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From the Human Logos to the Divine Logos: The Anthropological Implications of the Christian Logos-Flesh in Klaus Hemmerle

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Abstract: The concept of *logos* takes on a new and interesting connotation through Christian revelation. The *logos*—word, discourse, reason—becomes human-divine flesh. Moreover, God, who is Word, needs human words to explain and reveal himself to human beings. In so doing, God lowers himself to the human level, thus becoming manipulable, but at the same time, he makes human words and, consequently, human beings greater and of higher dignity. As a result, the human person becomes the giver of language to the one who allows him to speak. In this paper, I will highlight the consequences of a *logos* becoming flesh for anthropology, following the line of thought of Klaus Hemmerle. In particular, I will focus on Hemmerle's trinitarian perspective and his phenomenology of language as a means for explaining Christian revelation.

Keywords: *logos*; word; language; God; human; Trinity; person; community

1. Introduction: Main Use and Significance of Logos in a Historical Framework

The history of philosophy is marked by the advent of the *Logos*¹, a word that has come to signify not only rational and verbal discourse in general, but the very approach to answering man's existential questions. In the ancient Greek world, the *logos* replaced myth as the privileged archaic form to recount possible explanations for events of all kinds to which there was no immediate answer. The passage from myth to *logos*, however, not only makes explicit a methodological shift in human reflection about oneself and the world, but also the form it can take. Images and symbols are conceptualised through words: reasoned and intellectual discourse becomes the key to accessing knowledge as an explanation of the whole. This word, *logos*, however, carries with it from the outset a certain ambiguity²; not only does it indicate human discourse, the explanation of something, but it also has a divine connotation³. This is the case with Plato⁴, for whom the *logos* belonged to the sphere of ideas that came from the *Hyperuraniun* created by the demiurge. It continued, although differently, with the Stoics, and Aristotle himself developed a very rational philosophy in which the divine principle was completely "logical" and absolutely disembodied⁵. It is, however, a word that corresponds to the human word as an expression or channel of intelligence, of the rationality that explains and orders everything, giving cosmic law to the chaos of the living multiple. Later, Plotinus, although not always using the term in a homogeneous way, distinguished *logos* precisely in more Aristotelian terms, as a logical definition, from the "one" as a producing power (the more material Stoic sense), to which is added a third *logos*—of clearly Platonic memory—which is found in the *nous* and has a higher degree of transcendence. Therefore, in Plotinus, the *logos* assumes an increasingly richer connotation in which the word shows degrees of transcendence and, at the same time, very strong links with matter, to the point of representing a channel of explanation of being in a sense in which the "pure word" becomes the expression of a unifying principle with religious accents.

It is the case, therefore, to affirm with Husserl that the *logos* sums up in itself that «turning point in the general history of humanity» (Husserl 2004, p. 61) that is called philosophy



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and that becomes an expression of Western European culture. With the philosophical *logos*, a “theoretical” humanity appears in history in search of rationally understood and communicated truth, of a comprehensible order of meaning that opposes only mythical–religious representations.

If we look, however, at the use of the term *logos* in the Semitic languages of the Hebrew religion, specifically in the sacred texts, we find it mainly in the restricted meaning of word and only in some passages with the meaning of reason or reasonableness, certainly not with a meaning of transcendence. The Hebrew correspondents of the *Septuagint* would be primarily *dābār*, ‘*ōmer*, or *millah*. Of these, *dābār* is the most widely used and is characterised by concreteness, «it is a precise and specific word [. . .]. It is the word that is realised and becomes reality» (Morani 2011, p. 49). Thus, it is quite different in meaning from the Greek *logos* of Hellenistic matrix. However, there is a close link between the word and the truth, that is, *dābār* assumes a dianoetic character, as Morani points out (Morani 2011, pp. 50–51), since having the *dābār* of something corresponds to having that thing clear and transparent before one’s eyes, that is, in its being. In this sense, the word par excellence is that of God, the creative word throughout *Deuteronomy* and the *Psalms*.

In this context, the figure of Philo of Alexandria is significant. He is an exponent of Alexandrian Judaism, who combines the Judaic–Rabby tradition with Hellenistic language and culture. In his thinking on God and the world, he combines biblical elements with aspects of Neo-Platonism, as well as Plato himself. Thus, God remains purely transcendent with respect to the world, yet in the *logos*, he expresses a first emanation or power that unites his transcendence with the materiality of the world. The *logos* is thus the first-born son and image of God, but also the wisdom, word, and instrument of God’s action and action itself⁶. In practice, the *logos* assumes the mediating function, and it is through it that God creates the world.

From the Human to the Divine Logos

The revelation of the Christian God brings a decisive change and a total novelty: the *Logos* is no longer just the Word of God, but God himself; rather, he is one of the divine persons and, at the same time, human flesh⁷. The *Prologue* of John’s Gospel, in fact, speaks of him not only as the one who «was with God and was God», but as the one who was in the beginning and through whom all things were created⁸. This is nothing extraordinarily new or revolutionary with respect to the previous philosophical thought⁹ of the ordering *logos*, the principle of everything. In it, indeed, Jewish and Greek–Alexandrian traditions converge because, as Waetjen comments:

as a being independent of God, its Originator, the Logos of the prologue is primordially toward union with God: καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν. Out of this relationship the Logos not only engages in universal creation by means of differentiating speech; it also constitutes the objectification of truth by drawing human beings into the same union that it enjoys with the Creator, namely by incarnation (Waetjen 2001, p. 265)¹⁰.

The *Prologue*, however, goes on «unprecedented and unexpectedly» (Waetjen 2001, p. 277) to say that this *Logos* “comes into being” (*egéneto*) flesh and comes to dwell on Earth among men and women, as God made man. «At this climatic point in its history the *Logos* transcends the paradigms that dominate the Hebrew Scriptures» (Waetjen 2001, pp. 277–78). As Časni states, «The Logos is the source and the finality of all things. For John the Evangelist, the Word is not just a personification, but a living Being who is a source of life. Jesus Christ is the Logos, which includes Christ’s full work of salvation» (Časni 2015, p. 197). Therefore, this *Logos* is not exclusively human word, discourse, idea, or creative word, but it is also not the Hebrew wisdom¹¹; it is a special person in the flesh¹². What is more, while the beginning of the *Prologue* still narrates the precedents of the *logos*, emphasising its union with God, here it expresses the union of the *logos* with the human *sarchs* and thus the approach of the divine to all that is limited, finite, fragile, and transient.

In this way, the *logos* becomes not only audible, as the divine word transmitted through prophets, but visible to the human eye. This fact cannot leave us indifferent: in the Christian revelation of John's *Prologue* and the entire New Testament, transcendence and immanence, unity and multiplicity, and infinite and finite converge all in the same divine person of the Son of God, *Logos*-word, at once man and God¹³.

Michel Henry seeks to reread the Johannine *Prologue* from an explicitly phenomenological standpoint by highlighting its transition to a phenomenology of life. The fact that the *logos* is an expression of God, insofar as it is generated by him—the Son is from the Father from always and forever—and that, as such, it takes on the spatiotemporal dimension of humanity, leads Henry to read all religious, and therefore anthropological, experience as a manifestation of God through the life of Christ. This means, specifically, that what would be hidden from human experience would become tangible and experienceable through the incarnation of the Word of God. Such a fact would bring the Son to be the origin of life, since He was generated from God “in the beginning” and thus in Him holds the origin of all life. God's becoming flesh becomes, then, God's recognition of the value of human life and, at the same time, the recognition of life's belonging—already in the mere phenomenon of birth—to God. The consequences of this phenomenological reading of Henry are very interesting because, on an anthropological and theological level, they propose a co-participation of the divine and the human from all time¹⁴. In a similar but different way, Klaus Hemmerle also looks at the incarnation as something that can explain not only the nature of God, but also the human nature and the specific relationship between God and the human being. He analyses the Christian revelation trying to explain the Trinity, from a phenomenological perspective, as Henry, which is, at the same time, also a theological one.

2. Hemmerle's Approach to Christian Revelation

The Trinitarian event of a God who becomes flesh, renouncing in some way his own omnipotence and divine essence in order to become absolutely close to men and women, appeals to Hemmerle, to the point of moving him to seek formulas and ways of making the Christian message explicit with all its consequences, not only for philosophical and theological thought but for the very living of humanity. He was certainly not the first and only one who sought to understand the deeper meaning of the Trinity by tying it to the biblical text and particularly to the *logos* discourse. Marian Hillar, for example, provided us with an history of the path that leads philosophers and theologians to reflect on the *logos* and from it on a new religious understanding of the Christian God, the triune God (Hillar 2012). However, it seems interesting to us here to highlight a part of the Hemmerlian theoretical path because of its complementary approach—theological and philosophical together—and particularly because of its phenomenological component in the method of analysis.

In the first instance, Hemmerle reads John's *Prologue* by seeking its decisive and new significance for the Gospel message as a whole. Christianity emerges, primarily characterized by the fact that the *logos* does not remain an ordering principle external to the world and whose understanding can pass from speculation or mysticism alone. Moreover, *logos* and flesh do not remain distinct from each other as single and isolated principles but are related to each other. This relationship does not propose a classical model of movement from the bottom to the top (the human, the flesh moves toward the divine, the *logos*), but just the opposite, whereby it is the word of God that descends toward the human dimension of the flesh. The becoming flesh of the word represents, finally, for Hemmerle, the further novelty whereby God moves and goes forth to meet without offering himself as a predefined principle (see Hemmerle 1995a, pp. 90–92).

Rather, the beginning of John's Gospel tells us of a God who is not a neutral principle, but an acting you who, from himself, makes history. He does so according to a multiplicity of relationships that unfold, beginning with the Johannine affirmation that the *logos* became flesh and came to dwell among us: the Word is in relation to the Father (with God), in relation to the world (to dwell among us), but as a result of this, we too are in relation to

the Father through the Word and in relation to the Word because it was sent with Him by the Father. “*The Father to the Son, the Son to the Father—the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father to the world, to us—we to the Son and in the Son to the Father—we for the Son to one another, we with the Son to the world.*” (Hemmerle 1995a, p. 93). The consequence of this is, for Hemmerle—and it seems to us very plausible—not only on the theological level, but also on the anthropological level: both the image of God and that of the human being are affected. Both are called to exit and not to stay in themselves, in a meditative closure.

Let us try, then, to radically assume the revealed datum of the *Prologue* and of the entire New Testament following Klaus Hemmerle’s¹⁵ reading of it, and see what consequences it might have in making explicit the anthropological category of the human in a relational perspective that leads to unity. This is a proposal that the Freiburg theologian and philosopher matures over the years by developing a phenomenological and dialogical approach at the same time.

2.1. The Search for an Explication of the Trinity Through Language

Looking not only at John’s *Prologue* but at the entire message of Scripture, we are faced with the fact that «when God reveals himself to humankind, when to humankind God speaks a divine word, God does so via human word» (Hemmerle 2019, p. 89); this is the story of the Judeo-Christian God, the God of the Covenant of the Old Testament. At the same time, however, an even more radical transposition takes place, since that same God-Logos—the unique Word¹⁶ within the Trinity—comes to express himself in human words by becoming man, thus assuming human nature in its entirety, in a language that not only borrows human words but assumes them as man himself.

Let us look, then, in the first instance at human language as channel of communication and revelation of the divine, and then observe the theoretical–existential consequences that derive from the humanisation of the divine Word, which is God himself.

In *Vorspiel zur Theologie* (1976), Hemmerle considers three human aspects or dynamics in order to approach the intratrinitarian dynamic, and he calls them “fundamental games”. Among these—interest, experience, and language—that of the word that becomes language, and communication is one that is very close to our author’s heart; in fact, it appears in several other writings and conversations¹⁷. Even if not immediately evident, language also represents a “fundamental game,” since it is not exclusively reducible to the semantic spectrum of signification. What, in fact, is expressed linguistically, while “being” before the verbal fact of being expressed, can manifest itself and reach its fullness of being precisely through language. This double aspect constitutes, according to Hemmerle, the rhythm of language and being: being is “lowered” in the language, but in so doing “shines” in it. This movement will be the basis for explicating the movement of the Being-God in human words and even more so in human flesh, thus shining in its greatness and making human nature shine at the same time.

2.2. What Happens When We Speak? Hemmerle’s Phenomenology of Language

If we now try to go deeper into Hemmerle’s phenomenology of language, a number of aspects can be highlighted. To begin, we are always faced with someone who speaks, an “I”—a fact that is quite evident and irrefutable—but whoever speaks generally expresses something that has been manifested to him, given to him to know and to understand; Hemmerle states that «whoever says something is affirming that something has been said to him» (Hemmerle 1976, p. 51). This happens regardless of the actual intention of the speaker, that is, it does not matter if he/she wants to joke, make fun of, express something that is not true or of which he/she is not entirely certain; however, the fact remains that in saying, in communicating, one is moved by the intrinsic urge of language to make itself present, that something be expressed in human words. Thus, in addition to the speaker, there is a second element typical of language, which is the thing or fact—the being—that “speaks,” and finally the word or language itself, as the channel that allows the thing to tell itself to someone, thus allowing others to be grasped and understood

(Hemmerle 1978, pp. 2–3). Finally, «My word raises in itself the claim that it can also be your word and our word» (Hemmerle 1976, p. 51). In this direction, we find further phenomenological support in Merleau-Ponty, who states that the speaking subject enters «a system of relations that presume and make it vulnerable», (Merleau-Ponty 1984, p. 43) in which, from the very beginning, «speaking and understanding are moments of a single I-other system» and «the bearer of this system (...) is the 'I' endowed with a body, and by this continually transcended» (Merleau-Ponty 1984, p. 44).

This means that language is fundamentally linked to the communicative and communitarian dimension of the human being; it does not exist if not for a concrete you to whom it is addressed and for whom it is moved.

Speaking, as my speaking, never begins from a zero point, but from the language assigned and pronounced already by others [...]. The ability to accept and implement the showing of oneself and, with it, the communication of what is, is part of spiritual nature. But to the being of what is belongs, as the highest way of showing and communicating of the person as a person, also the linguistic capacity and the being linguistically marked by other persons. The linguistic capacity is inscribed in the spiritual being as a possibility of mutual exchange between persons on being and in being (Hemmerle 2021, p. 301).

Language reveals, therefore, a space of sharing within which each person must exit starting from within himself to reach the other in a movement of external/internal (my word externalizes something that is internal to me) that finds the background that interests and unites all of us in the interrelationship between the speaker and the one addressed and listened to, that is, in a common world of meaning and significance.

At the same time, according to Hemmerle, language becomes witness to a “drama” between the speaker and his/her speech:

When one begins to speak, one asks oneself: How will it be received? One is not sure of one's word precisely when one thinks one is sure of one's word, because this word has a skill, that it cannot simply be manipulated and made; if it could be made and manipulated, then it would not be a serious skill of the word at all [...]. But the word itself refers to a free going along and a free consent, and that is precisely what cannot be done (Hemmerle 1978, p. 2).

This drama is also played out between object and receiver, so that «the origin becomes alienated, the object becomes alienated in the language» (Hemmerle 1976, p. 61); at the same time, the speaker becomes alienated insofar as he/she uses a language that is external to him/her, that precedes him/her in the communication given by others, but at the moment in which he/she expresses him- or herself with that language, it also becomes his/her own, or rather becomes him/herself: when we speak, we express together the words of others that have become ours, and in using them, they express us, saying something about us. Once again, we are faced with the communitarian character of language, which is also its character of power and impotence at the same time: my words are generally the words of others, an already said which, in becoming extraneous to whoever says it, by reaching me becomes mine to be re-spoken in other contexts: my word is mine, but it has an independent life (Hemmerle 1978, p. 4). For this to happen, a common world of understanding and belonging is necessary, within which language seeks agreement. «The perfect sense of language is communion, is agreement. In it, self-constitution and self-emptying take place, constitution of the thing and its deconstitution» (Hemmerle 1976, p. 64). There is a giving that is also a giving and receiving because the direction is multiple: from me to others and vice versa. In the giving, which is also a saying, we find the point of convergence between the speaker, the spoken thing or language, and the receiver.

2.3. The Translation of the Word Dynamic into Trinitarian Communication

This is, for Hemmerle, also the phenomenological key to the Trinitarian mystery: a God who does not treasure his own uniqueness and extraordinariness in relation to

creation, but who somehow renounces it by giving it through love. A first expression of this is the fact that this God renounces his distance from creatures in order to make himself close to them through words and concepts that they can understand: «the outgoing Word of God comes under the preconditions of a human word that is already given», but «the human word, which precedes the Word of God, follows ontologically the Word that establishes humans as beings of speech and so possessing the possibility of language» (Hemmerle 2019, pp. 90–91). Here, we see the double movement that we have already encountered within language itself: human words, by elevating themselves to divine expression, lower themselves, being brought back to their origin, without which they would not be; God, in turn, by expressing himself in human words, lowering himself—Word among human words—elevates himself, raising language itself¹⁸. The divine *logos* makes itself impotent, manipulable, and misunderstandable, like all human words, and yet, in so doing, expresses its greatness and superiority, that of a God who makes himself his “other”.

God is identical with himself in his going out beyond himself, in his giving of himself. What happens to the Word of God in revelation is then in reverse order what happens also to the human word, namely, self-lowering, self-emptying and self-transcendence (Hemmerle 2019, p. 91).

This movement of the incarnating *Logos*-Word of God reaches its expressive apex when it becomes non-word or disembodied word, that is, at the moment of Jesus’ abandonment on the cross. There, God is at his farthest distance from himself because he is the negation of relational fullness, typical of the Trinity. The cry of Jesus’ abandonment is the highest expression of the *Logos* that becomes “logosless,” but being moved by love, it also becomes the highest expression of God, the principle of love that is, the more it gives itself. The logic of the *Logos*-Flesh is, therefore, an a-logic, or at least a logic of a different kind: not discursive and rational, but agapic and practical¹⁹.

3. Anthropological Consequences of the Double Movement of Revelation

According to what Hemmerle developed, Revelation has not only a theological but also a philosophical and anthropological significance. In fact,

the human being no longer lives life and understands the world from a human perspective, but from the perspective of another who is not under human control [...]. Our being overpowered by this Other does not remain outside, but rather is manifested as the reality on which I and my world are most deeply dependent and by which we are most touched (Hemmerle 2019, pp. 97–98).

The becoming flesh of the divine *Logos*, of the Word of God, means the overcoming of that clear distinction that the Word of God had meant in the Old Testament: distinction and distance between a speaker (the divine person) and a listener (the human person) that proposed a consequent distinction between theology and anthropology, as well as a real one between God and the human being. This means, once again and more concretely, the assumption of a human will, or rather a divine will, that becomes “recognisable” to the human being through a human will, that of the Christ-man: in him, the divine and human will coexist. This is why the human condition becomes, for Hemmerle, new and different.

The *Logos* made man is *the* work of art of the divine will. The God who is love [...]: is there in Jesus Christ in the midst of our history [...]. The Father’s will of love appears fully and directly in him whom he sent out of love to us and gave for us. But at the same time, this will appears in what we are, in our humanity. A human will that is shaped and seized by the will of God from the root and to the last is the place in which the will of God’s love is revealed, in which God reveals Himself. (Hemmerle 1982, pp. 79–80).

The consequence of God’s becoming man is a communication of himself to every man and woman in history and a sharing of a common destiny with them. One could thus rethink a basic anthropological structure under four aspects, that with Klaus Hemmerle are

upturned by understanding the Incarnation as the privileged channel of God's transmission and communication to the human being:

- (1) The human being becomes the place of the maximum opposition, in which God becomes his opposite, giving himself to such an extent that he loses himself and, in this way, reveals himself as God, the one who loves and gives himself. But if God becomes man in this way, man too can become "everything" like God. This means that he/she can take on everything and, as a "gift," give him or herself to others.
- (2) The human being becomes *forma dei* because, in him and following his premises or conditions, God gives himself and manifests himself as love, donation, and communion. At the same time, God becomes *forma hominis*, of every possible human person: he can repeat himself in each one and become a partner of every man and woman.
- (3) The human being possesses the *logos*—which means the meaning and truth—inasmuch as he/she is primarily possessed by it, that is, he/she is the place where God can express himself and show himself. He/she lives in him/herself communion with God, with the incarnate God-*Logos* and therefore with every incarnate *logos*.
- (4) The human being is definitively freed from his isolation in order to enter into deep communion with others through love and self-giving. Being oneself means not possessing oneself²⁰: this is the new meaning of identity and the communication between all people takes place through words that are understood in the Word made flesh which, as such, sums up and contains them all.

4. The Logos-Paradox: From the Logos-Concept to the Logos-Person

What has been said so far needs confirmation: following Hemmerle's phenomenology, we have, in fact, recognised a paradox of the human being that is, at the same time, a paradox of God. Unity or substantiality together with multiplicity and distinction: Word and words, *logos*-concept/the principle, on the one hand, and *Logos*-Man, on the other hand. If we take up the concept of "person" in use in Western tradition, both philosophical and theological, two aspects emerge which, in defining the person, show this paradox: the character of substance, that is, an identity that is complete in itself, as well as the openness to the "you," that is, a transcendence above and beyond self²¹.

Referring to the first "substantial aspect" that goes back to Boethius ("Persona est naturae rationalis individua substantia"), Hemmerle puts it into this context saying that:

The concept of the person as a whole is not understood insofar as it is oriented towards communion, but rather to its status in itself, in closing itself on itself. And this is further exacerbated in the subsequent elaboration of the concept of the person within Scholasticism, when Thomas Aquinas defines the person as an "incommunicabilis subsistentia" (Hemmerle 2021, p. 295).

This fact is not, however, according to Hemmerle, necessarily contradictory to the other aspect—the communitarian one—to which it is, on the contrary, preparatory because:

Only the status in itself, only the distinction from the other allows for community, constitutes partnership in it. Communication with the other is only guaranteed by the fact that the communicant does not dissolve into his partner. Communication and communion, in and with it, "need" autonomy and distinction in front of the partner, but they also need the distinction of this partner in itself from what is communicated to him and from what is communicated: distinction between person and person, distinction between person and essence (Hemmerle 2021, pp. 295–96).

Person is, then, subsistence (act of being of a spiritual nature), which entails (as essence) the relation to being and thus to all that is. The question regarding person is, in fact, a question of specific beings—a you and an I that asks about the you—and the personal aspect emerges from the encounter between them. The positive tension between two opposite poles already emerges in the encounter: I and you are unique because they are irreplaceable, but at the same time, they are not univocal because they can only be given

together; in fact, I am not me if not for a you who is in front of me, recognising me and giving me back to myself, and the same is true for the other.

Here is the paradox that saying “person” involves: someone absolutely unique and unrepeatable who is not such if not always in relation to a you, in a whole (us). This means that «in reality I am what I am as I am, only from you and in your call. And you are what you are insofar as you are, only from me and in my call» (Welte 2006, p. 109). But if you and I are what we are only in the encounter with and dependence on one another, in the “I-and-you,” then, the “we” is closely linked to the person, that is, the person is essentially linked to a communitarian dimension²². The expression of this is precisely the word made conversation, that place where the manifestation of something to oneself and to others takes place through language. In this, there is not a mere addition of two distinct entities, but something else that unifies them, a third party²³ that guarantees and gives this moment of encounter and that we share: in conversation, we are not only sharing ourselves in each other, but also in something that unites us, in a “we” that envelops us—I would say, something like the “world-between” (Merleau-Ponty 1945)²⁴.

Fundamentally talking enables the encounter with another, the I-you relationship. Talking at the same time founds communion with the other, being together in the same world, in principle, in the same language. Encounter and communion allow and penetrate each other in the personal being-with. But both are bound together in that responsibility before God’s call, which founds the person and thus at the same time the mutual belonging of persons, who, conscious or not, expressed or unexpressed, stand in Being in the presence of God and, in equal inescapability, one before the other and with the other. In being a person, the character of the “I”, the character of the “you” and the character of the “we” are thus insolubly bound together, and are knotted together in the relationship with God and in the relationship with everything that is (Hemmerle 2021, p. 304).

When we speak of community, we generally mean a gathering of people as a result of a particular bond—family, religious community, academic community—and the relationship between person and community is dynamic and mutually dependent because it is based on common elements²⁵. Hemmerle speaks of community²⁶ above all as communion, which indicates an intimate and intentional bond between people, which does not require a communal “statute”, communion is being in relationship with the other, whoever he or she may be.

Hemmerle emphasises this dimension to which the triune God calls because God is, in himself, already a profound and intimate communion of three divine persons²⁷, which is given through the incarnate Word and the words of human persons who have entered in contact with God. In the Trinitarian communion, through the presence of the one *Logos* that binds and unites all the human *logoi*, we are all called to be person in a full sense: communion of all human beings without exclusion or, much more deeply, communion of children—brothers and sisters—through the first One, the *Logos*-Flesh.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, the concept of *logos* was presented in its meaning and evolution in the ancient world up to its presence in biblical texts. In these, we discovered an important and original variation: the *Logos*, through a theological event in history to which the Biblical text testifies, comes to mean not just word or speech, nor even a regulating principle, but a God-made flesh. The Christian God presents himself first through words of mediators and then through himself; the one Word from eternity become humanity, and thus multiple words. The Hemmerlian reflection that we explored in this text is grafted upon this background. The extraordinary fact of the *logos* becoming flesh has, in fact, original consequences not only from a theological but also from an anthropological point of view. Hemmerle’s phenomenology of speech and conversation led us to discover how speech is a channel that necessarily requires another to whom it is addressed. It is something eminently relational,

like the triune God, who lives through a deep community of love among the three divine Persons. The originality or even paradoxicality of the Gospel message, however, lies in the fact that the almighty God brings the finitude of the creature within Himself because He takes on its features. In doing so, he lowers himself to the level of the finite, somehow losing his omnipotence and making himself manipulable. On the other hand, the human word is thus raised to a very high level because it becomes in Jesus the divine word. The movement of the *Logos*-Flesh is thus twofold: it “lowers” divinity by reducing it and raises humanity by increasing it. This reading of Christian revelation, and thus of the triune God, has its own peculiar originality because of the approach using a phenomenological method through an analysis of human language. In fact, in the history of philosophical–theological thought, there are many ways and approaches toward explaining the Trinity, but the Hemmerlian approach is of particular interest. This is so not only because of the linguistic approach, but also because of the immediate relationality between God and human beings that derives from it. Leaving aside the theological specifics, we then focused on the philosophical–anthropological consequences by expanding the phenomenological reflection to the concept of person. If God is a person, indeed three persons in community, and one of them becomes man, then the human being also fully assumes the character of a person and does so not from the historical moment when the Word becomes incarnate, but from eternity, precisely because the Word was in God and with God from the beginning. So, the profound meaning of human beings is to be a person, that is, a being in communion with God and with others.

Considering this double movement in God, Hemmerle describes the word not only as a relational channel, a means of communication and world-building, but also as an expression of being embedded in God from eternity. It is a privileged place for the manifestation of God because it is taken up by Him to its absolute opposite extreme. Anthropologically, one can derive some consequences, such as the dignity of speech and the power it has to build or destroy, the freedom and dignity it bestows, the precedence of the community of the we over the I without that meaning an annihilation of the I, and the full co-occurrence of the finite and the infinite, of limit and fullness. The incarnate *Logos* becomes the absence of the word, and with that the absence of God himself, because the word without a recipient to receive it is a word without meaning, a broken word. Therefore, the human condition that emerges from the revealed datum of the Christian God is a condition of fullness and truth already given—because sons in the Son who is *logos* from eternity, but who is incarnated in history—still to be realised and discovered in the course of humanity’s journey. To become fully person means, therefore, to bring the Trinitarian communion to visibility through the cry of abandonment of the *Logos*-Flesh, and to express and build community not only with words but also with their absence.

This entails, in my opinion, a re-signification of all that is apparently wail, cry, swallowed word: the novelty of the incarnated *logos* is, therefore, its being no longer only a harmonious and organising principle, but at the same time and in itself manifestation of this principle through the absence of meaning. Death, guilt, and abandonment become, in Jesus’ self-giving, the place of God’s manifestation: «it is here the total power of God—precisely because here is the total self-giving of God» (Hemmerle 1972, p. 86).

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Notes

- ¹ For a specific examination of the evolution of the concept and its use by various thinkers in antiquity, see for example: (Fattal 2005; Dunshirn 2021; De Beer 2015).
- ² In this regard, studies on the use of the Greek term *logos* in contexts directly preceding the philosophical one, such as texts by Hesiod or Homer, have revealed a very ambivalent use of the term that is not entirely in line with the philosophical one. Bruce Lincoln, following a survey of certain texts, concludes that: “it should now be clear that the most ancient texts consistently use the term *logos* to mark a speech of women, the weak, the young, and the shrewd; a speech that tends to be soft, delightful, charming, and alluring, but one that can also deceive and mislead” (Lincoln 1997, pp. 352–53). In this sense, Lincoln concludes that the consideration of the philosophical *logos*, as proposed for example by Heraclitus, does not take into account this earlier use of the same term at all. Ultimately it would be Plato who would ‘replace’ the ‘trivialised and marginalised’ myth with the ‘sanitised and aggrandised’ *logos* (Lincoln 1997, p. 364). Michel Fattal also points out that the term *logos* used by Homer and Hesiod does not have such an immediate assonance with the meaning it takes on in the philosophical area, starting with Heraclitus (Fattal 2005).
- ³ This is both in the original uses of the term, but also philosophically for Empedocles, who renounces the properly rational and logical character that it had assumed for other philosophers since Heraclitus, recovering a poetic-religious meaning (Fattal 2005, p. 33).
- ⁴ Let us recall that Plato is the philosopher who first brought the term *logos* into close conjunction with *dianoia*, speaking of “discourse” as something that comes out of the soul through the mouth in articulated sound emissions. Thus, in the first instance there emerges for Plato a discourse of the soul with itself that is then externalised through words that are communicated, thus also always in a kind of *dia-logos*. Dividing and distinguishing ideas and thoughts, and then reuniting them in the proposition. So much so that «The *logos*, at one and the same time analytical and synthetic at its origins, never ceases to oscillate between the rational activity of thought and the declarative activity of the word, and thus becomes more precise until it finds itself fixed and determined as a proposition in Plato» (Fattal 2005, p. 39).
- ⁵ This Greek environment, with its use of *logos* in this sense, probably influenced Philo the Jew and with him ancient Jewish thought and the use of this term. However, in Palestine the rabbis used the term *mēmra* corresponding precisely to the Greek *logos*. See: (May 1946, p. 438).
- ⁶ This great variety of definitions, all close but different from each other, expresses the human difficulty of reaching and fully explicating God and with him also the *logos*. In fact, as Calabi points out, Philo makes abundant use of images to define the *logos*—light, sun, shadow, flaming sword, etc.—precisely because of this inability to define something that remains ultimately unknowable (Calabi 2011, pp. 65–84).
- ⁷ However, the term *logos* in the New Testament comes to indicate the words of Jesus, hence of the incarnate God, words that take on a value of eternity and continuity that ordinary human words do not have. It is, therefore, a word that has full and absolute efficacy like that of the Father already present in the Old Testament (Morani 2011, pp. 53–54).
- ⁸ There are various approaches to John’s use of the term *Logos* and its translation into the various languages, not all of which necessarily agree. A widely cited example is that of Goethe, who, faced with the desire to translate the *Prologue* from Greek into German, is overwhelmed by the impossibility of translating *logos* with Word, or word, because it is too reductive with respect to the scope that John seems to give to this term, indicating with it God himself in the person of Christ. A reading of John’s cultural and linguistic context and at the same time a careful interpretation of what he wanted to communicate with the terms he used can be found for example in (Hercsik 2008) and (Časni 2015).
- ⁹ There may not be any particular novelty in the association between word and deity either when comparing Jewish culture—already of the Old Testament—, and ancient Egyptian culture. In fact, as Herbert Baynes points out, in some papyri one finds just such an evident association: “I am the great one, the son of a great one: my father meditated upon my name. My father and my mother pronounced my name; it was hidden in the body of my begetter” (Baynes 1906, p. 373).
- ¹⁰ Waetjen goes on to say that for a Jewish family of Alexandrian culture, familiar with the texts on *Sophia*, there would have been no “problem” of novelty or change in relation to the communicated word of Yahweh in the Old Testament (Waetjen 2001, p. 277).
- ¹¹ *Sophia* is depicted in the Old Testament as someone who is with God and at God, thus in a very similar way to the Word of John’s *Prologue*. However, there is also a difference, in that wisdom in various passages can be read more as the presence of the world. In this regard the interpretations are not entirely in agreement. Undoubtedly *Sophia* is defined as someone who is always with God and very close to Him, especially in the Book of Wisdom 10. “For Wisdom is mobile beyond all motion, and she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity. For she is a breath of the might of God and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled can enter into her. For she is the reflection of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness”. On the difference between wisdom and the verb of God and the independence of John’s *Prologue* from other biblical texts referring to wisdom, Thomas Tobin expressed himself in an article: (Tobin 1990).
- ¹² Miller tries to demonstrate a different interpretation of John’s *Prologue* by tying it very closely to his entire Gospel and John’s letters. By critically rereading the use of the term *logos* in all these texts and linking it back to some assumptions about the dating of them, he comes to believe that the *Prologue* is not an early text and that the term *logos* is meant to indicate for John precisely the person of Jesus and not so much what that term in the various other contexts, including Semitic, had already indicated. See: (Miller 1993).

- 13 If we take a step back in history, we can find Greek elements of “translation” of the Gospel message in Plutarch who, taking up the Platonic doctrine of the *Logos*, develops the discourse of the *logoi* and thus the relationship between the *Logos*-divine word and creation. This was followed by many other thinkers who urgently felt the need to explain the created world as not entirely foreign to God in order to avoid any form of dualism. It would be, however, with Maximus the Confessor that the doctrine of the *logoi* would be resumed and systematised in a very broad conception. For him, the *logoi* indicate both a principle of existing reality, and the natural law sufficient on the *logos* present in the world, and finally as the main object of knowledge. See: (Moreschini 2008).
- 14 For an in-depth study of the Henryan proposal, see: (Kuhn 2009).
- 15 Klaus Hemmerle (1929–1994) is a German philosopher and theologian, trained in the phenomenological school of Bernhard Welte (1906–1983), who in turn had studied philosophy under Heidegger in Freiburg. In addition to the more Heideggerian phenomenological approach, however, Hemmerle’s circle of friends and colleagues also included the thought of Franz Rosenzweig and with him dialogical thought in general. These two components, together with a more exquisitely idealistic matrix contribute to the evolution of Hemmerle’s philosophical and theological thought, together with the spiritual influence of Chiara Lubich and her charism on unity. For further details on Hemmerle, see: (Hagemann 2008; De Marco 2012; Gaudio 2021).
- 16 This is not the place here to go into the interpretation of the divine *Logos-Verbum* according to the rich Christian theological tradition. In this regard we refer to research and analyses of St Thomas, Origen, Augustine—considering fathers and theologians of the first hour—as well as Rosmini. Central for all of them is the question of the identity definition of this *logos* both with respect to God and as God and with respect to the created world. If, in fact, it is possible to recognise a divine *logos* in action from the origins of the world—attested by *Genesis* as well as in general in the Old Testament—the word of God that communicates itself to creation, the *Prologue* of John and with it all the *Gospels*, attest to a *Logos* as the unique word of God expressed in itself, without further mediation and knowable to men through direct experience of the man-God who speaks and acts in the world. We refer to some studies on this subject: (Tadini 2011; Pazzini 2011; Ramelli 2011).
- 17 Examples in this direction include: *Krise des Hörens* (1960); *Gesprächsführung* (1964); *Das Wort für uns* (1976); *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie* (1976); *Macht und Ohnmacht des Wortes* (1978); *Denken der Grenze—Grenze des Denkens* (1981); *Gerettetes Wort—rettendes Wort* (1982); *Wahrheit und Liebe—ein perichoretisches Verhältnis* (1992); *Linien des Lebens* (1993).
- 18 This double movement is however always originated by God and not by human beings. Hemmerle tries to highlight the extent of novelty even in the continuity of God’s communicative event, so that the passage from the “word of God” communicated to the prophets, as a word that requires a precondition, namely that God makes himself comprehensible to human ears and at the same time that human beings are made able to grasp the divine message, remains the work of God. Therefore, the extension or going beyond the word of God is precisely its definitive incarnation and, therefore, the lowering of God to the human being. In this regard, Hercsik comments, in fact, that in order for the Word of God not to be depotentiated by becoming a human interpretation, it is necessary for the human being capable of listening to that word to be empowered by God (Hercsik 2008, p. 370).
- 19 Hemmerle develops this link between God’s love and the crucifixion of the Son in various contexts, among which are: (Hemmerle 1972, 1995b). In the *Theses*, on the other hand, he lays the foundations for a new Trinitarian ontology, based precisely on the different logic of the triune God, which is that of love that gives itself up to its extreme, precisely even to death (Hemmerle 2019).
- 20 This consideration is also present in other phenomenological and Christian thinkers such as Stein and Scheler. For them, too, one’s identity becomes more explicit the more one gives oneself to others, particularly in the dynamic of love. See: (Stein 2000, 2016; Scheler 1957).
- 21 The reference to substantiality highlights the character of closure, of completeness of what is referred to by the term person. On the other hand, precisely under the more theological profile, the relational dimension as intrinsic to the person soon matures. A characteristic that is then also taken up philosophically, especially in the contemporary debate of the twentieth century and still today. See: (Carrithers et al. 1985; Bianco 2017).
- 22 We find many studies on this topic, especially in phenomenology and in personalist approaches, such as that of Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Emmanuel Mounier. The relational character of the person is grounded in the Christian understanding of a Trinitarian God, a God, who is in itself relation of three beings. In this sense the understanding of the concept of person is connected to that of *logos* in both a philosophical and theological way. See: (Ferri 2020).
- 23 Note the evident assonance of the Weltian passage with Buber’s thought in this brief passage: “in the most intense moments of the dialogue, in which the profound truly recalls the profound, it becomes quite evident that it is neither the individual nor the social, but a third essential element that draws like a circular sphere around the event”. (Buber 1984, p. 13sff).
- 24 The French philosopher speaks in this regard about an « *intramonde* » as the history or the cultural background of the people, which always precedes the person as an I. Hemmerle’s understanding is not exactly the same as that of Merleau-Ponty, but I think we can understand this “communitarian” aspect as being very similar.
- 25 One can say with Edith Stein that the person is in relation to the community both because he/she gives of his/her own, he/she gives his/her “lifepower” to the community for its development and growth, but also because he/she takes strength from the community: in fact, there are life-giving elements for the members of the community, but, the community also takes power from the individual so it can also deplete him/her. See: (Stein 2000).
- 26 About the use of the term *Gemeinschaft* between these two different meanings and translations of community and communion in Hemmerle, see: (Gaudio 2021, footnote A, pp. 290, 306–11).

- ²⁷ In this sense the passages of the New Testament are valid, including the *Prologue* itself on which we have dwelt in the relational expression between *logos* and God-the-Father (he was with God and he was God), but also the Gospels in which it is the words of Jesus that bear witness to this intimate bond between him and the Father.

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