Courtney Murray formulated this curious human reality in the following way: “the more united you are to others, the more completely you are yourself; the more you give to others, the more you have yourself; you possess yourself only by giving yourself away; you find yourself by losing yourself.”²² This exactly is a paradox we experience when we love somebody. Giving ourselves to others is not easy at all, because there is always a possibility we can be hurt, we do not see what is going to be happen with us. Love calls from us the most beautiful ability to give ourselves for the sake of the other, but it also can awaken in us a fear and a refusal to cooperate. However, when we are going little by little on the way of self giving, “we learn to break out of the shell of selfishness and self-centeredness where we seek to be brilliant and to prove our goodness, wisdom and power.”²³

The deep dependence on others, which we experience in our human communities, has something to say about the creation of the human world as well. The life of individual persons is somehow relative to the whole community. I mean here not that the value of an individual is worthless, but it means for me that the life of each individual is the life of the whole community, and inversely it is the same. The community and the individual person are mutually dependent

²² John Courtney Murray, *The Construction of a Christian Culture*, 117.

²³ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 58.

upon each other. I think this is the reason why John R. Sachs emphasizes: “the final good of each and every individual human person must be seen as the mutual interrelationship of persons in a community which includes all persons, in which each cares for the others and for the nonpersonal creatures placed in their care.”²⁴ This mutual interrelationship is a long journey from our first personal relationship with our mother to the community of equality and mutuality, which has to be desired, chosen and created by the human person. In this process we are becoming more and more responsible how we live our life in the human community.

Mutuality and Trust within the Human Community

John Macmurray emphasizes that “a community rests upon a positive apperception by its members of the relation which unites them as a group. It is a personal, not an impersonal unity of persons.”²⁵ Growing in mutuality and in the confidence to appreciate each other is a process that requires time for development. A good example of this process is when new people join an existing community. It is often noticeable that the new members present a certain image about themselves, because they want to be accepted by the others in the group. They need time to open their real selves, but slowly they discover that the others love them and begin to trust them. Although, most of the time this trust will be tested and the trust must always be growing.

Another good example would be the deepening process of the mutual trust in marriage. Newly-married couples often love each other a great deal. However, their love provides a continual invitation to be even deeper. “Love is even deeper between people who have been married for a long time, who have lived through difficulties together and who know that the

²⁴ John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 37.

²⁵ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 147.

other will be faithful until death. They know that nothing can break their union.”²⁶ The deepening of confidence happens in a very similar way in other human communities. This deepening process often happens after conflicts, after situations of suffering and the proof of fidelity, where the mutual trust really begins to grow. Mutual trust is a sign of a deep personal relationship and sign of a community. This is the condition, which opens up the place where forgiveness and reconciliation can be born.

Forgiveness

Being in community is not a static reality, but a living actuality with both joy and sorrow. One of the challenges of the community, I would like to emphasize here, is the overcoming of difficulties that impede love. Using Sachs’s words, “practically speaking, it means the overcoming of fear and the selfish, private individualism which fear usually breeds.”²⁷ It makes sense, since the more somebody is under the control of fear, the more likely he/she will hurt others and it may easily go to the expense of a community. This is the reason why community requires from their members the ability to forgive everywhere where relationships, mutual trusts, and respect have been hurt.

Theoretically the largest majority of the people would say this is makes sense and it is obvious why forgiveness is so important; however, when it comes to an actual situation, it is not so obvious anymore to forgive. In Christianity forgiveness is so important that Christians every day pray: “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us.” In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis says: “There is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness

²⁶ Jean Vanier, *Community & Growth* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1979), 13.

²⁷ John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 38.

on any other terms. It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be forgiven. There are no two ways about it.”²⁸ It is very often the case that we want to do the best for others, but unintentionally in spite of this we hurt each other. This is the reason why we need so much to forgive each other. It seems to me, without mutual forgiveness it is not possible to live in peace in any kind of human community. Søren Kierkegaard calls our attention to the importance of forgiving with the following words:

Love hides the multiplicity of sins by forgiveness. ... I believe that the seen came into being on the basis of that which cannot be seen. I see the world but the unseen I do not see – this I believe. Thus it is also with forgiveness – and sin, a relationship of faith, which however, men are rarely aware of. ... Just as one by faith believes the unseen in the seen, so the lover by forgiveness believes the seen away. Both are faith. Blessed is the man of faith; he believes what he cannot see. Blessed is the lover; he believes away what he nevertheless can see!²⁹

The expression of that kind of love transforms one’s life. Forgiveness is the greatest gift one can receive, because it is a gift of release from all the hurts of the past, hurts that stop us from living fully and loving others. I call forgiveness a gift and not a simple act of our will, because I think it is far beyond of our own strength and will. With this recognition I am turning from our human relationships to our relationship to God, from the horizontal dimension to the vertical dimension of our human reality.

III. The Religious Dimension of Human Personal Existence

In one form or another, beside the horizontal dimension there is the vertical dimension of our human reality at the core of our human existence. In the light of Macmurray’s understanding,

²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 116.

²⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 273-4.

this vertical, religious dimension is concerned with the same original and basic field of our human existence, and this is the relation of persons.³⁰ Although I am going to introduce in the second chapter the theological dimension of this relational human reality in its depth, I would like to give an introduction to this vertical dimension of the human personal existence from a more philosophical perspective. Doing so, I am turning to William A. Barry's book '*Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*,' which offers a whole chapter particularly to this vertical dimension of our experiences.³¹ Using his sources and references, in the following steps I am going to follow Barry's chain of thoughts.

To examine the notion of religious dimension of human experience, William Barry invokes one fundamental insight of the American philosopher John E. Smith, who said: "There is no human experience that is not an encounter."³² To unfold what this statement means, Barry points out that even the most "subjective" experiences, for example hallucinations, have something to do with elements from outside that take effect and condition the experience. These elements are for example the encountering with air; the place where one is; the part of the day, etc. Moreover, it is true from the other side too: objective experiences depend on expectations, beliefs, inside elements. The example Barry gives here is the experience of a scientist, who depends on the expectations he supposes. If the scientist does not expect a new star, he does not see it. He may experience something, but it will be not the experience of a new star. To sum up, any human experience happens in encounter with the universe; they mutually have an effect on each other.

³⁰ John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 17-38.

³¹ William A. Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 20-39.

³² *Ibid.*, 23.

At this point, there are several fundamental questions to be raised in connection to the vertical dimension of our human reality. How is in the human experience a religious dimension? If our experiences are really encounters, is God somehow present in our experiences? Barry says that the religious dimension of human experience is complete by the encounter between the seeking person and God who is mystery.³³ Therefore, for people in Christian belief any experience can have a religious dimension, because they believe that God, who created the universe, is a person and that God is present everywhere. This is the reason why Ignatius of Loyola is able to write the following words in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*: “[We should be] finding God in all things, loving him in all creatures and all creatures in him.” (Const. 288).³⁴ John Macmurray argues very similarly when he states that the only consistent way to think of our human relation to the world is that the world is one action:

To conceive the world thus is to conceive it as the act of God, the Creator of the world, and ourselves as created agents, with a limited and dependent freedom to determine the future, which can be realized only on the condition that our intentions are in harmony with His intention, and which must frustrate itself if they are not.³⁵

In other words, the universe is God’s one action, states Macmurray. God is present in every moment in the history of the world; furthermore, as initiator God is part in every human experience as well. This is the answer of the questions above, why every human experience can have a religious dimension; however, it needs a believer who expects to encounter God. This is very similar to the scientist who does not expect to find a new star and therefore do not realize it when the time is coming. Barry emphasizes that faith and experience mutually support each

³³ William A. Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 25.

³⁴ Citations from the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus are taken from *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms*, ed. John W. Padberg, trans. George E. Ganss, (St. Luis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.) with standard paragraph references.

³⁵ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 222.

other.³⁶ If I do not believe that God speaks to me; or I do not desire to find God, maybe I would not experience God. But when I believe in God, I may discover God's presence – God's love and care – in my experiences. Moreover, the experiences intensify my belief and my desires as well. "The believer encounters God and knows God prior to any reflection on the experience and prior to 'really' knowing what has been experienced."³⁷ This should be very similar experience to what the disciples might have had on the road to Emmaus. They experienced their hearts burning even before they knew exactly that Jesus was walking with them. But when they came to realize what was happening, they knew exactly what they had experienced. The reflected experience gave them light of understanding and reinforced their belief. Reflection played an important role in the interpretation of their experiences. It may be the reason why Macmurray himself saw the role of reflection to such an extent that he writes: "Religion is the reflective activity which expresses the consciousness of community; or more tersely, religion is the celebration of communion."³⁸ Reflection helps us to discover how God is present in our experiences, how God is seeking our communion with Him and our communion with each other.

IV. Conclusion

According to Max Weber one of the biggest challenges facing modern western societies is increasing depersonalization. In such a climate the person is understood more and more individualistically as independent from anyone else. Such an understanding of the human person is problematic in its consequences; however, at the same time it opens up a new space for us to

³⁶ William A. Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁸ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 162.

rediscover the depth and the good news in the Christian understanding about the human person. Macmurray's approach helps us to do precisely this.

Macmurray's starting point was that the human person is an agent, whose basic reality is the 'I do', instead of the Cartesian 'I think', because we are always in relation with others. Following Macmurray's thoughts I examined the mother-child relationship, which the basis and in some way the model all of our personal relationships. In the light of this basic relationship I highlighted that persons need one other to be themselves. As Macmurray writes: "This complete and unlimited dependence of each of us upon the others is the central and crucial fact of personal existence. Individual independence is an illusion."³⁹ Because we all live in personal relationships, I also have highlighted the centrality of community, which is the gathered unity of human persons. Community means the friendship of persons that has as its primary cementing force the mutual love of its members. After examining some of the basic characteristics of community I pointed out some important challenges and gifts which are given to us in our communities, such as the tension between giving ourselves and self-realization; mutual trust and forgiveness. Lastly, as an introduction to the theological approach, I considered the religious dimension of human personal existence which is the basic foundation of our relationship with God. While Macmurray does not attempt to prove the existence of God, he does give good reasons to dismiss the existence of God as an illusion. There are good reasons to believe in God and to open ourselves to experience God. He was convinced that the traditional proofs of God could not be really successful due to their merely intellectual starting point, because when action is separated from thought, religion cannot be rightly conceived. This is the reason why Macmurray changes the fundamental starting point by looking at the person. At the beginning,

³⁹ Ibid., 211.

he has restored the orientation of thought to action, by shifting the standpoint from the ‘I think’ to the ‘I do’. This new philosophical starting point made it possible to state that the core of our human experience is first of all encounter: an encounter with the world, and with other persons. As a result, in Macmurray’s view, we human beings are driven through these encounters to experience a personal universe in which God is the final reality.

CHAPTER TWO: A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PERSONHOOD

The starting point of the theological approach is the witness of the Bible that human beings are created in the image of God: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27) Through the process of looking at God we believe that we are going to understand ourselves in a much deeper way and get closer to the mystery of our human reality. On the one hand it is an intellectual and systematic work using the tools of our understanding and well-chosen language. On the other hand the knowledge has deep roots in the human experiences of encountering God; encounter comes before the knowledge. This is the short summary of John Macmurray’s philosophy, which I introduced in the first chapter and which opens up a new space to the theological approach to personhood. Since the philosophical knowledge and personal experience are deeply connected, looking at God is not going to be a simply intellectual act, but the way of finding the fullness of our human life; as the Psalm says: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11) In addition, I believe that we are not closed in our own experiences, but we can share what we have already found and understood as the essence of our human life. When we begin to talk to each

other and share our experiences and understanding, we are truly helping each other to find the way that we are all looking for and to find our deepest desires.

John Zizioulas, the Orthodox Metropolitan of Pergamon and significant contemporary ‘spiritual theologian,’ turns to the concept of personhood and sets out his theology, first of all, from the Bible and from the Church Fathers. Through the historical search for an accurate formulation about the Trinity and the mystery of God, a concept of the person was created. This new model became a significant development in the history of theology, and, in Zizioulas’s judgment, the Cappadocian concept of person has existential implications for discipleship today. Zizioulas’s theological approach is a good complement to Macmurray’s philosophical approach, as their thoughts and views about the human person are very similar.

This chapter will consist of four parts: First, I will introduce the modern theological context in which the Trinitarian understanding of God has again become central. Secondly, I will introduce Zizioulas’s insights concerning the contributions of the Cappadocians, who attempted a reconciliation between biblical Christianity and Greek philosophy in the concept of person. Thirdly, since our starting point is that human beings are created in the image of God, I will reflect on some anthropological implications of the Trinity. Finally, I will present some practical observations from these theological and anthropological insights in the life of the Christian community.

I. The Divine Persons: Faith in the Trinitarian God

When studying and reflecting on the existence of the Trinitarian God, we touch upon the deepest mystery of the Christian faith. As far back as the fourth century, Saint Augustine wrote a considerable work about the Holy Trinity, where he acknowledges his struggles that he is not

able to grasp God's mystery; it seems far beyond his understanding. A well known legend developed from Augustine's struggle; namely that "he found beside the sea a boy who was digging a hole and who then tried to scoop the ocean into the hole with the seashell. When he saw that, the saint realized within himself that, just as the ocean cannot be put into this hole, no more can the mystery of God be put into your brain; it's too small for that."⁴⁰ In fact, this central mystery of the Christian faith may, ultimately, remain incomprehensible for us human beings; however, through the process of considering God's Trinitarian nature we may arrive at a deeper understanding about God and about ourselves. For this reason, the Holy Trinity will remain a fruitful theological topic for all time.

Modern Theological Issue

The Trinitarian understanding of God repeatedly becomes the centre of Christian theology in the twentieth century, especially through the work of the Protestant theologian Karl Barth and the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. Both face the serious problem that after the Enlightenment the understanding of person has basically changed. As I introduced in the first chapter the person had come to be understood as an individual who has become the centre of his/her own consciousness and his/her own freedom. Both Rahner and Barth face the subsequent problem which appeared in the following issue: if we use the term "person" in its new understanding talking about the Trinitarian God, then the three persons in God can be easily understood as three independent centers of consciousness. This interpretation shifts facility from monotheism to tritheism. In order to avoid this consequence, both theologians try to address this new theological issue.

⁴⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 266.

Karl Barth proposes that we should not use the term ‘person’ in reference to the Trinity, but rather “mode (or way) of being”⁴¹ in God. Since the content of the term ‘person’ has definitely changed, Barth’s intention is to express the original meaning of this expression, which is equivalent to the ancient usage of ‘person.’ Barth says: “Hence we are not introducing a new concept but simply putting in the centre an auxiliary concept which has been used from the very beginning and with great emphasis in the analysis of the concept of person.”⁴² Karl Rahner, on the other hand, does not want to abandon the term ‘person’ in Trinitarian theology. Rather, he argues that it is we must overcome a false understanding of what is meant by person in Trinitarian theology. Rahner’s basic axiom is that God truly communicates Godself to us as God is. He expounds: “The one self-communication of the one God occurs in three different manners of given-ness, in which the one God is given concretely for us in himself.”⁴³ We experience the one God in salvation history as Father, Son and Spirit; and therefore Rahner stresses that the one, concrete God gives Godself in each one of these manners of given-ness. Translating it into the language of ontology Rahner says: “The one God subsists in three distinct manners of subsisting.”⁴⁴

There have been several criticisms of both Barth’s and Rahner’s suggestions. In her book, “*God as Communion*,” Patricia A. Fox introduces the above pronounced theological concern and the ensuing theological debate in the twentieth century. According to Fox’s summary, the protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann criticizes both Barth’s and Rahner’s standing points, since they identify the divine subject with the unity of God and not with the

⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957), 359.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 109.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

plurality of God. Moltmann states: “Barth presents the doctrine of the Trinity as Christian monotheism and argues polemically against a tritheism, which has never existed. That is why he uses a non-Trinitarian concept of the unity of the one God – that is to say, the concept of the identical subject.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, Moltmann has a similar criticism of Rahner’s position when he says: “Idealistic modalism leads back to the Christian monotheism of the one unique essence, the singularity of a one single consciousness and of a single liberty of God, who is present in the innermost center of existence of an individual person.”⁴⁶ In short, Moltmann, in his reply, criticizes the emphasis on the absolute divine subjectivity, which, in his opinion, leads to a misunderstanding of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Another considerable criticism has come from the Roman Catholic theologian Walter Kasper, who states that both Rahner and Barth set out from an extreme individualistic understanding of a person in their theses. He argues that, in the strict sense, it was a proper concern from Barth and Rahner; however, the understanding of a person has already changed in the last century. Kasper states: “Ever since the time of Feuerbach modern personalism, as represented by M. Buber, F. Ebner, F. Rosenzweig and others, has made it entirely clear that person exists only in relation; that the concrete personality exists only as interpersonality, subjectivity only as intersubjectivity. The human persons exist only in relations of the I-Thou-We kind.”⁴⁷ In his response, Kasper wants to call to our attention that in the twentieth century the understanding about a human person had already changed and that this change must have an influence on our understanding of the personality of God. However, he says, we can apply our categories of person to God only by analogy, since God is always higher than our categories.

⁴⁵ Patricia Fox, *God as Communion* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 27.

⁴⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 148.

⁴⁷ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 289.

When we apply the concept of person to God, it is the highest category we can use, but we have to be clear that God is “supra-personal” in this sense; “God is a person in an incomparably higher way than we are.”⁴⁸

In the further steps of our study we keep Rahner’s basic axiom, that God communicates Godself as God is; which is in Rahner’s own words: “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.”⁴⁹ Why is this statement so important here? It is important because the goal of this theological approach is not simply a theoretical speculation about God’s being, but about a deeper understanding of our relationship with God. From the twentieth century’s consideration about being a person we found and state that the essence and substance of being a person is being in relation. This is the background from which we turn to the mystery of the Holy Trinity, using the theological knowledge and consideration of the Greek orthodox theologian John Zizioulas.

II. Trinity and Personhood

John Zizioulas states that the concept of the person is at the centre of the Trinitarian theological roots in Greek patristic theology. On the other hand, he argues that “this [patristic theological] concept of person is completely congruent with a twentieth-century understanding of the person as a relational category and as such stands in sharp contrast with the individualistic tradition.”⁵⁰ For this reason, towards a better understanding to the question of person and personal identity, Zizioulas examines the fourth century and the contribution the Cappadocian Fathers Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, who began to develop

⁴⁸ Ibid., 155.

⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 22.

⁵⁰ Patricia Fox, *God as Communion*, 32.

reconciliation between the biblical Christianity and the Greek philosophy relative to the concept of person.

Ancient Greek and Roman Concept of a Person

Zizioulas points out that the basic principle in the ancient Greek thinking was that the essence of being is one: the unity of being brings life, harmony and stability to the world; while the differentiation on the other side was regarded as movement toward chaos and non-being. This thought was then applied to the concept of cosmos which is the place of harmony and reason. “In this way Greek thought creates a wonderful concept of cosmos, that is unity and harmony, a world full of interior dynamism and aesthetic plentitude, a world truly beautiful and divine.”⁵¹ Everything is drawn together in harmony and unity by “reason” (logos). When somebody rejects the ‘logos’ and separates him/herself from the uniting principle of the cosmos, such a judgment will result in rejection and condemnation. Zizioulas highlights that this conflict of human reality became the main theme of the Greek tragedies, which were performed in the theaters of antiquity. The common story of the tragedies was that human beings strive to become “persons”, i.e. to struggle against and resist his fate, against the oppressing unity he/she is experiencing. However, according to the evidence of the stories the people or gods can neither escape from their fate, nor sin without the consequences of suffering. Describing this ancient world view, Zizioulas quotes from Plato’s *Laws* that, “the world does not exist for the sake of man, but man exists for its sake.”⁵² The freedom for becoming an independent ‘person’ was not possible within the ancient world.

⁵¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 30.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 32.

The Greek term ‘person’ (prosopon) comes into usage in this medium and was presented in the form of the actor’s mask. The original meaning of ‘person’ is consequently not the essence (hypostasis) of someone. Person is something which is added to one’s true being. If this happens, such a development always had tragic consequences in the plays. The message was clear for the people of that age: a “human being does not have the freedom to escape fate and to become a unique self.”⁵³ It was just not possible for a human being to live that way. Zizioulas draws a similar conclusion from the Latin expression ‘persona.’ Persona meant a particular role in the Roman state and had nothing to do with ontology, or with the essence of being human. They called the one who helped to organize human life in the state a ‘persona.’ “As persona man subordinates his freedom to the organized whole, but also assures himself simultaneously of a means, a possibility, of tasting freedom, or affirming his identity.”⁵⁴ Zizioulas shows furthermore, that similar to the Greek prosopon, the Latin use of persona illustrates that the freedom of human beings acting out of one’s own identity is always limited by the boundaries of the whole cosmos or of the society. This is a limit of our human life and an ontological necessity in the ancient Greek and Roman culture.

The Biblical Tradition and the Encounter

In the Bible, however, there is a different view of being. Mary T. Clark points out that in the Hebrew Scriptures the single human being, one’s physical body was fundamental. The fundamental role of our body in our relationship with God is going to be discussed in the third chapter, here I just would like to emphasize with Clark, that the biblical authors often connect

⁵³ Patricia Fox, *God as Communion*, 33.

⁵⁴ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 34.

mental processes to the individual bodily feelings. Clark's stressed example is the word 'heart', which was often used instead of a personal pronoun in a Hebrew Scriptures. "In many cases the word 'heart' was used to bring together the feelings, motives, intentions, and other aspects of an individual as a whole. The word 'heart' referred to psychic activity, not merely to a physical organ."⁵⁵ There are several examples in the Bible, where the formula 'heart' was used to describe the individual human being (for example: 1Samuel 2:1 "My heart exults in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord, my mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation."), or to describe God's self (for example: 1 Samuel 13:14 "The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people."). From the Scriptures as evidence Clark deduces that in the life and faith of Israel the individual dimension, the personal "I" was very significant. God calls his people personally and the individuals are free to respond to that call or choose not to respond. Within this biblical worldview, the world was created by someone; someone who created all the beings particularly and who is in continuous connection with them.

Noticeably, the Greek and Hebrew traditions have two different approaches to the individual and one's place in the universe. Zizioulas highlights that these two worldviews came to an encounter through the agency of the early Greek Christians, who raised their religious and philosophical questions from a different background. They also encountered Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who was not simply a teacher for them, but revealed God's self through his life, death and resurrection. They had a personal encounter with God's presence through Jesus Christ, which they try to explain through the language and understanding they had. As a result, God's nature turned into a central question, especially his relation to Jesus, whom they

⁵⁵ Mary T. Clark, "An Inquiry Into Personhood," *Review of Metaphysics* 46 (1992): 4.

recognized and experienced as the Son of God. For this reason, points out Zizioulas, in the first centuries there arose a new need to formulate statements about God and about the interpretations of Christian faith in a manner which is understandable to Greek thought as well. The main question is: “What does it mean to say that God is Father, Son and Spirit without ceasing to be one God?”⁵⁶ The process of finding an answer reaches its climax in the fourth century with the Cappadocian Trinitarian theology.

The Fathers of Cappadocia

From the first century, the Christian Church has baptized the new believers in the name of the Trinity: “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19) The belief in God as Trinity is already there, but the language which, perhaps, can best express the reality of this mystery has not yet arrived. In the fourth century the theological demand became centered on finding a precise language which expresses the core of the Christian belief, that is, expressing the particularity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit while holding the unity of the one God. The main question was to find an understanding and a language for that mystery. Zizioulas shows that before the work and expressions of the Cappadocian Fathers there were several other attempts to answer this question; the two main conceptions were from Sabellius and Eunomius.

Sabellius was a theologian who taught in Rome in the third century. His teaching “represented an interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity which involved the view that the Father, the Son and the Spirit were not full persons in an ontological sense, but roles assumed by God. Sabellius seems to have used the term person in the singular, implying that there is ‘one

⁵⁶ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 36.

person' in God."⁵⁷ This is a modalistic interpretation of the Trinity, which means that the Son and the Spirit are just a kind of 'role', or 'mask' of the one Father. As Zizioulas describes, the idea was logical, but raised several questions. If this idea of Sabellius is correct, how can we understand the incarnation of the eternal God? How do we explain Jesus' prayer to his Father? Does God give Godself always just partly to us, never giving us his very being? Zizioulas argues that for these and other reasons the Cappadocian Fathers excluded the propriety of the Sabellian understanding and claimed "the fullness and ontological integrity of each person of the Trinity."⁵⁸ In other words, each person of the Trinity has to have a full and complete being; they are not modes from the one Father. Because of this new theory of the Fathers and a with the purpose of clarification and a more precise language, they introduced the concept of 'hypostasis', and used it as a synonym of terms 'prosopon' and 'persona.' The Cappadocians came to the conclusion that in God there are three full beings, three different persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, to avoid the notion of tritheism in God, the Cappadocians recommended another clarification between the different terms that were used. With the help of Aristotelian philosophy, the Fathers illustrated that, the terms 'nature' or 'substance' can be used at the same time in a general sense and as well as in a particular sense without being illogical. An illustration of this is given in an example by Zizioulas in the term 'human nature.' 'Human nature' can be applied to all human beings and, at the same time, to the many concrete, individual human beings as well. With this linguistic clarification "the Cappadocian Fathers suggested that 'ousia' should be taken to mean 'substance' in the generic sense, and therefore

⁵⁷ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (New York: T. and T. Clark, 2006), 156.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

applicable to more than one being.”⁵⁹ As a result, they could say that God has one substance, or ousia, or natura.

The clarification by the Cappadocians and the weight of their effort could appear, at first sight, to be a little confusing and unclear; however, the development as presented is very significant. Why is it important? Zizioulas points it out that this linguistic development and change had a transforming influence of the whole of theological and philosophical thought. Before the Cappadocian Fathers, the identification between ‘ousia’ and ‘hypostasis’ implied that one’s concrete individuality (hypostasis) meant simply that somebody is (ousia). However, here a very essential change occurred:

The term *hypostasis* was dissociated from that of *ousia* and became identified with that of *prosopon*. But this latter term is relational, and was so when adopted in Trinitarian theology. This meant that from now on a relational term entered into ontology and conversely, that an ontological category such as hypostasis entered the relational categories of existence. To be and to be in relation becomes identical. For someone or something to be, two things are simultaneously needed: being itself (hypostasis) and being in relation (i.e. being a person).⁶⁰

The ontological insight after the Cappadocian Fathers is that being and being-in-relation are mutually presupposed of each other. Through these insights, the Biblical and the Greek philosophical tradition came to a deeper understanding of each other. These different traditions became reconciled because God’s ultimate being is identified with a ‘person’ rather than with ‘ousia’. From the Biblical tradition, it is known that God is a person, the Father, whose essence is loving relation. This is the one God, the Father, who “out of love begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit.”⁶¹ Zizioulas points out this key theological insight of the Cappadocians, namely

⁵⁹ Patricia Fox, *God as Communion*, 38.

⁶⁰ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 87-88.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

God's very being is identical with an act of love, an act of communion. "The expression 'God is love' (1John 4:16) signifies that God 'subsists' as Trinity, that is as person and not as substance."⁶²

In summary, in the fourth century, the development of finding a correct philosophical language to express the theological truth of the Trinitarian God became a breakthrough in the history of theology and in ontology. Through the search for an accurate formulation about the mystery of God, a concept of the person was created. This new model became a significant development in the history of the theology, and, in the judgment of John Zizioulas, the Cappadocian concept of a person has some existential implications for humanity today.

III. Anthropological Consequences: Uniqueness and Relatedness in the Human Existence

Before we draw any inferences or conclusions from the personhood the Cappadocian Fathers gave us, let us start with one of the basic ontological questions: Who am I? How would I answer this simple question? Of course, there is only one simple or correct answer; we find many different ways to respond to it. One could say, for example: I am a man (sex, gender); or I am a student (what I am doing); or I am the first son of my father (a relational answer). All three answers are true answers, but they are not the same. John Zizioulas points out in his book: *Communion and Otherness*, that there are two different types of answers when we respond to the 'Who I am' question. The first type of answer refers not so much to the 'who' question, but more to the 'what' question. When one says 'I am a man', or 'I am a student' – it is more an answer of 'what' than of 'who'. The real 'who' answer, he argues, always supposes particularity and uniqueness, which is the Cappadocian understanding of a person. Zizioulas stresses:

⁶² Ibid., 46.

“Personhood is not about qualities or capacities of any kind: biological, social or moral. Personhood is about hypostasis, that is, the claim to uniqueness in the absolute sense of the term, and it cannot be guaranteed by reference to sex or function or role.”⁶³

Humanity is created in the image of God. However, people are not God. Human beings are created in space and time; therefore with all its limitations which involve, among others, individualization and death. Despite all the realities of limitedness, human beings are called to exist and to live in the same way as God does. Zizioulas emphasizes: “Man is called to preserve the image of God in him as much as possible, striving to free himself from the necessity of nature, experiencing ‘sacramentally’ the ‘new being’ as a member of the community of those born again, in the above sense.”⁶⁴ For it is very important that the human person is always unique, but always through and for communion with others. This is the thesis we are learning and draw from the doctrine of the Trinity. As a next step, consequently, let us go deeper in these two characteristics of the human person.

Uniqueness

Uniqueness means that someone is that particular person and not somebody else. The uniqueness of personhood is the core which makes any other qualities personal, since they belong to that particular person. Zizioulas states that uniqueness arises from a relationship: “Absolute uniqueness is indicated only through an affirmation arising freely from a relationship

⁶³ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (New York: T. and T. Clark, 2006), 111.

⁶⁴ John D. Zizioulas, “On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood,” in *Persons, Divine and Human. King’s College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991) 44.

which constitutes by its unbrokenness the ontological ground of being for each person.”⁶⁵ We have seen the tendency of the Greek Fathers, how they stressed that the three persons in the Trinity are not the same: “the Father is simply not the Son or the Spirit, and the Son means simply not the Father and so on, points to the true ontology of hypostasis.”⁶⁶ It means for us human beings that everyone is a particular person, not somebody else.

The condition of being unique has an irreplaceable significance when we look at its presence in everyday human life. Zizioulas offers the example of authentic love. In that particular loving relationship one does not identify the loved person simply with the person’s qualities (for instance with intelligence, beauty, etc.), but in accepting who the other person is, ontologically. This experience of authentic love, the experience finding oneself in a loving relationship, emphasizes Zizioulas, makes someone who he/she is, i.e. a unique person. This significant condition of being ontologically loved shows the truth that human beings are unrepeatable and unique grounded in one’s own existence.

Relatedness

Being unique and unrepeatable is essential when we are talking about persons; however, one will find the truth of this reality only through their relationships. A person cannot exist in isolation, states Zizioulas. This is even true of God, who is not alone, but who is always in relationship, in communion. “Love is a relationship; it is the free coming out of one’s self, the breaking of one’s will, a free submission to the will of another.”⁶⁷ As a matter of fact, from the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers it follows that we cannot find identity alone,

⁶⁵ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 111.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 166.

simply from our own being. Finding ourselves is possible only in a loving relationship, where we discover who we truly are, namely *persons*. This is the message of the patristic idea: the essence of being a person lies in a relationship (community) of love. “Both in the case of God and in that of human beings the identity of a person is recognized and posited clearly and unequivocally, but this is so only in and through a relationship... Personal identity is totally lost if isolated, for its ontological condition is relationship.”⁶⁸

Zizioulas develops his understanding of person in communion further when he talks about the Church as communion. As the Cappadocian Fathers considered from God’s being, Zizioulas is also clear in his point of view that we cannot talk about the Christian theology of the person without considering the mystery of the Church. In the human experience of being in a loving communion there is an experience how God is living in his Trinitarian being and how He is present for us. Zizioulas emphasizes the fact that the Church was formed in history, but in its life leads peoples beyond that history to the inner life of God. Patricia A. Fox, analyzing the theology of Zizioulas, states that: “within such an understanding of Church there is a belief in a continual dialectic of God and the world, of history and the eschaton. Ecclesial being and the being of God are experienced as organically interconnected.”⁶⁹ In the following and final part of this chapter let us look at Zizioulas’ approach to the Church, in which ecclesial communion reflects the life of the holy Trinity.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 112.

⁶⁹ Patricia Fox, *God as Communion* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 72.

IV. The Community of the Church

In Zizioulas' theological method, concerning faith in the Trinity, faith in Christ and in the Spirit finds their concrete form in the Church. The Church becomes the actual place in his understanding, where the communion with others fully reflects the relation between the uniqueness and communion in the holy Trinity, in Christ and in the Spirit. The Church is the place where Christians experience and celebrate God's presence, but also the place where, through their loving relationships, they participate, in the concrete form, how God lives in communion and is unique in his Trinitarian being. "This living relationship reflects...the grandeur of the Church as the manifold realization of Christ in history and creation, and as a free imitation of the divine labour which works out this realization."⁷⁰ In the next steps we are following Zizioulas' book: *Communion and Otherness* in considering some concrete forms of ecclesial communion and the anthropological consequences of the Church life.

Some Highlighted Forms of Ecclesial Communion

The first form of ecclesial communion in the Church is the sacrament of *Baptism*. Every person who was baptized received the forgiveness of their sins and was fully received into the community of the Church. "In accepting the sinner, Christ applied to communion the Trinitarian model... the other is not to be identified by his or her qualities, but by the sheer fact that he or she is, and is himself of herself."⁷¹ This full acceptance of the other person is the first form of what the Trinitarian model of communion requires.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Loudovikos, "Christian Life and Institutional Church," in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, ed. Douglas H. Knight (Burlington: Ashgate, 1988), 132.

⁷¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 6.

The *Eucharist* is the next form Zizioulas mentions. For him “the Eucharist is the locus of the experience of the triune God,”⁷² and for this good reason, he calls the Eucharist “the heart of the Church, where communion and otherness are realized par excellence.”⁷³ This is the heart, since we find all the dimensions of Communion: communion between God and man; man and man, and the whole universe. In the Eucharist, God communicates Godself to us, in which event we can enter into unity with Godself; but it is also the place where Christians enter into communion with one another and, in addition, brings the whole of creation into relationship with God. Besides communion in the Eucharist, the otherness has an essential role as well. It is the place where differences are not something wrong or dividing, but where all becomes good, a place of richness for the whole community. For this reason, it is fundamental that Eucharist includes diversity: every race, or sex, or age, or profession, and so on. Zizioulas stresses: “The Eucharist must include all of these [differences], for it is there that the otherness of a natural, of social kind can be transcended. A Church which does not celebrate the Eucharist in this inclusive way risks losing her catholicity.”⁷⁴

A third form of ecclesial communion that must be considered is *ministry*. There are so many different needs in the world where the Church is present in her ministry, and there are also so many different charisms involved in the service and mission of the Church. Zizioulas quotes Paul in order to show the simultaneous presence of the difference and unity in the Church ministry. In the letter to the Corinthians we read: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” (1 Cor. 12:4-6) In addition, Paul is

⁷² Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 31.

⁷³ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

using the image of the body to express the absolute inter-dependence among the people in the Church. The body of Christ, i.e. the Church, consists of many different members, who represent various functions, gifts and ministries in the one body. For this reason no one can say to the other: “I have no need of you” (1 Cor. 12:21), since they mutually depend on each other. At this point it is worthwhile to mention that for Zizioulas a theology is always shaped by pastoral elements, since it comes from the heart of ecclesial experience.⁷⁵ Ecclesial communion for him is not simply a theoretical idea, but a concrete manifestation of loving relationships.

To summarize, ecclesial communion contains different people with different charisms, uniting them in the one body of the Church. Furthermore, it is crucial that the otherness should not fall into division, as we read that in the exhortation by Paul. For this good reason Zizioulas emphasizes: “It is not accidental that there can be no Church without a bishop. And it is not accidental either that there can be only one bishop in a Church. A Church without a bishop risks allowing difference to fall into division.”⁷⁶ All the questions and reflections about unity and otherness in the Church become essential when we believe that our faith in the Trinity, faith in Christ and in the Spirit is found in their concrete form in the Church.

Final Consequences about Personhood from an Ecclesial Point of View

Finding the meaning of personhood Zizioulas built his clarification of the Cappadocian Fathers and described the person as “otherness in communion and communion in otherness.”⁷⁷ This is the new definition of person who has his/her own identity but finds it also arising from

⁷⁵ Athanasios.G. Mellissaris, *Personhood Re-Examined: Current Perspectives from Orthodox Anthropology and Archetypal Psychology* (Katerini: Epektasis Publications, 2002), 62.

⁷⁶ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

relationship. One cannot isolate oneself from others; or if somebody would do that, argues Zizioulas, he/she would lose not simply his/her otherness, but his/her very being as well. Being a person means we do not exist from ourselves, but we always need others. This is the same implication from the ecclesial point of view, since ecclesial communion always contains the otherness, but unites them in the same faith. This is the experienced unity of otherness and communion which gives personal identity for all Christian people.

Being a person has another anthropological and theological consequence which is the fact that personhood requires freedom, as Zizioulas underlines it.⁷⁸ This means that the person is free to be who he/she really is, to be oneself. Karl Rahner also emphasizes in different writings of his, that freedom is not merely freedom to choose among options, but primarily the freedom to be, the freedom to become a particular person. This freedom includes all of God's gracious act whereby he brings into existence creation and us human beings as who we really are. "It is not merely the quality of an act and capacity exercised at some time, but a transcendental mark of human existence itself."⁷⁹ In other words, this given freedom is in our human existence as something essential. In our freedom, we are called to live the dialogic capacity of love: to love each other and love God with our whole being. The capacity of our freedom is for loving others. When we use our freedom in the opposite way, when we hate somebody, this ability is going against its intended use. Karl Barth calls such a negative usage of freedom not real freedom anymore. Barth says: "Trying to escape from being in accord with God's own freedom is not human freedom. Rather, it is a compulsion wrought by powers of darkness or by man's own helplessness. Sin as an alternative is not anticipated or included in the freedom given to man by

⁷⁸ Ibid., 214.

⁷⁹ Karl Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," in *Theological Investigations* 6 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1969), 184.

God.”⁸⁰ In brief, the incorrect use of freedom leads to sin, fear and this is not the way which is given to us. The proper use of freedom will create community, harmony, and peace. This is the freedom to which human persons have been called.

Zizioulas emphasizes furthermore a third significance of personhood, which is *creativity*. Creativity arises from the free intention to love somebody, from the intention being free for the other person. However, in our human life there will always be present the possibility that my desire for loving or helping another may not receive a positive reception from that other. Consequently, we need a productive creativity to overcome the fear from others and “going outside and beyond the boundaries of the self.”⁸¹ In this movement of creativity there is a deep notion of trust. As we will see it in the next chapter, trust is constantly calling us to grow and to go deeper. If somebody abuses this confidence, trust is deeply wounded. Being creative, affirming the other person, and trusting in each other is the attitude which opens us to the reality of larger personal actuality.

V. Conclusion

This theological approach of personhood started with the witness of the Bible that human beings are created in the image of God and a brief description of the re-emergence of the centrality of the Trinity in contemporary theology. I focused mainly on the works of the Protestant theologian Karl Barth and the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. Both were facing the problem that after the Enlightenment the understanding of person has basically

⁸⁰ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 77.

⁸¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 10.

changed and received an individualistic meaning. From their consideration about being a person the conclusion was drawn that the essence and substance of being a person is being in relation.

Next I turned to Zizioulas' insights concerning with the contribution the Cappadocian Fathers, who began a reconciliation between biblical Christianity and Greek philosophy in the concept of person. Zizioulas summarizes his point of view with the following words:

The essence, of the anthropology which results from the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers lies in the significance of personhood in human existence. The Cappadocian Fathers gave to the world the most precious concept it possesses: the concept of the person, as an ontological concept in the ultimate sense. Since this concept has become, at least in principle, not only part of our Christian heritage but also an ideal of our culture in general, it may be useful to remind ourselves of its exact content and significance as it emerges from a study of the theology of the Cappadocians.⁸²

Furthermore, I referred to one fundamental anthropological consequence of the Trinitarian God: the human person is always unique, but, also, unique always through and for communion with others. From the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers we learned that human beings cannot find their true personal identity as lone individuals. Finding oneself, finding identity is possible only in a loving relationship where we discover who we truly are, namely persons.

Finally, I presented some practical observations of these theological and anthropological insights in the life of the ecclesial community. The Church is becoming the actual place where the communion with the others fully reflects the relation between the uniqueness and communion in the holy Trinity, in Christ and in the Spirit. This is why Zizioulas strongly emphasizes that ecclesial communion should contain all different people with different charisms and unites them in the one body of the Church. The Church is the place for Christians to become, a place where they experience freedom and accomplish their creativity through love.

⁸² John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 166.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DEEPENING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HUMAN PERSONS

After looking at the meaning of person from two different perspectives, we have the background from which we are able to reflect on the relationship between God and the human person. The conclusion of both philosophical and theological approaches was that the meaning of person is not simply an individual but someone who is always in relation. The person finds self always in relation. The self is established in the context of “otherness in communion and communion in otherness.”⁸³ In the first two chapters we examined the meaning of the person as relational being. In this third chapter we want to look at what does this relational being mean for us in time and space, where there is a process of the relationship, which can change and deepen. Being in relation is the basic condition we human beings have, but it is also a process we, as the images of God, are called to live.

Being in relation is not a static, but always a dynamic reality. Every relationship has its own story with its personal beginning, and with its further continual dynamics: experiences of interconnection, joy, difficulty, reconciliation, etc. Although one may not see at the beginning where his/her given relationship may go in the future, there is an ongoing process and communication between the two persons. For this reason, I understand relationship as a personal process, which has always an overall direction of greater emotional proximity and increased intimacy, or moving away from each other and loss of intimacy. This dynamic reality is present in our human relations, but in our relationship with God as well. In our personal relationship with God there is also a beginning and a continual process, in which God always desires to come

⁸³ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 9.

closer and closer to us with ever greater intimacy. According to the Bible, God is the one who creates us, speaks to us, and continuously initiates the relationship with us. God is the one who called Abraham, who formed the everlasting covenant with his people (Gen 17:7), and who called Moses and led his people out of Egypt (Exodus 3:4). I do not want to state here that every person in the human history has the same inner process in one's relationship with God; however, in the Bible there is a human experience expressed that God calls and communicates with his people. Through God's initiative a personal process begins of a deepening relationship. As John Macmurray strongly emphasized, personal relationships are based not simply on thoughts, but on actions. This is the case in our relationship with God as well. God communicates to us not just God's thoughts, but God's own self and addresses the whole person, not just simple our human mind.

In the process of relationship with God the whole person is issued a call from God—including every aspect of his/her life, desires, body, mind, and soul. Through God's personal call there is a possibility of mutual communication between God and the human person, through which communication the relationship deepens and the whole human person is going to be changed by this deepening. There are several examples that illustrate this principle drawn from many disciples and saints of the church, whose personality – their attitudes, desires, self understanding – changed in their relationship with God. In the following I am going to introduce this changing process of the relationship with God; furthermore, in the final part of this third chapter, I am going to turn and reflect on the method of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius, which is a particular way and example of this changing process of the personal relationship we are talking about.

A. BODILY EXISTENCE AS A SIGNIFICANT ASPECT IN THE DEEPENING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

When someone is called by God to be a disciple, the whole person is called. This is a quite simple and easy thesis to state; however, walking on the path of discipleship reveals that following with one's whole being is not so easy. We not always want to be led where God is leading us to go, or want to know more clearly in which direction we have to go. This is the reason why a disciple may ask as Augustine did: "Is there any place within me into which my God might come? Is there any room in me for you, Lord, my God?"⁸⁴ We find other similar questions raised by many disciples: how do we listen God's call within us? How do we relate to ourselves and to our personal experiences? What kind of role does our body play in our relationship with God?

Before we begin considering these questions, we need to clarify how we are going to use the term 'body.' Talking about the body in general, we may understand any physical object and structure that we can see and touch. However, talking about the embodied condition of the human person, the expression 'body' becomes much more than simply a term for a physical object. Our human body is a subject with physical, mental and spiritual phenomena.⁸⁵ These areas are not separated from each other but are interconnected elements of the one embodied life. Gabor Medgyesi, an Hungarian physician, describes this interrelated reality of our human body when he talks about healing in the new medical understanding:

⁸⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.2., <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/confessions-bod.html> (accessed March 4, 2011)

⁸⁵ Marcia W. Mount Shoop, *Let the Bones Dance, Embodiment and the Body of Christ* (Kentucky: WJK Press, 2010), 5-10.

Illness is not a separated reality, but a visible sign which has connections to spiritual and mental processes. When we heal people we do not look simply at the symptoms of the illness, but the whole body, the whole person. Illnesses are often signs of spiritual and mental processes that the reality one deeply feels may be seen and understood. For this reason, it is important that we look at the body as a whole.⁸⁶

Behind professor Medgyesi's medical observation is an insight that we cannot approach the human person from a dualistic perspective in which body and spirit are separated from each other. If we would approach the human person in such a way, we would reduce the body into an object, and either think about the body extremely negatively or place an extreme importance on our physical reality. This is the reason why several Catholic personalist philosophers like Emmanuel Mounier and Gabriel Marcel offer a strong challenge to this dualistic approach. "Mounier wrote: 'I am a person from my most elementary existence upward, and my embodied existence, far from depersonalizing me, is a factor essential to my personal status. My body is not one object among others.... I exist subjectively, I exist bodily are one and the same experience.' Marcel wrote, more simply, 'I am my body' [rather than 'having a body.']"⁸⁷ Following their thoughts, our body has to be seen as a subject and, as such, a first place where one can come to know one's self, as well as others and God. For this reason, in the following steps, I am going to turn to our human experience, in which God's call, the dwelling of God's Spirit becomes noticeable for us in our body. Furthermore, I will look at this basic experience in connection with Jesus, in its significance on our way of discipleship.

⁸⁶ Gabor Medgyesi, "God-Experience in the 'New Medicine,'" *Sziv* 96/11 (November, 2010): 19. (My own translation)

⁸⁷ Robert E. Lauder, "Our Sacred Selves, The Profound Mystery of the Human Body," *America*, December 6, 2010, 21.

I. The Body Speaks of the Original Experience

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul says, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1 Cor. 3:16) Although it is not easy to grasp and describe exactly where God is present in our midst, and although our way of listening is often incomprehensible, we might experience this truth Paul describes. It would be so important and helpful to know more about that reality and find ways to listen to God, who is in our midst. The Jesuit Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, wrote a very exciting book about the human body, in which he also expresses the same desire of wishing to understand more deeply God’s voice in our midst. He says, “What I would like to know about the body is the word that is not spoken, the word that is inscribed in it, that speaks its meaning and its destiny.”⁸⁸ This unspoken word deep within us is expressed by many different people in many different ways. Mystics, great thinkers and theologians were trying to describe this basic human experience within us. In the following step, I would like to show through a few examples that the experience Saint Paul expresses is a very deep and universal one and because it is universal, it has been described in many different ways.

Some theologians describe this basic human experience as a ‘holy longing’ deep in our very being. Augustine, for example, defines his experience with a well-known restless feeling: “Thou hast prompted him that he should delight to praise thee, for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee. Grant me, O Lord, to know and understand whether first to invoke thee or to praise thee; whether first to know thee or call upon thee.”⁸⁹ The

⁸⁸ Carlo Maria Martini, *On the Body, A Contemporary Theology of the Human Person* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 41.

⁸⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.

desire to be with God is planted deep in us and draws us towards God, where the experience of restlessness becomes calmness and peace in His presence.

John Paul II calls it ‘the original experience.’ Using the creation stories of the Book of Genesis he describes this human observation as original nakedness, “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”(Genesis 2:25) In this original experience we are naked, we are really who we are; and since we do not have anything to hide we feel comfortable, we are not ashamed. This original experience is not original only in the sense that it happened sometime at the beginning of human history, but original because it can be found at the basis of human experience. He says: “Speaking of original human experiences, we have in mind not so much their distance in time, as rather their basic significance.”⁹⁰ This original experience is with us and points us toward our true fulfillment. As it was with Adam in the creation story, this experience calls us today also in our search for our true identity.

Thomas Merton’s expression “le point vierge” evinces the same original experience we are introducing. Merton says that there is a ‘virgin point’ in our lives, which is not touched by sin and this is the point where God is present in our lives. It is a little point in our midst, but becomes absolute and transformative if we find it.

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and

⁹⁰ John Paul II, *Meaning of Original Human Experiences*, L'Osservatore Romano, December 17, 1979, 1. For commentary see: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp2tb11.htm> (accessed 4 March 2011)

cruelty of life vanish completely. I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.⁹¹

In spite of all our sins and human weaknesses, in that virgin point we are untouched by sin and illusion. This sacred space belongs to God, states Merton, and it is the place where we find our unique and true self, who we really are. It exists with a gemlike sparkle within us, moreover, when we are in our center with God, the diamond begins to shine forth in our life wherever we go and in whatever we are doing.

The last image about this basic human experience comes from the Christian English writer, J. R. R. Tolkien. He opens his last book, *The Silmarillion*, with a mythological illustration that compares God's creation to a piece of music. The story is analyzed by Carl Anderson and Jose Granados in their book *Called to Love*. The main point Tolkien makes is that although the dark angel strongly tried to introduce a discordant note into the celestial orchestra, "God reminds Melkor [the dark angel] even this disharmony cannot destroy the pattern of the original music. On the contrary, even Melkor's rebellion will be woven (against his intention) into the final master theme all creation will sing to God's glory."⁹² This is a description about the original experience in a different way. Similar to Merton's insight, the primordial music made by God is always present in our lives and cannot be destroyed through sin. To listen to this music we need to keep silent and we need to find the right attitude to be attentive to it.

In brief, we have seen four different images about the same embodied experience, in which the dwelling of God's Spirit becomes noticeable to us. Giving names to this experience we called it the original experience, holy longing, virgin point and inner music. These are four

⁹¹ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, (New York: Image Books, 1968), 158.

⁹² Carl Anderson and Jose Granados, *Called to Love: Approaching John Paul II's Theology of the Body* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 23.

different expressions about the same reality. God prepared our body as a temple in which He is present through His Spirit. After illustrating the original experience in our body, we now turn to the questions: What helps us to recover this original experience? How do we listen to God's Spirit, who is in midst of our body? In the following steps we are going to introduce two main elements, which seem to be essential for many disciples on their way of listening God's voice in their midst: firstly, the role of silence in their journey and then return to the attitude of trust, which was introduced in the first chapter.

The Role of Silence in Listening to the Original Experience

Thomas Merton writes about his experience: "My only task is to be what I am, a man seeking God in silence and solitude, the deep respect for the demands and realities of his own vocation, and fully aware that others too are seeking the truth in their own way."⁹³ We all have our own ways of approaching and finding God, states Merton, and for this reason he does not make general statements about what somebody should do to find God. In spite of this, Merton shares his own experience. He is helping people through his confessions in which he emphasizes the tasks of silence and solitude. Silence and solitude become much more for him than simple ascetical practices. As John F. Teahan, a Thomas Merton scholar points out "[Merton's] writings speculate about their metaphysical and mystical significance, about the God who embodies them, and about the person who comes to rest in the silence and solitude of God himself."⁹⁴ Following this line of thought, it becomes fundamental for us to think about what kind of role silence plays

⁹³ Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 241.

⁹⁴ John F. Teahan Solitude, "A Central Motif in Thomas Merton's Life and Writings," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50/4 (December, 1982): 552.

in our search for God; furthermore, it is essential to see what is happening within us when we keep quiet.

The invitation from Merton is to walk on our personal way, and to turn our attention to our original experience and begin to pay attention to what is coming from within us. If we do so, we make ourselves silent in order to open up a space to feel and perceive God's voice within us. Putting this into practice seems to be not so difficult at first; however, when we continue down this path, we often face difficulties. Silence means not simply that we do not talk, but it also means that we actively avoid the possibilities of escape from silence – for example: music, internet, smoking, alcohol, etc. – and therefore we stand in front of ourselves as we are. Through the silence we make ourselves able to turn to the inner voice of our body; facing ourselves is not always easy. When we begin to soften the tones around us, the volume of our inner senses becomes louder and louder, since they have now room to come forth. As a consequence, many different feelings, desires, thoughts and needs become present for the person, which can often be chaotic and uncomfortable. Anselm Grün, a German Benedictine monk, describes this process in lengthy fashion in his book *The Challenge of Silence*, and points out that, “the first moments of silence often open our eyes to see our confusions and the disorder of our thoughts and desires.”⁹⁵ For this reason, the beginning of the practice of silence can be uncomfortable, yet it gives us the chance for the voice of our original experience slowly to begin to amplify its presence in our body.

The condition of silence becomes a very important element in the listening process. However, we also see that we discover different kinds of silences in our lives. On the one hand, we know a kind of silence which is enjoyable, which gives us energy and makes us to love more

⁹⁵ Anselm Grün, *Hallgatni arany, A hallgatás igénye* (Pannonhalma: Bencés Kiadó, 1994), 21. (My own translation)

deeply. On the other hand, we also know the silence of tensions and stress. Ferenc Jalics, an Hungarian Jesuit, makes a clear distinction between these two silences.⁹⁶ He says, when two people are joyfully together in silence, usually it is a sign that they had something to say to each other. After they shared their message and they were mutually received by the other person, in this silence, love flows between them. This is a joyful silence. However, it can happen that they are not able to share their message with the other person. When this happens their communication disconnects, and their emotions are simply accumulating in their bodies. As a result, their silence becomes tense and unbearable.

When we start to listen to our original experience in silence, we undergo a similar process in our relationship with God. There are possible times when we clearly feel God's presence in the center of our lives. I communicate myself to God and I am able to listen to God's voice in my body. However, there are times when we may not hear God's voice; instead, we hear our jumbled thoughts, feelings and often tensions. If this happens, our natural reaction is that we do not want to be there where our tensions and weaknesses are so present. The question is raised for us: What can we do to be with God in this process we are going through? How can we listen to God, when everything is confused in us? Thomas Merton describes this process and asks the same question in his poem, titled 'In Silence:'

I will try, like them [stones]
to be my own silence:
and this is difficult. The whole
world is secretly on fire. The stones
burn, even the stones they burn me.
How can a man be still or
listen to all things burning?

⁹⁶ Ferenc Jálícs, *A szemlélődés útja*, (Kecskemét: Korda Kiadó, 2006), 54-59.

How can he dare to sit with them
when all their silence is on fire?”⁹⁷

In poetic language we see the same issue: the silence is sometimes painful and it does not always seem possible to stay in that burning. Thomas Merton does not give a clear answer as to what we should do when this happens, but does clearly point out one thing, namely the importance of an honest attempt to stay there. He will try to stay in that process, although he does not see the end of it. Staying in that burning silence has a hope of redemption as spoken in the Book of Wisdom which proclaims: “As gold in the furnace he hath proved them, and as a victim of a holocaust he hath received them, and in time there shall be respect had to them. The just shall shine, and shall run to and fro like sparks among the reeds.” (Wisdom 3:6-7) In this process silence becomes the place where our healing happens. Silence helps us to realize that we are not able to heal ourselves but when we trust in God, even when it is burning, genuine healing occurs. In this presence of God we are being healed, God is the one who redeems us. This redemption is the hope for Augustine as well who affirms: “Only this I know, that my existence is my woe except in thee – not only in my outward life, but also within my inmost self – and all abundance I have which is not my God is poverty.”⁹⁸

To summarize, silence becomes an important element in our journey to recover our original experiences. When we turn down the voices around us, we become much more sensitive to what is coming from inside our body. Although we try to listen to God’s voice within us, there are many other voices as well which we do not necessarily like. However, when we keep our attention on God, we may come to the point where we meet Him in the center of our life, and

⁹⁷ Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1977), 280.

⁹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* 13.8.

behind all the voices we may find our peace in God. Going through this process, we are invited to learn to trust in God, who dwells in our midst.

Trusting and Letting Go in order that God Can Come Close

After considering the importance of silence in our human exploration of God in our midst, there is another attitude, which is often emphasized by so many theologians and disciples. This is the attitude of trust, as we introduced it in the first chapter. An imaginative story by Anthony de Mello exemplifies well this attitude in the process we are talking about. The story is entitled *The Temple Bells*,⁹⁹ and speaks about a temple on an island, which had a thousand bells. Over many centuries the island sank into the sea, but according to an ancient tradition the bells could be heard by anyone who listened attentively. The story talks about a young man who was determined to hear those bells. He sat for days and days on the shore, listening with all his heart. Although he made every effort, he did not hear the bells, just the sound of the waves breaking on the shore. He did everything to go behind the roar of the waves to find the sound of the bells, but he could not find it. He did this for weeks without any success. Finally, he decided to give up the attempt and go home. He thought, perhaps the legend was not true at all. Just before his return, he went back to the place where he had been listening. He lay on the sands and, that day, he did not resist the sound. He did not try to do anything; instead he gave himself over to it. Soon, in the depths of the silence, he began to hear a tinkle of a small bell followed by another, and another, etc. Lastly, he found the sounds of the bells he desired. With this short story De Mello draws our attention to this truth: if we wish to see God in our lives, we just need to contemplate. We do not

⁹⁹ Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird* (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1984), 22-23.

need to force ourselves, we do not need to reject ourselves, we do not need to analyze. The key point for de Mello is this: to look attentively at creation and to trust, deeply, that God will come.

We do not control God or our encounter with Him. We can try everything possible from our own power, but the encounter with God does not seem to work that way. In order to hear God's voice we need to find an attitude of trust in our life. Finding this trust means that we let go of our ideas and preconceptions about how God should talk to us and about what we should hear or feel, and open up ourselves to receive God into our lives the way God wants to come. If it happens, this encounter is transformative. Peter Nemeshegyi, an Hungarian Jesuit and theologian, accentuates this:

Whenever God wants He gives his Spirit to his people and transforms them; through this transformation, these people then find the way to finding deep joy, loving and doing good things and in this way to give oneself to the way of love, to the way of discipleship. Without the grace of the Holy Spirit we are not capable of taking one step on this way towards the salvation.¹⁰⁰

The trust we need is not something we can produce, but a gift we receive. God does not force us, but attracts us so that we become more capable of asking for trust in His coming; yet at the same time God is already present in our lives. This is a mystery and God's amazing gift. As Hans Urs von Balthasar expresses it, "Christian faith means understanding our existence as a response to the Word, to Logos, that sustains and maintains all things. It means affirming the fact that the meaningfulness that we do not create but can only receive has already been given to us."¹⁰¹ Our existence is a response to God, in which we give ourselves over to God, who is present. In our

¹⁰⁰ Peter Nemeshegyi, *Jo az Isten* (Teologiai Kis Konyvtar, 1981), 36.

¹⁰¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That all Men be Saved"? With a Short Discourse on Hell*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 172.

response we open up ourselves even before we know anything about when and how God will come and touch our lives. This is the trust we are talking about.

Trusting is not always easy, especially in times when, in our silence, we experience disorders, confusions and fears in our body. In these times we may ask ourselves, where is God in our suffering? Why we do not find God, especially now, in these difficult moments of our lives? In his article, “Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer,” Karl Rahner expresses the conviction that there is an incomprehensibility in suffering that is connected with the incomprehensibility of God. He says: “The acceptance of suffering without an answer other than the incomprehensibility of God and his freedom is the concrete form in which we accept God himself and allow him to be God.”¹⁰² At first, Rahner’s answer seems to be a simple evasion of the problem; however, there is a significant insight here, which opens up for us a further insight into our way of following Jesus with our whole being, within our body. We make Rahner’s insight our starting point, which places the issue of our suffering in our personal relationship with God. We can go a little further from here when we ask our basic question a little differently. By asking the theodicy question differently, we turn from the ‘why’ question to the question ‘how;’ and with this change we turn from pure intellectual reasoning to personal experience and the process with which we are dealing within our body. One could, for example, ask oneself: How am I experiencing God now in this terrible situation? What does my relationship with God look like in this powerless occurrence? Francois Varillon, a famous French Jesuit writer says:

It is difficult to believe in God when God is a desert. Solitude with God appeases. But solitude from God burns one to a cinder. Solitude among men is often so unbearable that

¹⁰² Karl Rahner, “Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer?” in *Theological Investigations 19*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 207.

one is ready to do anything in order to escape from it. God then becomes a ‘means’ that is ‘used.’ Not God, but his false image. This is why, refusing this degradation on my behalf, he escapes. The ‘means’ is lacking. Then God is God. He is never so much God as when I am ‘missing’ him. But this hurts very much. This also hurts him very much. ... It is the price of union. If I turn away, either from standing in silence before his absence, or from listlessly working to fulfill my human tasks, then I wound him with a quite different type of wound. Suffering from the pain he causes me through love, he suffers even more from the pain I deal myself through lack of love. ... ‘Nothing wounds God,’ says Angelus Silesius. ‘He never suffered, yet my soul can wound his heart.’ Paradox of transcendence, which I must never cease to affirm, and which transcends itself in the vulnerability of love.¹⁰³

Varillon draws attention to the spiritual occurrence which happens when, in one’s looking to God as a tool to achieve one’s ideas and goals, God disappears. We cannot use God for our purposes. However, when we allow God to be God, we can talk to God and we can deeply trust in God that He is with us, although we may not experience His presence at all, or have any answers to the ‘why’ questions. In those times of darkness, the maxim of Ignatius of Loyola can be helpful when he says: “The more hopeless matters are, the more we ought to trust in God.”¹⁰⁴ Is it a satisfying answer to the question of the suffering one may experience? Perhaps it is not. However, trusting, or perhaps for some it is imaging the possibility of trusting, is the only way I have found that I can deal with this challenging issue and go further with God into his mysterious ways.

II. The Original Experience and Jesus Who Touches

By describing the original experience in our body I have already begun to use a language in which I recognize a communication between the person and his/her original experience. The reason I indicated that is because the original experience is not simply one feeling among other

¹⁰³ Francois Varillon, *The Humility and Suffering of God* (New York: Alba House, 1983), 183-184.

¹⁰⁴ Steward Rose, *St. Ignatius Loyola and the Early Jesuits* (New York: Catholic Publication Society Co, 1891), 564.

feelings, but a sacred space where God's self is present in our body and where God talks to us. This inference comes from the mystery of the incarnation that, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14) The Son of God wanted to share in our human life and took on our mortal body. The reality of the incarnation opens up a new vision of our own body. John Paul II often emphasizes this truth, and in the light of this new vision he talks about the Gospel of the body. The Good News of the body, he says, is that God's self became body and offered himself on our behalf, therefore our "human body is a sign and instrument of the same message of our salvation in Christ."¹⁰⁵ For this reason, we turn our attention to Christ and the ways he was proclaiming the Good News through his body.

Looking at Jesus and his ways of relating to other people through his body makes visible for us the following: who God is; who we are as human beings; and how He relates to us. By contemplating the person of Jesus there is a chance to get closer to him. By doing so, our original experience is going to connect us to Christ's life, since, "everybody who comes into the world is destined to share in this Gospel by becoming one body, one spirit with Christ."¹⁰⁶ Looking at Jesus, the hidden good news is becoming visible in our body, through which Jesus calls us to be with him and participate in his life. In the following section, we will look at three narratives from the New Testament through which we get a good picture about Jesus who talks not simply with words, but through his whole being, through his whole body. The first scene is when Jesus walks on the water; the second is when he heals the blind man close to Jericho; and the third one is when Jesus gives his body for us.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained, A Commentary on John Paul II's "Gospel of the Body"* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2003), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Jesus Said: “Come!”

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (Mt 14:25-32)

After a day when Jesus was healing all the sick and feeding more than five thousand people, he sends the disciples back to the western shore on the Sea of Galilee. On the way back, there is a strong break in the weather; the disciples are struggling against the strong winds and against the waves. They are not able to go forward. Since they are out of control, the situation becomes frightening, because their life is in danger on the sea; moreover, Jesus is not with them when it is happening. This experience of the disciples is profound; however, we human beings all have similar experiences when we are out of control, when we are afraid and when we do not sense God’s presence in our struggles. This is the place where Jesus enters the scene. The way that Jesus is present is particular and even strange, so much so that the disciples do not recognize him, though surely it was really him who comes walking on the water. Daniel Harrington points out the parallels between this event and other biblical texts, “in stilling the storm Jesus does what only God can do according to Psalm 107:29, and in walking on the water Jesus does what only God can do according to Job 9:8.”¹⁰⁷ In addition, we are witnessing in this story a change in Peter’s life, which occurs in his relationship with Jesus and manifests God’s saving presence in his life. Like the calming of the storm, this change in Peter is also something only God could do.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel J. Harrington, *Meeting St. Matthew Today: Understanding the Man, His Mission, and His Message* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 50.

For this reason, in the following step we are going to focus only on the phrase that tells us what is happening between Jesus and Peter; and what Jesus communicates through his body by grabbing Peter's hands when he begins to sink.

Peter steps out from the boat to reach Jesus, who is walking towards him on the water. The water is deep and dangerous. We could ask ourselves why Peter would do such a thing. "Peter's conduct does not make sense except as a combination of impulsive love and faith weakened by doubt,"¹⁰⁸ says Benedict T. Viviano, O.P. in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Peter steps out from the boat, not because he is reasoning and thinking about the consequences of his steps, but because his love and self-giving is stronger than his weakened faith. When he begins to walk on the sea and his attention turns from Jesus to the wind and the waves that surround him, he becomes afraid again (like before in the boat without Jesus) and right away begins to sink. Peter does not have any control over the situation and so his body reacts to this reality he is experiencing; consequently, he begins to sink. Through this situation and his bodily experience, Peter realizes that there is no one else who can save him, just God alone. As a result, he turns back to Jesus with the last hope he has, and Jesus immediately reaches out his hand and grabs him. Jesus communicates to Peter much more through this hand-clasp than simple verbal truths; in that gesture and saving act, Jesus communicates himself to Peter. As a consequence, Peter and the disciples will correctly recognize that Jesus, when they are back in the boat, is the son of God.

Although the analysis cannot be complete, because in this holding gesture of Jesus there is so much more than we could express in words, I just would like to emphasize one element of

¹⁰⁸ Benedict T. Viviano, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 658.

this bodily communication of Jesus, which gives deep meaning to how we look at him and how we look at ourselves as human beings. Through this occurrence, Jesus communicates that he is there to save Peter; furthermore through his holding presence, he expresses that he has control over the hopeless situation; everything is going to be all right. From Peter's side, on the other hand, trusting and letting go are the basic attitudes which come to light in this story — the same attitudes we were talking about earlier, through which God becomes active and present in Peter's life as well. Peter does not know what is coming next in his life after stepping out into the water. His desire to follow Jesus with intimacy and trust may not always make sense from outside. However, trusting in Jesus and handing over the control into his hand is the way for him to be active in our lives.

“That Our Eyes May Be Opened”

As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. “Lord,” they answered, “Let our eyes be opened.” Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. (Mt 20:29-34)

In the healing story of the two blind men Matthew draws our attention to Jesus' compassion for the people and his healing of the sick by touching them. Jesus brings the good news and healing to people through his body. Although there are many other cases where Jesus heals people by laying his hands on them, I have chosen the healing story of the two blind men because, in this narrative, both the relational-dialogical and bodily elements are expressly connected. In his book *On the Body*, Carlo Maria Martini proposes that when somebody is healthy, his/her body is basically quiet, but when somebody feels physical pain the silence is no

longer there anymore, the voices of the body are no longer quiet. For this reason Martini says, “sickness takes us back to what is essential: it reveals the roots of a despairing evil and prods us to reexamine everything we have lived for and still live for.”¹⁰⁹ This is exactly what is happening with these two blind men by the roadside close to Jericho. Their bodies cannot keep silence anymore, although the crowd rebuked them to be quiet; their powerful needs cry for help: “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” These two blind men understood from their own experience that they could not be their own masters; they needed help to be healed. This is the reason why Martini stresses: “suffering can be an opportunity for conversion. Our eyes open onto a horizon that can give meaning even to an existence filled with sickness and death, because our life is not a journey towards nothingness, but a journey towards the Lord who is coming to meet us.”¹¹⁰ These two blind men were able to use this opportunity and, with the help of their desire and faith, they met Jesus who, by touching them, opened up their eyes for a new meaning. As a consequence of this encounter, they followed Jesus.

“This is My Body Which is Given For You”

Then Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you: do this in memory of me.” (Luke 22:19)

The third scene is from the last supper in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus and the apostles have gathered to celebrate the Passover together. According to Robert J. Karris, O.F.M., in the Passover liturgy the head of the household takes the bread for distribution as a symbol of how he

¹⁰⁹ Carlo Maria Martini, *On the Body: A Contemporary Theology of the Human Person* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 18.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

provides for his own.¹¹¹ Jesus follows the tradition and does as is customary: He distributes the bread to his disciples; however, he provides not simply bread to his disciples, but he provides himself. The words and deeds of Jesus we hear in this passage take on an enormous significance from the perspective of the occurrence which comes a few hours after this supper; namely he is going to be tortured and executed. Jesus gives freely his whole body, his whole life for the salvation of the world, for our salvation. Carlo Maria Martini summarizes the essence of this self-giving mystery of Jesus in with words that Christ himself would speak to us:

Trust me, for I have given my life to you, even dying on the cross for you. Trust me, for I want to nourish you with my flesh. I want to make of your body my house. I want to share your existence and make you partake of my resurrection. You must not feel alone, because I am here with you. I can give meaning to your search, to your restlessness. Turn your sadness into joy and your lonesomeness into communion with your brothers and sisters.¹¹²

Christ's total self-giving love shows us how much God loves us; moreover it shows the way for how the disciples are invited to live. As Jesus gave his body for others and symbolized it by the distribution of the bread, so the disciples are called, in the same way, to give their lives in the love and service of other people. The symbolic power of this gesture goes to the heart of the disciple's call. Through this mission of God the people find trust and faith; they heal and find the meaning of their lives. Human beings become whole again, the meaning for which they were created. As Martini says, through the Eucharist we, "recognize in the sacramental signs the body of the Lord who nourishes us so that our eyes may be opened and may see him near us and around us."¹¹³ Jesus gives his body for us and opens our eyes that we may see and experience his

¹¹¹ Robert J. Karris, "The Gospel According to Luke," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 715.

¹¹² Carlo Maria Martini, *On the Body*, 85.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 86.

presence in our midst; to see that in our very being we are not alone; he is with us. From this experience Jesus sends the disciples to do the same as he did: “Do this in memory of me!” As a result, following this call, disciples in all ages go in all directions of the earth, and filled with the dynamism of love, do the same as Jesus did, even unto martyrdom.

Through the giving up our body for others—in other words, through our deeds of love and charity—Jesus’ presence becomes visible for us and for the entire world. Furthermore, Jesus’ presence becomes not simply visible, but also transforms us and transforms our world. People who were separated before become connected to each other in one community with Christ. In the presence of Jesus, our selfish “I” opens up and begins to see the world differently. In brief, through this transformation we begin to sense God’s presence more deeply and to understand more fully his way of communicating to us in our midst; we are becoming sensitive to the needs of other people; and, lastly, we are becoming reconciled with God, with the other people, and with ourselves in this world. This is the way we are becoming “Eucharistic” says John Paul II, and that is, “the fruit of transfigured existence, which splendidly illustrates the eschatological tension inherent in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the Christian life as a whole!”¹¹⁴ Through our transformed and loving body we and the whole community proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes again. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

III. Conclusion

We started the chapter with the simple statement: when somebody is called by God to be a disciple the whole person is called, not just one’s mind, or the intellect. This is the reason why

¹¹⁴ John Paul II, *On the Eucharist*, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Ecclesial Letter (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2003), 21.

we turned to the human body which seems to play a very important role in how we follow Jesus in our lives. Peter Nemeshegyi proposes that perhaps we western people speculate too much when we do theology, and so we are often uncomfortable just simply walking on the way.¹¹⁵ When we start to walk on the way, we listen at a deeper level to our personal experiences and God's dwelling presence in our bodies.

First, we turned to our body and gave an overview about a basic human experience which happens in our body and connects us to God. This experience is described by many great thinkers, mystics and theologians in many different ways. After introducing these observations, we highlighted the role of silence and trust, as two main attitudes which are key elements for listening to God's voice in our midst.

Secondly, we turned to Jesus, and through three different narratives from the New Testament we looked at Jesus and His ways of relating to people through his body. The first story was when Peter was stepping out from the boat to walk to Jesus on the water and Jesus grabs his hand. The second narrative was when Jesus heals the blind men close to Jericho by laying his hands on them. And the third is the last supper when Jesus gives his own body as salvation for all. Analyzing these narratives, we came to the conclusion that Jesus communicates not simply a truth through his body, but he communicates himself to the people, through which communication the people change. Their eyes were opened up and they realized God's presence in their midst. This experience changed the foundations of their lives and called them to follow Jesus on his way -- the way on which he gives himself fully for others. In the following and last part of this thesis I am going to turn to one description about the introduced deepening and changing process in our relationship with God through the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

¹¹⁵ Péter Vámos, *Két kultúra ölelésében* (Budapest: JTMR, 1997), 96.

B. THE TRANSFORMATION OF DESIRE: FINDING THE AUTHENTIC SELF WITH GOD IN THE IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

After a year in Manresa, Ignatius of Loyola wrote down on account of his spiritual journey. These writings became the basis of the *Spiritual Exercises*. After further contributions of other spiritual masters, editing and revisions by Ignatius, the *Spiritual Exercises* took its final form as we know it today. It is not a book of spiritual reading, but more a methodological handbook for people who have made the Exercises and who want to guide others in making them in order to deepen their personal relationship with God. The essence of the Spiritual Exercises came from the experience of Ignatius and the dynamic of his relationship with God. Juan de Polanco, who was later the secretary of the Society of Jesus, wrote about the Spiritual Exercises and emphasized that what is written in this book of Ignatius comes not from other different books, but from the personal experiences of Ignatius.¹¹⁶ For this reason I do not want to state here that every person must go through the same process I am going to describe, but I think that looking at one process of a deepening relationship with God – which is based on the experience of Ignatius and has become the experience of so many other people – can help us to reflect our own relationship with God. Furthermore, it puts our current experiences in a perspective of a deepening and personal process. In the context of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises we find on one hand the retreatant who is seeking to encounter God a deeper way; and on the other hand, there is God who desires this encounter with us much more than we can imagine. In the following we are going to discover the special way of the Spiritual Exercises, how one's relationship with God

¹¹⁶ Directory of the Spiritual Exercises, Foreword, in: Ferenc Szabó (ed.) *Loyolai Szent Ignác Lelkiyakorlatok*, (Budapest: Jézus Társasága Magyarországi Rendtartománya, 1994), 178.

deepens and man and how this personal relationship transforms one's identity from the selfish "I" to the communal self-understanding.

I. The Principle and Foundation

The Principle and Foundation is the foundation of the Spiritual Exercises, which is why it stands right at the beginning. And, as Michael Ivens notes, it remains the fundament not only throughout the exercises, but throughout the whole of one's life.¹¹⁷ The Principle and Foundation is a short summary of Ignatius's experience of God's love and desire for us human beings. It begins with the following words:

Human beings are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by so doing save his or her soul; and it is for the human person that the other things on the face of the earth are created, as helps to the pursuit of this end. (Sp Ex 23.)

Ignatius emphasizes that God created the world and, in the world, us human beings out of love, and called us to love as well. The final goal of creation, namely to "praise, reverence and serve God" is not the compulsory behavior of a servant, but it is the spontaneous act of a person from one's love and joy for and about the other person. The final goal we are called to is a mutually loving relationship with God. Ivens formulates this goal in theological language: "God, it seems, creates this universe to invite all persons to share the interpersonal life of the Trinity."¹¹⁸ This insight of Ignatius comes from his own experience. Thus, when we may have similar foundational experiences from our encounters of God, we may also experience the creative action of God, who is constantly creating the occasions to reach us and to bring us into the inner life of the Trinity.

¹¹⁷ Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2008), 26.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

The Principle and Foundation is a dynamic reality, not a simple statement. Creation is not merely an act fourteen billion years ago, but an ongoing action that continues today as well. Teilhard de Chardin emphasizes that creation has never ceased. “Its act is a great continuous movement spread out over the totality of time. It is still going on; incessantly but imperceptibly the world emerges more and more from nothingness.”¹¹⁹ As we have seen the arguments of John Macmurray in the first chapter, this is the one action of God, who is the universal agent; furthermore, the world has an intention which manifests God’s desire for relationship with us human beings. We are all free agents in this world, and for this reason it is very important how we collaborate (or not) with God’s desire for its realization. William Barry notes: “If we understand the world as one action of God, we mean that God has a unitary intention for the whole Creation and that this one action includes and is constituted by all the actions of every created agent and all the events that will ever occur in the history of the universe. In other words, the one action of God includes the free actions of all human beings.”¹²⁰ How God’s action depends on us is a mystery, since we are free agents, able to do good or evil. We find, however, that we are most truly free when our actions are in tune with the divine freedom that is the source and foundation of our own human freedom. Thus, the text of the Principle and Foundation continues:

It follows from this that the person has to use these [created] things in so far as they help towards this end, and to be free of them in so far as they stand in the way of it. To attain this [freedom], we need to make ourselves indifferent towards all created things, provided the matter is subject to our free choice and there is no prohibition. Thus for our part we should not want health more than disgrace, a long life more than a short one – and so with everything else; desiring and choosing only what conduces more to the end for which we are created. (Sp Ex 23.)

¹¹⁹ Robert Faricy, “Teilhard de Chardin on creation and the Christian life”, *Theology Today* 23 (1967): 512.

¹²⁰ William Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 15.

As Ignatius said, our freedom is a great gift from God and according to the second element of Principle and Foundation, it is also a task. The gift of freedom Ignatius talks about here is the foundation of our being. Karl Rahner emphasizes that freedom is first of all a freedom of being. He says, “[Freedom] is not merely the quality of an act and capacity exercised at some time, but a transcendental mark of human existence itself.”¹²¹ In other words, this God-given freedom constitutes in the whole creation and in our human existence in its essence. This foundation becomes existentially real in the choices we make—choices which are going to change us and eventually make us the person we ultimately become. In fact, our freedom shows us something intrinsic about ourselves. It tells us who we really are, and in so doing, drives home the notion that our freedom is to be understood, primarily, as freedom of being.

Moreover, freedom has also a direction. It is clear that our human freedom compels us to make decisions in our lives and to act upon those decisions. When we reach such decisions and make consequent actions, we always do so in relations to others. Acting is never just about us-- there is always another person (human or divine) involved. Karl Rahner puts it this way: “Freedom in its origin is freedom of saying yes or no to God and by this fact is freedom of the subject towards itself.”¹²² In our human freedom, we are called to live the dialogic capacity of love: to love each other and love God with our whole being. The capacity of our freedom is for loving others. When we use our freedom in the opposite way, when we hate somebody, this ability is going against its intended use. According to Barth, use this is no longer freedom. He says: “Trying to escape from being in accord with God’s own freedom is not human freedom.

¹²¹ Karl Rahner, “Theology of Freedom,” in *Theological Investigations* 6 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1969), 184.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 182.

Rather, it is a compulsion wrought by powers of darkness or by man's own helplessness. Sin as an alternative is not anticipated or included in the freedom given to man by God."¹²³ In brief, the incorrect use of freedom leads to sin and fear, and this is not the way which is given to us. But the proper use of freedom will create harmony, peace, and surety. Ignatius called this inner freedom indifference, where freedom really becomes free. "It is an affective space within which the movements of the Spirit can be sensed and things seen in relation to the signs of God's will, an affective silence making possible an unconditional listening."¹²⁴ Indifference for Ignatius is a stance before God, and what this act makes possible is a positive desire for the encounter of God and search for his will. According to this recognition, indifference and dialogical freedom are deeply related to our desires. When God's desire and our human desire meet, something wondrous happens, an experience that Ivens would describe with words like joy, freedom or love. Such a deep and personal encounter changes human life from a selfish "I" to a person who is living with and for others. For this reason, in the following, we are going to consider the role of our desires and their changing process throughout the Spiritual Exercises, a process that will change one's self-understanding as well.

II. The Transformation of Desires and Self-Interpretation in the Four Week Structure of the Spiritual Exercises

It seems essential in the Spiritual Exercises to put our desires into words. However, it is not always easy to recognize and articulate our desires—especially our true, authentic, deepest

¹²³ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 77.

¹²⁴ Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 31.

desires. One important task of a director of the Exercises is to help the person find the correct words to identify his feelings and desires. This is why William Barry emphasizes:

If we know what we want in prayer, we are going to find our way. After a practical belief that God wants an intimate relationship with each one of us and that God is directly encountered in our experience, nothing is more important for the development of our relationship with God than knowledge of what we want and of what God wants.¹²⁵

Sometimes it can happen that we may know what we should want, but we still do not desire it. In this situation, we can ask God's grace to desire it, or at least the grace to desire the desire for it, as Ignatius puts it. This request seems important because, since, as it was already underlined before, will power alone cannot help people achieve the peace of a deep relationship with God. Lastly the person realizes, as Ignatius points out, desire is a gift that only God can supply. For this reason the retreatant asks God for what he/she wishes by before all the meditations through the preparatory prayer, which is recommended.¹²⁶ For Ignatius, trying to put our desires into words is a key to developing our relationship with God because of a two-way dynamic: God's desires and mine.

Not every positive feeling one may have is the kind of desire Ignatius is talking about here. Ignatius is talking about our most fundamental and authentic desires, those we experience in the depths of ourselves, those that are connected to God. This experience can take very different forms, but the main point is that it is always related to our very personal relationship to God. About the authentic desire Michael Ivens says, "A truly authentic desire is a desire consonant with the fundamental Spirit-given desire for God. ... Such an experience corresponds to the truth that an authentic love (or desire) for God does not destroy other loves (or desires) but

¹²⁵ William A. Barry, *Letting God Come Close* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001), 27.

¹²⁶ "The preparatory prayer is to ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of his Divine Majesty." (Sp Ex 46.)

integrates them into itself.”¹²⁷ However, God’s desire for us and our deepest desires for God, meeting in a mutual personal relationship, is called to grow in self-devotion until our life is united with God’s life.

Our deepest desires are going through a growing process, which is evident in the journey of the four-week structure of the Exercises. Through the Principle and Foundation, the person experiences the overflowing love of God. Starting from this basis, a person in the first week will focus on his/her own needs. The centre of one’s desires is about the “I”. By the second week, the desires focus on Jesus as the exercitant aspires to know Jesus better. The centre of the desires is related much more to the other person; the focus is becoming “*I and You*”. In the third week, one will express the wish to find a deeper knowledge of Jesus and a more profound sharing in his life. The focus is changing continuously. In the third week the desires grow deeper in the context of a new “*We*”. And lastly, by the fourth week the desires are for unity with God, with the focus being “*We together, under Your guidance*”. In the following I would like to take a closer look at this changing process of human desires and self-understanding.

1) First Week – Self-Understanding: “The Separated I Begins to Open”

In the Spiritual Exercises the retreatant begins with the Principle and Foundation. One experiences God as the Creator who loves us. In the Spiritual Exercises it is usual that just a few days are given for the Principle and Foundation; however, in reality, as many commentators of the Exercises observe, it can take years until someone is really able to open oneself to really experience God’s infinite love in one’s life. And yet, this Foundation, the experience of the loving God, is the necessary first step and basis for the rest of the Spiritual Exercises. After this

¹²⁷ Michael Ivens, “Desire and discernment,” *Retreats in Transition* 95 (1999): 33

first step the real work of the First Week begins. One has already experienced God's love in one's life and this is the time when one begins to realize in the light of God's love, who he/she really is. The time of self realization can be very difficult. For example, "the realization depends that one is unable to consciously regulate tendencies to grab for security, love, and control ... The person is painfully aware of not being in control of [one's] own motivation."¹²⁸

At the beginning of the First Week the times of prayer are often undisturbed and enjoyable, but now it becomes painful. What is the reason for that? We can find several reasons for that experience, but perhaps, the main reason is we lived in an illusion before. We lived in an illusion that we are good enough in ourselves and that we can direct our life alone, simply from our own power. But this is not the reality. This new situation opens our selves so that we can see into our new desires. As Barry says, "In the First Week of the Exercises, then, our desire is for God to reveal how far short we have fallen of God's dream for us and how our inordinate attachments (addictions) keep us from living out God's dream."¹²⁹ We experience here how we are capable of sin; and we see its consequences and feel its pain. However, it is not the end of the process. Slowly a new hope is born from God's love, who loves me with all my sins, for he has died for me out of love. The experience is: I am a loved sinner. To sum up the personal change in the First Week of the Exercises with the words of Howard Gray, "Granted the radically positive trust of the First Week of the Exercises, there remains a sober Christian reality which every retreatant carries into the rest of the Exercises and then throughout his or her life: I am *homo viator*, a person on a journey, seeking that final homecoming only God can give."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Carolyn Osiek, "The first Week of the Spiritual Exercises and the conversion of Saint Paul", *Review for Religious* 36 (1977): 659.

¹²⁹ William Barry, *Letting God Come Close*, 75-76.

¹³⁰ Howard Gray, "Changing Structures," *The Way Supplement* 76 (1993): 79.

2) Second Week – Self-Understanding: “I in Relation to You”

Following William Barry’s insight, the desire of the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises is expressed in the third prelude Ignatius suggests before each contemplation: “Here it will be to ask for an interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely” (Sp Ex 104). The person who has this desire has changed in his/her orientation. In the first week our focus has been on ourselves and our own needs. Here the desire changes. The person wants to know Jesus better: where he is, what he is doing, how he is present in his mission and we want to be with him on his way. The direction of one’s attention has changed. The attention now tends away from one self and tends towards the person Jesus and to the personal relationship with him. “In the First Week, we are like the blind man Bartimaeus, who wants Jesus to give him succor and heal his blindness. In the Second Week, we are like the now seeing Bartimaeus, who follows Jesus on the way.”¹³¹

The invitation of the Second Week is to follow Jesus as his disciple and friend. Following Jesus means not simply to do what he was doing in his mission, but to be with him and to know him in a deeper way. This friendship and ‘interior knowledge of Our Lord’ really forms us to be disciples of Jesus, which is not always easy. It requires an adequate answer and a decision from the retreatant, which is not simply a matter of thinking but of action involving of the whole person. The dynamics of personal invitation and involvement leads the person deeper into the relationship with Christ. The process, starting from the desire and entering into discipleship with Christ, directs the dynamics of the Second Week, “creating, through its repetition, a logic of heart, symbolized by the series of colloquies found in the Kingdom

¹³¹ William Barry, *Letting God Come Close* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001), 78. See also: Mark 10:52.

reflection, and then in the triple colloquies after the Two Standards, the Three Classes of Persons, and the Three Ways of Being Humble.”¹³² The dynamic of the Second Week, with the help of these different exercises, leads us to a deeper and closer relationship to Jesus who is calling us to this discipleship. This calling is the main gift we have been given, since we cannot follow Jesus from our own willpower, without the grace of God. But with him it is possible and so this experience of being called opens up a new prospect for our life. God’s presence through Jesus draws, repeatedly, our self-centeredness to a deeper level of our being in a deeper relation in love.

3) Third Week – Self Understanding: “I as a Part of a We”

The desire of this Week is, “to ask for what I want; here it will be for grief, deep feeling and confusion because it is for my sins that the Lord is going to the Passion” (Sp Ex 193). To have this desire is not simply the result of our will; these desires are gift from God, therefore it is not under our control. We want to suffer with somebody whom we love, whom we have deeply experienced, whom love is concretely related to. When we see that the beloved person is suffering we want to do something just to be with him. This is the desire which comes alive here, to ask Jesus to let us share his life fully with us because our love moves us to do so. The person, who has this deep desire to associate himself with Jesus, oversteps his self-centered attitude. One is experiencing that he/she is deeply related to the other person and in a close communion with him. Mary Jo Meadow identifies the core change of the Third Week of the Exercises: “The Third Week’s invitation is to transformation won only with intensely relentless

¹³² Howard Gray, “Changing Structures,” 80.

suffering, suffering that turns us inside out and changes how we view everything.”¹³³ In fact, we are not alone here, but in a deep relationship with Jesus, whose life we may and want fully share.

William Barry stresses, however, that “we must expect that no matter how strong our desire to suffer with Jesus, there will be internal resistances to that desire. Death threatens us with annihilation, with the loss of all the relationships that make us who we are.”¹³⁴ The fear of death is deep in our human reality and nature. In spite of this fact, death does not have the last word. Barry often emphasizes that beyond suffering and death, human beings have a given ability for hope. We can hope in God, whose love and care we have experienced in our life and whom we believe as the beginning and end of our human existence. In his book, *Unwanted Wisdom*, Paul G. Crowley says however, “Thus, the Christian cannot deny the sting of suffering and death in the name of hope. As Paul reminds us, Christians are baptized into hope because they are baptized into Christ’s death. (Rom 6:3) Reality pushes toward the truth of its brutal end.”¹³⁵ Without clearly understanding the whys and wherefores of suffering, with the deep trust and hope in God’s silent presence, we may reach the Fourth Week the Spiritual Exercises.

4) Fourth Week – Self Understanding: “I as Mediator of the We”

After the retreatant has remained faithfully in the passion of Jesus, there is a final shift in the desires. God gives a desire, “for the grace to feel gladness and to rejoice intensely over the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord.” (Sp Ex 221) The exercitant asks for this grace from God, as such deep joy does not come automatically after the Third Week. However, when this gift comes, the person’s heart is filled with affection and freedom of a depth that was an

¹³³ Mary Jo Meadow, “Personal Growth and the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises”, *The Way Supplement* 76 (1993): 21.

¹³⁴ William Barry, *Letting God Come Close*, 86.

¹³⁵ Paul G. Crowley, *Unwanted Wisdom* (New York-London: Continuum, 2005), 138.

unknown experience before. The words I have been using throughout this thesis – like mutual trust, hope and freedom – become a lived reality that gives real meaning for the person in its depth.

To express the gift character of these affections and the gratuitousness of love, Ignatius uses expressions: such as “from on high” or “from above.” In the Contemplation for Attaining Love, he says: “To see how all that is good and every gift descends from on high; so, my limited power descends from the supreme and infinite power above, ... as rays descend from the sun, and waters from a fountain.” (Sp Ex 237) When God comes close in our lives, and we let him love us, this gracious and free love from God is not an unreturned occurrence; it naturally calls for our response. For this reason Ignatius emphasizes: “Loves consists in mutual communication, i.e. the lover gives and communicates to the beloved whatever the lover has, or something of what the lover has or is able to give, and the beloved in turn does the same for the lover.” (Sp Ex 231) Everything we can receive from or we can give to the other person is a sign of our wish for a personal encounter. Through his gifts God communicates himself to us: “it is the Lord’s wish, as far as He is able, to give me Himself.” (Sp Ex 234)

At the end of the Fourth Week one can look back and realize that this long journey of encounter and relationship with God has changed one’s life. One has come a long way in God’s grace and away from one’s selfish ‘I’ to a real mutual relationship where one can receive love and give the other person all one has. One has changed. The whole person is changed. And for this reason, this change will naturally appear in all of one’s other personal contacts as well, not simply in one’s relationship with God. In this process one is becoming a person through whom others recognize God’s healing presence. One is becoming one’s whole existence and personality, a witness of God, whose affection has transformed one’s life.

III. Conclusion

Through the process of the Spiritual Exercises, first of all, we considered the essence of the Principle and Foundation: what God desires and invites us to as human beings. In addition, we went through the four weeks structure of the Exercises considering how our desires change and, as a consequence, how our personality and our self-understanding change in this personal dynamic. The process of the Spiritual Exercises is a particular example, but shows distinctly a deepening process of our relationship with God. In this process the person is no longer only thinks about God, but follows God with his/her all being.

If I were able to express the essence of this described process in one single sentence, I would do it in the following way: The process of the relationship with God changes one's life, from a selfish "I" to the person who has become capable of accepting love and to giving others everything one has. When these words are not mere words but a genuine personal experience in one's life, the relationship with God becomes the center of everything in one's human reality. God gave us everything God has. I believe with Ignatius that when somebody experiences this love of God, one necessarily begins to change. The person changes in his/her desires, in his/her self-understanding and in all his/her other relations as well. When someone has experienced this changing and liberating reality of a mutual relationship with God, that person desires ever more deeply to direct his/her full life in this relationship, since the deepest desires of our hearts draw us. Similar to the man who finds a treasure in a field: "then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Mt 13:44).

FINAL CONCLUSION

My thesis was intended to describe and come closer to our human reality from the perspective of our Christian faith, in which we believe that God created us in God's image and likeness and continually works to draw us into a community with Godself and with one another. It means for us that being in relationship is going to be at the core of our human reality; it transforms our desires and self-understanding, and so completes God's creative process within us that we grow more and more into God's image. These are insights which I believe are able to give hope for our western societies today, where the person is often understood simply as individual, left alone in this world. The understanding of person as an individual has serious consequences in our societies, as Max Weber pointed out, which he calls the danger of depersonalization. The Christian perception about the person, however, opens up a new space for our time to think about who we really are and gives meaning for our lives.

In the first and the second chapter of this thesis I introduced the good news of the Christian understanding by placing the person in a new philosophical and theological perspective. As the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray pointed out, it was necessary to restore our orientation by shifting the standpoint from the 'I think' to the 'I do.' Criticizing the Cartesian individualistic approach, this new philosophical starting point made it possible to state that the core of our human experience is first of all encounter: an encounter with the world, and with other persons. Following Macmurray, I turned to the human experience of a personal universe in which we believe God is the final reality. Our Christian tradition holds that God is one and, at the same time, God is relation in Godself; in other words, God is Trinity. Based on these insights, in the second chapter I presented John Zizioulas's Trinitarian theology concerning personhood and its consequences in Christians' lives. As God is one and three at the same time,

human beings are always unique, but, also, unique always through and for communion with others. From the Trinitarian theology of Zizioulas we learned that human beings cannot find their true identity alone. Finding oneself, finding one's identity, is possible only in a loving relationship where we discover who we truly are, namely persons. The conclusion of these theological and philosophical approaches is that the essence and substance of being a person is being in relation. This is the background from which I turned to the state and process of our personal relationship with God.

From the philosophical and theological background it was already clear that God communicates not simply to our minds, but to our whole beings. This is what we saw in the philosophical and theological approach where instead of thinking, action was seen to be the essence of the person. In the incarnation God became body for our salvation, through which God communicated much more than simple words and insights to us, but himself. This is the reason, by looking at closer our personal relationship with God, we first of all turned to Jesus and looked at His ways of relating to people. Reflecting on three narratives from the New Testament, I came to the conclusion that Jesus communicates not simply a truth through his body, but he communicates himself to the people, through which communication the people change. This personal change was finally in the center of my study, which happened in so many people who encountered Jesus two thousand years ago, and which experienced of many people today as well. Illustrating this personal change I gave a description and overview about the deepening and changing process in our relationship with God through the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The process of the spiritual exercises shows that one's relationship with God changes one's life. From the selfish "I" becomes a person capable of accepting love and of giving others everything one has. Seeing ourselves in this process of a deepening relationship with God and experiencing

the change in our lives brings the good news to all our societies today, where the depersonalization is so strongly present. Through our relationship with God we are set free from the view that we should be self-sufficient individuals, competing and fighting each other; but we can be persons, who are always in relation needing God and others to become who we really are.

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