MEANING AND TRUTH IN THEOLOGY

Before giving my presentation, I want to express to the Catholic Theological Society of America, to its Board of Directors and especially to Father Scanlon my deep gratitude for having invited me to take part in this Convention. It is for me a great honor, a joy also, to be able to participate in your work, in a feeling of common responsibility. I appreciate it highly.

As the meeting this year of the Catholic Theological Society is devoted to the impact of the linguistic turn on theology, I propose for this address, which must be of a general character, an examination of the relationship between meaning and truth in the language of theology.

In very broad terms, it can be said that the linguistic turn in philosophy has been a shift in method more than in the problems which are considered as relevant for philosophical reflection. For example, classical problems like the problem of induction, or the mind-body problem, or the problem of time, remain central philosophical issues. But it is considered that the task of philosophy, with respect to its legitimate questions, is primordially a task of clarification and that the appropriate method for that is not a direct study of the ideas themselves, which are private representations, but of the language used to convey those ideas, which is a public and objective phenomenon, the study of which can be undertaken on the basis of an intersubjective agreement. To clarify what is said is to determine as exactly as possible the meaning of what is said. And as in general our language is full of ambiguities, the task of analysis will be for a great part to make apparent those ambiguities and, if possible, to separate the different meanings which collide in the same expression, while taking due account of the fact that very often the use of ambiguity is systematic and aims at suggesting a meaning which cannot be directly captured in a univocal expression.

As is well known, two main approaches have been proposed for the analysis of meaning: a radical one, which tried to replace ordinary language by an artificial one, built according to the methods of strict formalization; and a more subtle one which gave full credit to ordinary language but considered that very often an expression is used in a way which is very distant from the normal use and that it is necessary to bring back the expressions to the normal circumstances of their occurrence. The usefulness of the method of formalization is very problematic. It has certainly been very fruitful in the case of mathematics, but we have to do there with a very special kind of objects. It seems that the more recent developments in this direction are clarifying not so much for the content itself of the discourse but for the metalinguistic aspects of it; they help to understand the semantic way of functioning of the different kinds of linguistic elements which are used in the building of the actual sentences.

The other line of analysis has been decisively influenced by the famous strategy recommended by Wittgenstein's *Investigations:* do not try to discover something like an ideal meaning, which would be in a special realm, distinct from the language proper, but ask about the way the expressions are used. One of the most interesting ideas which have been introduced in the analysis of language in this second direction (but retaken also, in the meanwhile, in a formalized representation) has been the idea, formulated by Austin, according to which there are three dimensions in the meaning of a sentence: locutionary (sense and reference), illocutionary and perlocutionary. Among the different illocutionary forces which are to be distinguished, the most significant ones, for the analysis of religious language, are those forces which have the character of self-implication. This aspect of the illocutionary component of language has been studied in a very detailed and very subtle manner by Donald Evans in his beautiful book on "the logic of self-involvement" and on the language of creation. This idea of self-implication has an existential scope and its fruitfulness comes precisely from the fact that it establishes a connexion between the analysis of language and the philosophy of existence. Self-implication means indeed that the speaking subject puts himself at stake in the very act which he is performing by uttering a certain sentence. It can be under the form of a determined commitment, like in the paradigmatic case of the promise, or in the form of a presupposition, concerning, for example, an interior attitude. In any case, the fact that the speaking subject is able to bind himself, so to speak, by what he is saying indicates that he is a kind of being who bears the responsibility of his own being. The term "existence" has been currently used in contemporary philosophy in order to designate precisely such a mode of being.

The theory of illocutionary force concerns the meaning, not the truth, at least directly. And precisely a fundamental distinction, in this connexion, is the distinction between the utterances which have the force of a statement and the utterances which have a performative character, i.e., which create some effect in the world. For example, if I express my gratitude toward somebody, I do not state anything, I do not give a report about my feelings, but I produce a particular situation, a certain kind of relation with the other person, in which I constitute myself as obliged with respect to him. Now it is perfectly appropriate to ask about a statement if it is true, but not about an expression of gratitude, or about an order, or in general about the sentential expressions which are used in a performative mode. To be sure, a question can be raised about the sincerity of an expression of gratitude, or about the right which the speaker has to give orders to such or such persons, and so on. Every type of illocutionary force has its particular conditions of effectivity. But truth is only a particular kind of condition, which belongs to those speech acts where the speaker takes a position with respect to a certain state of affairs and manifests, by the very fact that he is asserting that this state of affairs is such or such, that he is ready to give, if necessary, reasons to support his assertions.

This distinction, made clear by Austin, can be considered as giving a substantiation to the fundamental idea of the *Philosophical Investigations,* according to which there are many different "language-games," each of them having its own grammar, functioning according to specific conditions, which cannot be interpreted as special cases of those conditions which are constitutive of an informative

assertion. In the light of the theory of speech acts, the idea of truth appears as applying only to special cases of the use of language and does not seem any more to be the constitutive condition of an authentic discourse.

But we must not forget that Austin himself has given arguments, based on a series of examples, showing that, after all, the difference between an assertive and a performative utterance is not as clear-cut as it seemed at first appearance. There are certain presuppositions in the case of assertions as in the case of performative utterances. For example, it would be absurd to affirm a particular fact and, at the same time, to say seriously "and I don't believe it". This would be a pragmatic contradiction, indicating, by its very absurdity, that an assertion presupposes a belief. But a belief is a certain kind of commitment of the speaking subject with respect to the fact which he is asserting. And so it appears that in the case of the most simple statement, as well as in the cases of overt self-implications, there is some form of implication of the subject, who compromises himself, so to speak, by the way in which he interprets the state of affairs to which his assertion refers. The speaker is not neutral with respect to the situation which he describes. And this is so because the sentence which he is uttering is not at all a pure reproduction of what happens in the world. There must be, to be sure, some kind of correspondence between the sentence and that which the sentence is about, if it is to be counted as equal to its pretension. But this correspondence is not an image, or, in more abstract terms, an isomorphism, like in the famous "picture theory" of meaning of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein himself has given a decisive criticism of this position.

A normal descriptive sentence makes use, in order to characterize a situation in the world, of certain devices which are not like the objects in the world but are provided by the cultural institution of language. And the most striking character of the mechanism used by our language to describe the world is the duality between those elements which can be used to refer to a particular object, person, situation, event, on the one hand, and on the other hand those elements which are used in the function of predicates and which are serving to place the item to which the sentence refers under an abstract perspective, giving some intelligibility to this item: by classifying it—what corresponds to the point of view of extension; or by attributing to it some property—what corresponds to the point of view of intension. The canonical structure of the sentence consists essentially in the application to the referring expression of the predicative expression. This structure is not at all the constitutive structure of the real situation in the world, which is completely concrete. Here, on the contrary, we have to do with abstract functions, which give a counterpart of the real situation but with a serious limitation: what is aimed at is apprehended only in the particular perspective indicated by the predicative expression used, and not at all in its full concretion. The very fact of imposing on the referent a particular point of view introduces in the simplest sentence an irreducible element of interpretation, because this point of view does not come from the referent itself, but is a part of the resources of the particular language which is used. By having recourse, for example, to a word of color in order to characterize a given object, let us say a flower, the speaker expresses his belief that this word is appropriate to categorize this object from the point of view of its color-appearance. He expresses the opinion that the kind of color experience which is

conveyed by the word used can be recognized in the perception of this particular object. But it is well known that the classifications of colors are not universal, that the transpositions from one language into another are not always adequate, and that even in the frame of a given language, containing a rich vocabulary for colors, it is sometimes extremely difficult to choose the best word. We feel in many cases that our way of expressing the situation is perhaps suggestive but not completely satisfactory, that we give perhaps the best approximation which our language gives us the possibility to express, but that a new word should be created in the particular circumstance where we are. But this characterizes what is proper to an interpretation. There is at the same time a gain in intelligibility, given by the determining power of the predicate, and a loss of determination with respect to the fullness of the concrete.

If there is thus fundamentally an element of interpretation in every assertion, it can be understood that an act of assertion asks from the speaking subject an initiative by which he makes choice of the predicate, that is to say, of a particular interpretation, which seems to him the most appropriate in the given case. This implies an act of judgment, in which there is at the same time an aspect of recognition and an aspect of decision. Such a judgment represents a risk. By performing his assertion, the speaking subject takes on himself this risk; he engages his responsibility in what he is saying. But this means that there is an aspect of self-implication also in the case of an assertion. This can be expressed also by saying that the subject has to add something of himself to the situation as well as to the purely linguistic devices. The situation is what it is, but by itself it is devoid of this kind of clarity, of intelligibility and of communicability which language only is able to add to it. And the purely linguistic mechanisms are by themselves inert; they are at our disposal, but they do not express really anything as long as they are not taken and assumed by an act, which gives them life. Precisely, a complete expression, conveying a complete meaning, takes the form of a synthesis, which is given neither by the objective situation nor by the linguistic expressions as such. This synthesis is produced by an act, and this act is precisely what is proper to a being which is not closed in itself but which is at a distance with respect to itself, and which has always to reunite its very being with itself, a goal which is effected precisely by its acts. In one word, the kind of synthesis which is presupposed by an assertion must necessarily be attributed to a being which can be characterized as "existence."

These considerations show that the part of language for which the notion of truth is relevant connotes some specific aspects of self-implication and thus that it possesses a specific illocutionary force, as well as those parts of language which have a strictly performative character. If this is so, a study of the conditions of truth cannot be undertaken independently of a study of this illocutionary force proper to an assertion. In other terms, the truth of an assertion cannot be considered in abstraction from the act in which this assertion is posed by the speaker as true. But such an act is not at all arbitrary. It is submitted to particular conditions, which are constitutive for the quality of truth and which have been already analyzed in the philosophical tradition.

But by the fact that an assertion has an illocutionary force, it has something in common with the other types of utterance which intervene in language. This is

perhaps already an argument to affirm that there is not a complete separation between those uses of language where the idea of truth is relevant and the other uses of language. But there is another argument, which gives a precision to this one (which remains very general). Every type of utterance has some presuppositions which, if made explicit, must take the form of assertions. If a person A expresses his gratitude to a person B, this presupposes that for him this person B exists and that this person has helped him in such or such manner. In general, certain beliefs are presupposed, on the part of the speaking subject, about the situation in which his utterance appears as appropriate. And those beliefs are susceptible, in principle, of being expressed in sentences having the form of assertions. As the notion of truth is indispensable in the analysis of an assertion, it appears that a theory of meaning cannot be separated from a theory of truth.

Of course, we must remember here that in the *Tractatus* this link is formulated in the most radical manner, under a form which has been adopted, perhaps with some modifications, by one of the main trends in the contemporary philosophy of language: the meaning of a sentence is made of its truth-conditions. This point of view about meaning has its justifications: the meaning of a sentence is what we understand when put in presence of this sentence. Now when a sentence describes a state of affairs, we understand what it says when we know in what circumstances the description it gives would be true, that is to say, faithful to the real situation, and in what circumstances the description would be false. In this context, the notion of meaning is made dependent on the notion of truth. Of course this idea of meaning applies only to the descriptive propositions, which correspond to assertions (from the point of view of the kind of speech act involved). But it could be generalized with the aid of the notion of effectiveness. Given an utterance of a particular illocutionary force, there are conditions which determine if the speech act corresponding to that force is effectively performed. For example, if the utterance has the form of an order, there are conditions, with respect to the speaker and to the hearer, specifying if effectively an act of giving an order has been performed. And it could be said that, in general, the meaning of a sentence, of whatever illocutionary force, is made of its effectiveness-conditions. But as the analysis of those effectiveness-conditions is exactly the same as the analysis of the different illocutionary acts, in their specificity, this type of generalization would simply absorb the theory of truth in the general theory of speech acts. And what was really significant in the thesis of the *Tractatus* would be lost. What was significant there was precisely the point that there is something irreducible in the notion of truth and that, therefore, a theory of language which would not take account of this would not be adequate. This does not mean that the theory of the *Tractatus* can be maintained such as it has been formulated. The theory of speech acts shows precisely that there are fundamental aspects of meaning which are not reducible to the relationship between predicate and subject and thus cannot be explained in terms of appropriateness of a predicate with respect to a subject. But on the other hand a pure theory of meaning, completely separated from a theory of truth, would be inadequate. This is perhaps the indication which can be retained from the *Tractatus*.

This is of fundamental importance for the analysis of religious language, and particularly for the analysis of the language of theology. Very broadly speaking,

we could say that in the first phase the analysis of language has been used as a tool of negative criticism with respect to religious language—it was the type of criticism based on the empiricist criterion of meaning—, but that in the second phase a more careful analysis, based in great part on the theory of the illocutionary force of language, led to the recognition of the fact that religious language is perfectly meaningful. But very often its meaningfulness has been established thanks to a rejection of its descriptive character, or more precisely thanks to a reinterpretation of its descriptive sentences in different types of performative utterances, implying to be sure some definite attitudes and some subjective beliefs on the part of those who are using those sentences. And here exactly we encounter a very serious problem: is it possible to interpret correctly religious language by making a complete abstraction from the idea of truth?

Of course, a theory of meaning capable of giving sense to a religious language must go beyond a purely psychological interpretation. It would be an undue reduction to interpret a religious assertion simply by saying that it expresses a subjective state of mind, explicable by purely psychological mechanisms. Even in the case of such a reductionist methodology, it should be explained why precisely those mental states take the sophisticated form of a religious language. If the meaning of this language is considered as an expression of a particular psychic state, it must be understood how and why such a state creates this type of projection, with all its peculiarities. But in any case religious language as such, even if it could be considered, from a genetic point of view, as the result of such a projection, has a meaning by itself. Even in a reductionist theory, the meaning cannot be the supposed underlying state; it functions at the linguistic level, independently of the way in which it has been constituted. And precisely the analysis of language is able to show what are the mechanisms of this functioning. But there are referential elements in a religious language. And even if they can be partially dissolved in predicative elements, some referential connexions remain. And they are of the utmost importance, because it is thanks to those elements that religious language has a relation with reality and can play a decisive role in the real life of those who are using it. An elucidation of the meaning of a religious language must necessarily give an interpretation of those referential elements. It will be perhaps possible to reduce progressively some of them to others, and so on. But finally the analysis must arrive at some ultimate referential relation, and it is at this point that the decisive moment of interpretation intervenes.

There is a well-known interpretation according to which the ultimate referent of a religious language is existence itself, not perhaps in its pure facticity, but in as much as it is a question for itself and is placed before the dual possibility of an authentic fulfilment of itself or of an inauthentic actualization. Religious language would thus be considered as the expression of an existential experience, as the form in which existence tries to give a definite shape to its search for authenticity. This interpretation has certainly its validity. Religious language is not a purely speculative language, like that of theoretical cosmology or even like that of metaphysics. It is a language which has a radical self-implicative character, which is thus not only the external expression but, by virtue of its performative power, the very effectivity of a form of life in which human existence tries to adjust itself to the most profound demands of its own constitution, to accomplish itself as des-

tiny. But this existential interpretation, even if it is able to show, so to speak, the place of religion in human experience, and its ultimate character with respect to the most radical decisions in which the being of man is at stake, nevertheless remains very partial, because it operates at an extremely formal level. It pertains to the religious attitude in general, to religion as a dimension of the spirit, not to what is particular and specific in a given religion. Now this specificity finds precisely its expression in the language in which a religious faith takes its concrete form.

A philosophical analysis has not, to be sure, to reconstruct this form as if it were simply an imaginative representation of a philosophical truth, like in the radically rationalistic interpretation of religion. Philosophy is able to show where religion comes in contact with existence, how it concerns it, what is the peculiarity of the religious dimension of life. But in order to show this, it can only analyze the structure of human existence and make manifest that in this very structure there is a fundamental question which concerns the authenticity of existence and to which religion can be an answer. Such an analysis is only thus in structural terms, not in existential terms: the indication of the conditions of possibility of an experience is not yet the effective realization of that experience. The idea of authenticity, of fulfillment, of reconciliation with oneself, of the accomplishment of a destiny, as such, remains a pure form. What is decisive, of course, is the content which can be given to that form and which can be effective only by being concrete, expressible in definite terms and operating through definite signs and symbols. Such a content is no more a structural pregivenness, but a process by which something is realized in existence, by which a destiny receives effectively its fulfilment. Philosophy can contribute to the authenticity of existence, at least by making someone fully conscious of its essence and of the radicality of the question which it is for itself. But it cannot be itself the overcoming of the question, in an encounter able to give it its ultimate meaning. This could be expressed more concisely by a distinction between structure and event: the existential conditions of possibility, analyzed properly by philosophy, belong to a structure, which is the existence itself as simply given to itself, with a task of self-accomplishment—the effective realization of a definite form of existence is obtained through an operative process, where something happens, where there is a concrete history, and for which, thus, the category of event is completely relevant.

But if philosophy cannot replace religion, in the sense that it cannot be considered as saying explicitly, in a rational discourse, the true content of that to which religion would give only an expression more directly accessible to the feeling and even to the sensibility, nevertheless philosophy, confronted with a particular religion, given as a fact, has to try to understand how this religion presents itself, in its most concrete and detailed expressions. This does not mean that it will elucidate it completely nor that it will be able to justify completely, from its own point of view, what the religious discourse is affirming. In the measure where a specific act of the spirit, an act of faith, is necessary in order to give their full meaning to some religious propositions, like the confession of Jesus as Son of God, philosophy will not decipher completely such a meaning. And in the same manner, it will not be able to establish for itself the truth of a proposition which presupposes this kind of acknowledgment which is precisely at the heart of a religious experience. But philosophy will be able to discern the exact role of this act, to analyze

its status, and also to propose categories, like those used by the analysis of language, in terms of which at least the problem of the meaning and of the truth of the religious propositions could be posed. If the religious experience, on the other hand, is able to reflect upon itself and to express this reflection in a specific language, those categories will be helpful for this explicitation. We have to do here with theology, and we begin to see how philosophical analysis can collaborate with the work of theology, without trying to replace it, and in the exact recognition of the point of bifurcation where what can be said in terms of structure separates itself from what must be said in terms of event.

Now if we introduce theology into our considerations, we must immediately recognize that, as a language, it is only a language so to speak of the second order, in the sense that it is only an essay of systematic reconstruction of the content of a language of the first order, which is the language of the religious experience as such. At this point, of course, we cannot any more speak in general terms, but we must restrict ourselves to the context of the christian faith, taken in its full specificity, marked centrally by faith in the Incarnation (which, of course, is not separable from faith in the Holy Trinity and from faith in the Redemption).

Now the language of christian faith takes many different forms, for example in the liturgy, in preaching, in spirituality. But there is a form which is fundamental because it expresses the very content of the faith, which gives their meaning to the other forms of the christian language: it is the confession of the faith, as it is expressed in the *Credo*. The structure of the *Credo* is very remarkable: it is made of a series of propositions, introduced by the expression ''I believe.'' This expression is the explicit form of the illocutionary force proper to this type of discourse. And the propositions which follow give the content upon which this force operates. It is not a simple assertion, which would be only a description, taken as valid by the speaking subject, of a certain state of affairs. Nor is it simply the expression of a subjective attitude, of an acknowledgment which subscribes to certain assertions. It is a commitment of a very deep significance. In a simple assertion, as we have seen, there is already some kind of self-implication, and thus of commitment, but only with respect to a particular fact. Here the commitment operates with respect to an all-embracing order of reality, what the theological vocabulary calls ''economy,'' recognized as this ultimate reality in which and in which alone can people find salvation. But this reality is recognized not under the form of an abstract constitution but under the form of a concrete process, which is the process of salvation itself, in its two dimensions, of redemption from sin and of positive assumption in the trinitarian life, through the mediation of Christ, of the Holy Spirit and of the church. The kind of acknowledgment-commitment which is proper to faith is not simply the recognition of this reality, but the active assumption of it; what is really effected by the operator of belief is an act by which the believer inscribes completely his existence in the order of salvation which is announced in the very words which he pronounces, submits himself to this order and makes himself totally receptive for the transforming action of Christ and of the Spirit which Christ has sent to his disciples.

But what is of vital importance here is that in this act of existential assumption is implied, as an essential component, the recognition of this very order of reality which is actively assumed, by a voluntary participation. And this recognition is

the acceptance of the truth of the propositions on which the belief-operator is actually operating. We have to do here with a very remarkable interaction between the illocutionary force proper to the language of faith and the truth-value of the propositions which express the content of faith. In a sense, the truth of those propositions is received, in an act of recognition which is comparable to the attitude of a mind which discovers an evidence, a truth which imposes itself, beyond any doubt. But in another sense, the truth of those propositions is constituted by the very act which ratifies what they are saying. It is through the force of faith that those propositions become true. This is a way of saying that the evidence which intervenes here is a kind of visibility accessible only to the act of faith, as connoting at the same time an intervention of our faculty of understanding and an intervention of the will, which brings into this complex act that moment of decision by virtue of which, precisely, what was at first sight the simple presentation of a possibility becomes the self-manifestation of a reality.

Thus is introduced, in the analysis of religious language, and in an essential way, the notion of truth. But here philosophy can be helpful, by giving some explanation of this notion, and also by showing that we must distinguish between the notion of truth itself and the notion of the criterion of truth. There are three main types of truth-theory: the correspondence-theory of truth, which says that the truth of a proposition is its correspondence with a reality independent of language and of human thought; the coherence-theory of truth, which says that the truth of a proposition is its place in the totality of the propositions, or, in equivalent terms, its accordance with all the other propositions constituting the totality of discourse; and thirdly the pragmatic theory of truth, which says that the truth of a proposition is its usefulness with respect to certain intentions or to a certain course of action.

The correspondence-theory appears as fundamental, because the other theories presuppose in one way or another some kind of correspondence between what is said and what belongs to the real outside. The coherence-theory of truth has an empirical and an idealist version. In the empirical version the coherence is with the totality of the empirical propositions which are accepted at a certain stage of scientific research. But if a certain set of propositions is accepted, in an empirical perspective, it is because it can be considered as supported by the empirical evidence available, and this is a kind of correspondence. In the idealist version the coherence is with the total discourse, and the total discourse is considered as being identical with the total reality. The truth of a particular proposition is thus its role in this totality, but this role is to express a particular aspect of the total reality. A particular truth is only a partial truth, but this partial truth is a part of what makes the total discourse a totally adequate expression of reality. And for what concerns the pragmatic theory, the usefulness of a proposition has itself to be explained in terms of its appropriateness to reality. Now the correspondence which makes a proposition true is not exactly between the proposition itself and a real object or real situation in the world, by reason of their heterogeneity, but between the proposition and what Alan White, in his very clarifying book on truth, calls—following Russell—a fact. A fact is exactly what is expressed by a proposition; it is the belonging of a property to an object. For example, it is a fact that this sheet of paper is covered by black signs. And thus the structure of the fact is comparable to the structure of the proposition which expresses it. A proposition is true if and

only if the fact that it expresses obtains. But to recognize this, as we have seen, is always a matter of interpretation.

Although the very concept of truth has a general validity for the different fields of knowledge, it does not function uniformly in the relevant contexts. We could say as a general principle that the relation of an assertion to its truth is a function of the way in which it produces its meaning. And as the meaning of an assertion constitutes itself with respect to some horizon of donation, the truth quality of an assertion depends on the way in which this assertion is related to this horizon. This must be examined now more in detail.

The attribution of a predicate to a subject-term, which represents a fact, is precisely what gives its meaning to a proposition, abstractly considered. Let us call this the propositional meaning. A proposition is true when the functioning of its meaning is in accordance with a fact effectively actualized in reality. But when a proposition is used in a concrete context of interlocution, it is always under the action of a definite illocutionary force, explicitly formulated or not. This force determines the way in which the relation of the predicate to the subject is actually taken by the speaker. In the case of an assertion, it is taken as describing an actual fact and when the operator of assertion is made explicit, it expresses precisely the intention of the speaker to give such a faithful description—in other words, to tell the truth. His assertion may appear, after verification, as false, but if it was made seriously the speaker took it as true, for all the information he could have about the situation which he wanted to describe. In the case of an order, the propositional meaning is taken as describing a state of affairs which, according to the intention of the speaker, supposed to have the appropriate authority, must be realized in the future by the person to whom the order is addressed. In the case of a thanking, the propositional meaning is taken as describing a state of affairs already realized and including a relationship between the two interlocutors in which the speaker has received some benefit from an action undertaken by the other person. And so on.

Let us go back now to the *Credo*. Each of its sentences contains a propositional meaning upon which the operator of faith is acting, and this on two counts. First, this operator contributes essentially to the very constitution of the propositional meaning. The propositions which intervene here are referring to a reality which is not given in the empirical world and which therefore could not be simply referred to by a demonstrative gesture. The reference is built with the aid of predicates. But those predicates themselves function upon the basis of an analogy, which presupposes already the possibility of making reference to the reality which is described through the analogy. And this possibility is provided by the constitution of a relationship in which the speaker receives access to an horizon of significance which is the very world to which belong the realities to which reference is made. But to receive this access, he has to make himself receptive and this is precisely what is accomplished by the act of faith, at least in one of its aspects. But, secondly, the operator of faith determines exactly how truth is implied in this context. This operator takes the propositional meaning, constituted according to the scheme of interaction between reference and predication just sketched here above, as describing an event-like reality, considered not only as actual but as constituting the process in which the speaker is engaging himself by his confession and in which

he receives the effectivity of salvation. Thus the truth which is recognized is, so to speak, an active truth, which transforms the existential condition of the speaker who proclaims it. As what is described in the very process of that transformation, it can be said that the meaning, in this context, is its own actualization, the becoming of its truth, and that its truth is its fulfilment: it is in the measure in which the meaning of what is proclaimed becomes effectively active in the life of faith that it receives its truth.

But, after all, the act of faith could be an illusion, its relation to truth a false pretension. If there is, in such an act, the recognition of a truth, it must rely on some criterion. And it is clear that such a criterion cannot be an empirical verifiability. But we must take account of that fundamental character of faith which inscribes it in a tradition, when in addition to its own assertion it expresses the belief in the church and in the communion of saints. Now a tradition gives a criterion under the form of the category of testimony. The coherence given to existence by the acceptance of the content of the faith can be a useful preparation, but the full recognition of this content as such must be based on a givenness. In the last analysis, the ultimate criterion of truth, in general, must be an experience in which what is said is recognized as expressing adequately something which is manifest. The last foundation of truth is a manifestation. What is manifest asks only to be accepted such as it appears, and the virtue of a true discourse is to give expression to such an acceptance. In the case of faith, the last foundation, actually, is an event, in which the reality to which faith refers becomes apparent. The role of testimony is precisely to be a mediation between the faith in its present state and this primary event which is the real support of faith. Through the continuity of an historical tradition, the believer of today is made able to receive the testimony of the first believers, as it is reported in the written sources recognized and transmitted by this tradition. The language of the first witnesses is already the language of faith, but in their case their confession is based directly on their personal encounter with Christ. The language of the sources tells what their experience has been, how they have recognized Jesus Christ as the Son of God, come into this world for the salvation of mankind. Their discourse presents itself as true, but in their case the foundation of this truth was not a testimony but the immediate reception of what was made manifest in Christ. The truth of their discourse is its faithfulness to what became thus manifest for them. What we know about it is what they have reported of the words and deeds of Christ himself. In his deeds he gave reasons to believe in him and in his words. And in those words he made present his own mission, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and ultimately his own reality. By showing himself as the one who was sent by God to save the world, and as having a unique relation to his Father, he revealed something of the internal mystery of God. The term ''revelation'' is here more appropriate than the word ''manifestation,'' which should be used to characterize the mode of appearance of the worldly reality, which makes itself accessible in perception, according to its constitutive status. Here we have to do with an historical event in which a new reality is announced, a world of humanity with God. In this announcement something of the divine economy is made accessible to the human mind, but the abyss of the divine reality remains unfathomable. The word ''revelation'' is apt to express the specificity of this givenness.

If the language of faith finds the ultimate foundation of its truth in the testimony which Christ gives of himself, his proper discourse, insofar as we can find it at least partially in the written sources of the faith, it may also be qualified by the concept of truth. But here the correspondence is not between what is said by the speaker and what happens in reality. The discourse speaks of the speaker himself and has as its meaning to reveal his mission and his real essence. Its truth is the act itself of revelation which is performed by its enunciation. The discourse is no more, here, at a distance with respect to what it refers to, but is the direct expression of the person who utters it. It is, so to speak, the self-presentation of Christ himself. And this is exactly what he himself has expressed in the most radical and extraordinary manner when he said: "I am the truth." The full meaning of this is recognized only in and through faith. But when faith receives those words of Christ, it recognizes that its own truth, which is the truth of a discourse, is founded on and justified by a truth which is no more a quality of something which is said, but is a person. The explanation of this use of the term "truth" by Christ is given by St. John when he explains that Christ is the Word of God, and that the Word has manifested himself by coming into this world. The Word is truth in as much as he reveals himself and by this very fact reveals something of the eternal being of God.

The term "word" is analogical. This analogy takes its point of departure in the experience which we have of the use of words in our language. But reciprocally, this same analogy throws a remarkable light on the status of our language and on its ability to express truth. If the term "word" could be used by St. John in order to speak of the Son of God, proceeding eternally from the Father, this shows that our language may be considered as some kind of participation in what is realized in Christ, in the mystery of his eternal origin, and the ultimate foundation of truth is the process in which and by virtue of which this mystery makes itself accessible to those who are able to recognize the signs which it gives of itself.

Now finally we may come back to theology. The justification of theology, corresponding to its intention, is certainly its relationship with the language of the confession of faith and, through this, with the founding language in which revelation itself is expressed. And the truth of theological language is its correspondence with the reality made present in revelation, but this through the mediation of the different levels of the language of faith. But the difficulty is that theological language is not just a kind of translation in more abstract terms of what is said in relatively concrete terms in the language of the sources. There is an original contribution of theological reflection which adds a particular dimension to the religious language as such and thus in a certain sense makes this very language more revealing for the human mind. This supplementary dimension is offered by the idea of "theoria," which itself gives expression to the deep intention of speculative thinking. This idea corresponds to the project of an authentic knowledge, that is to say, of a knowledge which would be in full accordance with reality, which would be thus the adequate expression of the process of manifestation, apprehended in its fullness and in its entire profundity. The status of theoria in greek philosophy was opposed to the status of opinion, qualified as an inferior type of knowledge.

The point of view which is constitutive of theology is certainly not to suggest that ordinary religious language is a kind of primitive language, speaking in images and not truly adequate, and that theology would be the only authentic expression of the religious reality. On the contrary, theology takes as its regulating principle its faithfulness to the primary expression of the faith, and this implies that it considers itself only as a secondary language, recognizing fully the founding authenticity of the language of faith. But what is maintained from the idea of theoria is that there is an internal constitution of reality which is of the nature of a concealed "logos" and that it is possible in principle to reconstruct in an appropriate discourse, under the form of an abstract conceptual network, the structure of this logos. This corresponds to a general hypothesis of radical rationality. Theology takes as its inspiring hypothesis that this is true not only for the wordly reality but also, and even on more profound grounds, for the religious reality. This is not in contradiction with the idea of mystery. Mystery is not at all unintelligibility. On the contrary, what was concealed in God is now revealed in Christ, as St. Paul explains very explicitly. Of course, as has been already noted, revelation is not a complete manifestation, as if the reality of God were completely accessible to the human mind. But what is revealed has by itself a coherence, a structural constitution which is not expressed as such by the language of faith, which is primarily a language of commitment and of acknowledgment, but which could in principle be made apparent in a manner which would not be an idle intellectual exercise, but which would be really profitable for the language and for the life of faith itself. It can be argued besides that this corresponds not only to a demand of our intelligence but also to an exigency of intelligibility which inhabits the faith itself and which is demanded by the very essence of revelation.

This being accepted, we must examine by what mechanisms theological discourse succeeds in producing a specific effect of meaning, corresponding to its intention. And, on the other hand, we must examine how it has a specific relation to truth.

The aim of theological discourse is not to repeat what is said already in the discourse of faith, but to make apparent the supposed internal structure of the reality presented in this discourse. In order to realize this project, it makes appeal to categories already created under the inspiration of the idea of theoria. But it has to transform those categories in order to adapt them to their properly theological usage. The displacement which must intervene could be described with the aid of the distinction introduced above, between manifestation and revelation. The process of manifestation is the process by which the worldly reality shows itself and makes apparent its own constitution. The speculative categories of theoria are constructed in order to give an account of that constitution. In very general terms, it could be said that they are organized according to a scheme of unfolding, starting from a principle of unity and descending progressively towards the pure dispersion of the "chôra," as we can see in the famous dialogue of Plato about the constitution of the world. This scheme can be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* of Kant or in the *Creative Evolution* of Bergson, as in many other major philosophical works. The process of revelation is the process by which the project of God concerning humanity finds its effectivity, in a religious history prepared by the Old Testament and receiving its accomplishment in the life and the teachings

of Jesus Christ. The central scheme of this process is the scheme of the encounter, in which a human being is concretely placed before the word of God and its power of salvation and in which he has to make a decision with respect to what is thus proposed to him. We might think here of the many episodes in the Gospel where Christ asks somebody to take a position with respect to him. A striking episode among others is the one in which Christ tells the sister of Lazarus that he is the resurrection and the life and asks her if she believes that.

The categories of theoria are adaptable to the description of manifestation. They have to be transformed in order to become able to describe the structure of a process which is of a personal and at the same time of an historical character, a process which implies events in which a human life is shaken on its basis and transformed. The only appropriate method to ensure this displacement is to detach those categories from the horizon of theoria in its original sense and to reinscribe them in the horizon of the religious experience, this same horizon which constitutes the ultimate horizon of significance of religious language of first order. As this horizon is made accessible by the virtue of the act of faith, this implies that theology presupposes faith, at least in the measure where it is properly theology and not a kind of metaphysics or philosophy of religion. What can be said of the predicates used in the language of first order can be said here of the speculative categories which are utilized by theology. But it must be added that those categories have mutual relationships, which contribute to their meaning. It is through those relationships that they are able, in principle at least, to express the structural constitution of the religious reality.

The truth of theological language is obviously constituted by the correspondence of this language with that very reality. But as this is presented to the mind in the language of revelation as such, concretely the theological truth will be the agreement between the propositions of theology and the truth-content of the language of revelation. It is thus a truth of the second order, like theological language itself. As in the case of the language of the first order, the way in which theological language has relation to truth is determined by its specific illocutionary force. The operator which expresses this force is no more the belief-operator as such. It is something like this: ''I consider, with sufficient reasons, that it is appropriate to express the rational structure of what is recognized in the confession of faith, and attested by the tradition of the Church, by saying that. . . . '' This makes explicit the dependence of the theological truth proper to the confession of faith. And of course the ultimate foundation cannot be but the same.

We must remember, however, that the appropriateness of the reconstruction proposed is always open to discussion and in any case cannot be considered as implying an absolutization of a particular theology. It may be recognized, to be sure, that such or such theology is particularly recommendable. But it is always to be expected that new interpretations will be developed. The general evolution of culture, and in particular the evolution of the categorial frames which are useable, play here of course an important role. For example, it could be said that one of the characteristic trends of contemporary theology has been its way of understanding the historicity of the christian faith. But this development is certainly connected with the emergence of the theme of historicity in philosophy since the

last century, particularly of the theme of existential historicity in our century, and perhaps also with the role attributed to time in contemporary natural science.

A categorial scheme is never the ultimate truth. As Whitehead said: "Every philosophy, in its turn, will be deposed." It is the poverty of theology to have as its proper mission to express something of the christian faith in terms which are of an historical character and partake of the contingency of the meditating thought. It is its greatness to be able, nevertheless, to say authentically something of the faith, notwithstanding its own inescapable limitations.

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