Mary, Fulfillment of Person in the Annunciation —
A Study of the Dialogic Principle of Martin Buber
and Hans Urs von Balthasar
A Proposed Re-reading of the Annunciation
(as a dialogic event)

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PREFACE

HISTORY OF PRESENT STUDY

"You will learn the truth and the truth will make you free." John 8:32

All philosophy, science, and theology share a passion for knowing truth which is realized through inquiry. The author’s personal quest for truth is inextricably tied to two well known religious thinkers’ search for God and his relationship to his creatures (Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar). What is truth as it applies to who is a person? Both men discovered the importance of dialogue as a focalization of that relationship and further discovered that the person (the theological person), involved in that God-human relationship, is the result of or becomes synonymous with that meeting of the two partners in dialogue.

This present inquiry for truth began with some texts of von Balthasar that explicated his definition of theological personhood. As a psychologist, interested in both philosophical thought and theological endeavor regarding person, the author became intrigued enough to begin further reading.

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Could a journey from “Athens to Jerusalem” carry the truth that makes for freedom? Was it possible that the “circular odyssey of all Greek and modern philosophies [could be] replaced by the uprooting of Abraham, forced to leave the intimacy of his home and country to go toward an unknown somewhere-else (Gen. 21:1)?”² Could theological reasoning and belief yield the long sought answer to philosophical and psychological questions of “Who am I?”; “What is a person?”; “How does one become fully human?”; “How can God relate to man?”.

Hans Urs von Balthasar stated in his third volume of Theo-Drama³ that each member of the human species possesses his nature in a unique way. This individualized possession is not the criterion for uniqueness as a person, however. It remains but a unique spiritual subject. Only in dialogue, as God addresses this spiritual subject can the spiritual subject become a person. God tells the spirit-subject who it is for Him, thereby conferring a divine mission. The spirit-subject is now a person. Therefore dialogue is the vehicle for personhood. The I-Thou relation, another way of understanding the encounter or dialogue, is the means to personhood. The mission that is discovered in the dialogic relation defines the person.

Further reading discovered von Balthasar’s stated desire to see the dialogic principle utilized more in theological investigation. Since he wrote a small book on Martin Buber⁴

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² Ibid., 44.
⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Martin Buber and Christianity*
crediting him with the development of the very tool he was espousing (dialogue or I-Thou relation), it seemed appropriate to examine both men's writings. It would add greater credibility to the search and final conclusions to pursue the thinking of a world renown Jewish religious thinker (Martin Buber) and an equally respected Catholic theologian (Hans Urs von Balthasar).

As a Catholic, one learns that the Virgin Mary is without sin, the exemplar of all virtues, the bridge between the Old and New Testament both as "Daughter of Zion" and Mother of us all in the order of grace. As the perfect human person, Mary might serve as the best and most logical choice to demonstrate theological personhood as described by Buber and von Balthasar. Furthermore, the Virgin Mary in the Annunciation could possibly exemplify all the elements (relation, mission, freedom) of the dialogic event, because of her "yes" to proffered mission and the singular uniqueness of that mission. She might even serve as the prototype of all persons as viewed in the God-human relation. Concurrent with the thought of Mary as prototype developed the idea that the dialogic principle might serve as a useful tool in a re-reading of the Annunciation.

The goal of the paper eventually crystallized as an exposition of how the Virgin Mary is both the fulfillment of person (as defined by the dialogic principle according to the shared principles of Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar) and the prototype for all persons.
HYPOTHESES

The focus of this study is the Virgin Mary in the Annunciation scene. This study will explore the possible use of the dialogic principle as an aid to understanding "theological personhood." The paper proposes that through the dialogic event, a person's uniqueness is called forth. This uniqueness comes about through the dialogue between Creator and creature. Human beings are spiritual subjects created by God and endowed with intelligence and free will, but theological personhood flows from being commissioned or chosen for a role. The dialogic elements (uniqueness, freedom, responsibility, vocation or mission) that comprise or constitute personhood are most visible in their concrete form in the Annunciation.

The first hypothesis of this paper asks if the dialogue, as understood in Buber and von Balthasar's works, can elucidate the concept of theological personhood. Simply stated, "Is dialogue an important aid to help comprehend the concept of person?" Specifically does the God-man dialogue furnish all the elements necessary for attaining theological personhood?

A second hypothesis, closely related to the first, is that a person achieves its fulfillment through the dialogic principle as espoused by Buber and von Balthasar.
A third hypothesis is that the dialogue between the Virgin Mary and God is the exemplary event of the God-human relation. If indeed, an individual spiritual subject truly becomes a theological person through the dialogue with the Creator (who tells it who it is and its vocation), it is hypothesized that the Virgin Mary be considered the prototype of the human person. The dialogical elements will be specifically cited and applied to the Annunciation scene.

LIMITATIONS

1. Both Buber and von Balthasar are well known for their prolific literary production. This paper will address only a small section of their work, i.e., those elements of the dialogic principle that relate to the God-human relationship and the human-human relationship.

2. The author was not able to read the authors' works in their original German and had to rely on translations.

3. No attempt was made to trace the full development of either man's ideas over time but the study has alluded to some progression of thought. Von Balthasar wrote his trilogy (Glory of the Lord, Theodramatic and Theologik) during and immediately after the Second Vatican Council. Whereas Buber's works span 40 years.
4. Buber never wrote specifically about the Virgin Mary as seen in the Annunciation.\textsuperscript{5} We can only apply his elements of the dialogical principle to it to pursue the possibility of Mary being the fulfillment of person.

TERMS

1. Dialogue

Dialogue was a teaching technique employed by Socrates (perfected by Plato), now viewed as a literary form.\textsuperscript{6} In this study dialogue is proposed as a theological tool to understand the human person. Through the encounter or dialogue we truly meet God and others. The dialogical encounter with God makes all other encounters possible. Language is by its very nature dialogical involving conversation between two people.

2. Covenant

A covenant is an agreement or solemn promise made binding by an oath. It is enacted between two parties who agree to perform or refrain from specific actions. Covenant in the Old Testament and New Testament is the "major metaphor" used to describe the relation between God and Israel.\textsuperscript{7} For the purpose of this study, covenant will be viewed as an example of being in relation through dialogue. It is therefore a type of or a sub-heading of dialogue.

\textsuperscript{5} Mention was made about his contributing to Claudel's play about the Annunciation but author was not able to obtain information about possible writing or if play was produced.

\textsuperscript{6} New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 4, 849.

\textsuperscript{7} The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 714.
3. Relation

Relation is the mode in which one thing stands to another. It can refer to two or more parties or one thing considered in itself, like self-identity. For the purpose of this study, relation means two individuals encountering each other that leads to personhood or fulfillment as human beings. Openness to otherness is the means to attain relationship. Wholeness is achieved through relationship.

4. Individual

Individual - "...the singular substantial, concrete being considered in its individual unity and as separated from every other being."\(^8\) It is an ontological unity that is not identical with anything else. The individual is considered as unique in his particularity. Uniqueness is a key idea associated with individuality. Although individuality is a necessary prerequisite for personhood, it is not a completely sufficient explanation. The "I-ness" that distinguishes each individual's subjective existence can philosophically account for the individual concretization of a generic nature shared by all. It cannot however, grant the special dignity bestowed by the term person.

5. Person

Person - this word traces its derivation to the Greek *(prosopon)* and from Latin *(persona)* to denote the mask worn by an actor. Later, person was applied to the role assumed. Finally any character on the stage of life was called a person.\(^9\) Person implies uniqueness

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\(^8\) Ibid., Volume 7, 474.
\(^9\) Ibid., Volume 11, 166.
granted by the incomparability and irreplaceability of the individual receiving a specific mission from God.

a. Philosophical definition

Boethius provided the classic philosophical definition of person: “an individual substance of a rational nature.”\textsuperscript{10} This definition indicates that person refers only to intellectual beings.\textsuperscript{11}

b. Theological person

St. Thomas advanced the concept of person explaining that the individual substance is complete, subsists by itself and is separated from others. Aquinas’ ontological contribution states that “person has a special dignity, that is represents what is most perfect in all of nature, and that its special excellence consists in having dominion over its own activity (ST 1a, 29.1).”\textsuperscript{12} Person in theology added to its definition the idea of incommunicability - “person is the subsistent, incommunicable subject of an intellectual nature...”\textsuperscript{13} The notion of person has been aided by philosophical considerations regarding the Trinitarian mystery. Psychology supplements the well accepted philosophical/ontological concepts. Psychology points out that the person is complete in himself but also is constituted by his relations. These psychological insights reflect the Trinitarian mystery of inter-relatedness experienced by members of the Trinity. In this

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume II, 167.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 169.
study person is inseparable from the dialogic principle since it flows directly from the
dialogic principle. The concept of mission further defines person and is synonymous
with it (in von Balthasar’s framework).

6. Personalism

Personalism was a reaction to materialism and evolutionism of the 19th century. It
stressed the value of a person, moral self, freedom, dignity and responsibility.\textsuperscript{14} Personalism stressed uniqueness in the face of Hegelian collectivism, stating, “Each self
is a unique existence, which is perfectly impervious...to other selves.... I have a center of
my own, will of my own, which no one shares with me or can share - a centre which I
maintain even in my dealings with God Himself.”\textsuperscript{15} Some of the existential philosophers
(G. Marcel, J.P. Sartre, N.A. Berdyaev) are included in the list of personalists. In this
same list one would find J. Maritain, Y. Simon, and E. Gilson. Personalist philosophers
believe that all ethical and moral truth derives from the “absolute value of the person.”\textsuperscript{16}
The term personalism (as defined above) was first used in 1908 by B.P. Browne. In
general, personalists are idealists who believe in God as a person. God is the measure of
all things, especially truth. All being is defined as personal consciousness. The act of
existing means to be a person.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 172.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 173.
7. Communication

This study stresses the encounter as the basis of communication. True communication which can occur only in the I-Thou or dialogic relation is not limited to dialogical speech.

8. Narrative

Narrative is an account, tale or story. The gospels are narratives because they contain the elements of narrative, i.e., narrator, story and type of reader. The narrative can be further defined as a discourse in which the language is organized in terms of character.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter one situates the dialogue both as a philosophical/theological tool and as a vehicle of covenant-making, an event in salvation history. It attempts to show how the Annunciation scene is a dialogic event revealing the typical elements of the dialogic principle. This chapter presents the first step in a possible re-reading of the Annunciation in light of this dialogic principle, and will lay the foundation on which to build a new approach to the understanding of how an individual becomes a person. Who Mary is and who she becomes through the dialogue is of the utmost importance in the enunciation of this new approach to the theological personhood.
Chapter two will investigate the contributions of Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar to the study and exposition of the dialogic principle. In Volume I of his *Theo-Drama*, von Balthasar cites dialogue as “one of the most fruitful new approaches of Christian life and thought.”

Yet he finds it astonishing in the two thousand years of Christian theology that dialogue has not been utilized nor received much attention. Martin Buber says,

“In no other period of human knowledge has man ever become more problematic to himself than in our own day. We have a scientific, a philosophical, and a theological anthropology which know nothing of each other. Therefore we no longer possess a clear and consistent idea of man. The ever growing multiplicity of the particular sciences that are engaged in the study of man has much more confused and obscured than elucidated our concept of man.”

This study will take up the challenge of both of these two well known thinkers, who recommended the use of dialogue as a tool in the theological understanding of man. Both would agree that the tool of dialogue has been too little utilized, if not neglected, and that this dialogue is the key to the understanding the concept of man. They are different men with different backgrounds and different religious beliefs, however, this study will highlight their similarities regarding the dialogic principle and its use in understanding “what and who the human person is.”

Because of their widely accepted work in the field of dialogue, this study can maintain that the tool of dialogue is an important, if not essential, element in theological investigation that provides a vehicle for a better understanding of the anthropological

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concept of the human person. This study will attempt to show how von Balthasar and Buber's views are similar, how different, and why they are different.

Chapter three will examine the Annunciation scene in light of the work of some well-known exegetes. However there will not be an exegesis or linguistic analysis, but an examination of published articles to discover any elements of the dialogic principle that may be alluded to or directly addressed. These articles have been selected on the basis of referring to elements of dialogue. This examination will ask to what extent do their well-researched ideas support the thesis, that the elements of the dialogic principle define theological personhood through the encounter with God and the creature's subsequent yes to God's call.

Chapter four will relate the ideas of Buber and von Balthasar to the Annunciation scene. The role of Mary in Theodrama will be explored and applied to her role in the Annunciation. Hopefully the progression from 1) situating dialogue, 2) examining the work of Buber and von Balthasar regarding the dialogic principle, 3) citing the contribution of exegetical studies to dialogue with a synthesis of these exegetical contributions, and 4) synthesizing Buber and von Balthasar's ideas will attempt to provide a fresh re-reading and a new grasp of the Annunciation from the perspective of the dialogic principle. The chapter and paper will conclude with some final comments regarding Buber and von Balthasar's possible contribution in forwarding the dialogic concept as a worthy instrument in theological anthropology's study of the person.
The significance of the study is the first time examination of the Annunciation scene by applying Buber and von Balthasar's dialogical principles and a comparison of their ideas to provide a possible re-reading of the Annunciation. Such a comparison and application has not yet appeared in theological literature. It is the author's intention that as a result of this study the Virgin Mary will be viewed as an exemplary fulfillment of personhood in her response to God's call (as understood in the light of the dialogic principle).
CHAPTER 1

DIALOGUE AND THE GOD-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

Both Jews and Christians believe that man is made in the image and likeness of God.\(^\text{19}\) Likeness connotes that we, like God, are made to be interpersonal. Throughout the Old Testament God initiates a dialogue with human beings and enters into a relationship. At times this formal relationship was called covenant (*berit* in Hebrew), which means chain. Not only did he enter into dialogue, but he “chained” himself to persons and to the Israelites as a people. The inaccessible God makes himself accessible to the people. Most modern scholars would agree that the basic analogy used to understand God’s relationship with his people is that of covenant.\(^\text{20}\)

COVENANT AND DIALOGUE

Man’s religious experiences in the Old Testament were always tied to personal relations with God even though these persons are representatives of the people. Reason and faith were always related. Personhood dealt with relatedness especially with a divine person, God, recorded in the form of a dialogue. Three brief examples demonstrate this. In the second account of the creation in Genesis, there is recorded the dialogue between God and Adam and Eve. Yahweh was a personal God who “walked” with Adam and Eve in

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\(^{19}\) Genesis 1:26

the Garden of Eden. Even more importantly God talked or communicated in some fashion with Adam and Eve. The book of Genesis relates this dialogue.

“9) But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ 10) And he said, ‘I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ 11) He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ 12) The man said, ‘The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’ 13) Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.’ 14) The Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.”’

The dialogue between God and the first couple continues in the very beginning of the Bible demonstrating that the first Covenant was broken. God forms Covenant again, this time with Noah. Noah was a good man, a man of integrity with whom God entered into relationship. God spoke to Noah, warned him of the impending flood and gave instructions concerning the building of the ark (Genesis 7). Not only does he enter into Covenant, but is very present and shows his concern over small details as can be seen in Genesis 7:16 when Scripture says, “And Yahweh closed the door behind Noah.” This thoughtful gesture speaks of God’s personal interest. After the flood God would say, “Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations: I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth.” Unlike Adam and Eve, Noah did not violate the Covenant.

21 Cf. Genesis 3:9-15
Lastly, the Covenant with Abraham, the most well known agreement,\(^2\) marks the beginning of salvation history for the Jewish people and all mankind. God appeared to Abram, promised him prosperity and that he would be a great nation. Later in a dialogue, God would promise an heir from Abram's own flesh and blood.\(^3\)

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old Yahweh appeared to him and said, 'I am El Shaddai. Bear yourself blameless in my presence and I will make a Covenant between myself and you, and increase your numbers greatly.' Abram bowed to the ground and God said to him, 'Here now is my covenant with you: you shall become the father of a multitude of nations. You shall no longer be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I make you a father of a multitude of nations. I will make you most fruitful. I will make you into nations, and your issue shall be kings. I will establish my Covenant between myself and you, and your descendants after you, generation after generation, a Covenant in perpetuity, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.'"\(^4\)

God would continue "speaking," telling Abraham that circumcision would be the sign of the Covenant. God's personal relationship is revealed in Abraham's intercession and bargaining through a dialogue with God over the inhabitants of Sodom. In both the incident at Mamre and Sodom the recounting is situated in a dialogue, and both stories conclude with Yahweh's departure.\(^5\)

In the book of Exodus, chapter two, we read that the cries of the sons of Israel groaning in slavery ascend to God. "God heard their groaning and he called to mind his Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."\(^6\) God enters into dialogue with Moses calling to him.

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\(^2\) Unilateral covenant
\(^3\) Cf. Genesis 15:4
\(^4\) Cf. Genesis 17:1-8
\(^5\) Genesis 18 and 19
\(^6\) Exodus 2:23-25
As Abram in dialogue received a mission of traveling and establishing a nation, as Noah in dialogue received a mission of repopulating the earth, so Moses in dialogue receives a direct mission from God -- to bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt. Moses like Abraham receives a sign -- “After you have led the people out of Egypt, you are to offer worship to God on this mountain.”27 The Sinai covenant is one of kinship between God and his people.

The Old Testament records covenants in the ancient world that were secular or religious. The Hittite suzerainty treaties or covenants were formal bases upon which depended the relationship between the Hittite state and the vassals who owed it allegiance.28 Under the various secular covenants (suzerainty, parity, patron, promissory), different members of the covenanted parties pledged allegiance. Whereas in the religious covenants it is God who binds himself to Abraham, Noah and David. The Mosaic covenant is a good example of Israel being bound. From the “Late Bronze Age,” a covenant could be viewed not merely as a theological concept, but the original form of social and religious organization.29 Even in the New Testament the first Christians may have considered themselves as a covenanted community, but this covenant is viewed in a different light than the Old Testament covenant. Instead of stressing the obligation of the different parties, the New Testament covenant created a personal relationship. The new commandment of love corresponds “to the very nature of the covenant itself.”30 The New

27 Exodus 3:12
28 The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, Volume I, 714.
29 Ibid., 719.
30 Ibid.
Testament covenant has retained the binding together of the two parties in a firm relationship. In the history of the covenant there was a development from vassal-treaty agreements with groups to a more intimate relationship with persons. The stage linking these two is the personal intimacy and love aspect of New Testament covenant. The interim period is marked by the prophets of the Old Testament likening Israel to a bride or marriage partner. Over time the covenant contained both treaty/agreement and martial/spousal elements. This history of God’s relating to mankind through the stages of covenant-making ends with the New Testament covenant bearing all the distinct elements -- treaty, oath, personal, marital and spousal.

Whereas the Old Testament covenant addressed a community or a nation through law and stipulations, the New Testament covenant binds the person to God in love. The old was juridical and social that spoke of rights and duties that formed community; the new is personal and speaks of individual commitment through a loving relationship, that might be called spousal.

God initiates contact with his creatures through dialogue and establishes and continues the relationship through covenant. Both types of covenant, Old Testament and New Testament, form relationships and are parts of dialogue. All these aspects of the Old Testament covenant are taken up and redeemed by Christ in the New Testament.\(^{31}\) As said so well by G. E. Mendenhall,

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
“The New Testament experience of Christ was one which could not be contained within the framework of a quasi-legal terminology or pattern of thought and action. Neither the act of God in Christ nor the religious obligation of man to God could be adequately expressed in language. Therefore the Word became flesh. The letters of man’s poor alphabet had to take second rank behind the person of a living being, the Christ, as the means of communicating the message of God. And yet the Sinai covenant of the Old Testament and the New Testament covenant in Christ’s blood are one: each created a people of God out of those who were no people, demanded the complete self-surrender to God as a joyful response to the love of God which preceded.”

This quote reveals the relationship of Old Testament covenant and New Testament spousal relationship. This change in the dialogic relationship may have its roots in the “new covenant” that began with Jeremiah. Without addressing the intricacies of differentiation of the terms - covenant, charter, loyalty oath, and treaties, and whether the dialogic relationships between God and Abraham, Noah, and David were of a certain type, it is important to know that these various relationships did one of two things. They either established a new community or body politic, or ratified one already in existence.

The “new covenant” as spoken of in Jeremiah (31:31-34) had to re-establish the relationship between Yahweh and his people after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. However this “new covenant” was made with persons as reflected in the words “house of Judah and the house of Israel (31:31)” in addition to the new community receiving a “new heart and new spirit.” In the future, God will regard his people as individuals; each one will know him: “And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor

32 Ibid., 723.
33 Ibid.
34 The Anchor Bible, Volume I, 1692.
and each his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer. 31:34). This “new covenant” bears little resemblance to Old Testament covenants except that it restores the relationship with God. It stressed what is essential to the dialogue: relationship. Absent are historical prologue, oath, curses and blessings, witnesses, public reading and ratification rituals. The law of the heart replaces “commandments, statutes, and ordinances.” Yahweh’s teaching will be “written on their hearts” (not on tablets of stone) and “placed in their inward parts” (verse 33). 36 In the New Testament, the heart is the organ of prayer and the “locus of dialogical contact with God.” 37 It is the dwelling place for the Word. Yahweh’s words written now on hearts are the uttered words of the covenant that the ancients held could never be annulled or taken back. 38 It is God’s creative love which cannot be annulled.

Also related to the heart theme of Jeremiah’s “new covenant” is the spousal or marriage aspects of covenant. The marriage contract contains some common elements of covenant: establishes a relationship or ratifies an already existing one, sworn oath, violated obligations and accompanying curse. In the Bible, the marriage contract lends itself both to expressing relationships and to establishing a political relationship. 39 Over time, Israel’s relationship with God moved from the suzerainty treaty analogy to a relationship likened to that of a husband and wife.

36 The Anchor Bible, Volume I, 1692.
39 The Anchor Bible, 1195.
It was Hosea in the middle of the eighth century who developed the relationship between God and Israel with the image of the marriage union.\(^{40}\) This spousal relationship portrays God as the bridegroom and Israel as the bride. Is this a realistic comparison? “Our first impression, however, might be that it does not adequately portray the immense distance between God and man.”\(^{41}\) Bouwmeester explains that in the eastern culture the groom had to buy the bride as property, and she remained his property like the man owned his mule or ox. She was at his disposal with no juridical rights.

Israel’s infidelity was viewed in the terms of the covenant. “They transgressed my covenant, and they dealt faithlessly with me” (Hosea 6:7). Throughout Deuteronomy, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Israel is seen as a bride. In chapter 11 of Hosea, he refers to Israel’s infidelity as the bride. References to “you will be my own possession” reflect this spousal relation. Israel is the bride of the Lord, his possession, his heritage, his holy people. Deuteronomy gives the reason: “The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth (Deut. 7:6). The solemn covenant is made at Sinai, but God had already made his choice and prepared that “marriage” long before.\(^{42}\) Covenant always implies God’s merciful initiative whether it be in a king to vassal, groom to bride, or vine-dresser to vineyard (Hosea). Secondly, it implies a human response to God’s action. The covenant is always a sign of God’s election and demands a response.\(^{43}\)

\(^{40}\) W. Bouwmeester, *The Bible on the Covenant*, 33.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 54.
The Covenantal relationship of God with his people perdured throughout salvation history as presented in the Old Testament. The narratives of God’s covenant with Israel were unique. Not only did they bring the partners together; they belong to one another and are mutually bound; they have a guarantee to be faithful to one another, but they went farther. God asks his people to make a choice. God prefers that man make a choice (Ex. 20:20). The people say yes making the covenant with Israel bilateral in character. There is a movement away from the more ancient treaty and oath covenants designed for nations to a more personal covenant relationship. What was promise in the old becomes full reality in the new. The “Old” foreshadows the new and yields to the “New.” As Abraham, Moses, and David were great figures of the Old Covenant, Mary the Virgin mother of Jesus will be the archetypal figure of the New Covenant. She will be bound to God and Him to her. At the core of her being, in her heart, she will be bound to God by covenant. The allusion to treaty and contract or the spousal relation are analogous ways of expressing the reality of covenant. All covenantal agreements are types of dialogue. Her highly personalized dialogue with God, through Gabriel, will be the archetype of the God-human relation not only because it includes all of the dialogic elements but because of her uniqueness. The Annunciation scene will serve as the exemplary event in

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44 Ibid., 26.
45 It is common for God to use an intermediary when carrying on a conversation with his creatures, e.g. three angels speaking to Abraham, and angel in burning bush speaking to Moses. “In the most ancient texts the angel of Yahweh, [Gen.] 22:11; Ex 3:2; Jg 2:1, etc. or the angel of God, [Gen] 21:17; 31:11; Ex 14:19, etc., is not a created being distinct from God, Ex 23:20, but God himself is a form visible to men. Verse 13 identifies the angel with Yahweh. “Hagar gave a name to Yahweh who had spoken to her: ‘You are El Roi’, for, she said ‘Surely this is a place where I,' in my turn, have seen the one who sees me?” (Gen. 16:13)

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the New Testament of the God-human relation. Possibly then the Virgin Mary may represent features of both the old and new covenant and even hold within herself the elements of sovereign promise (Old Testament) and spousal relation (New Testament). Let us examine the Annunciation as a fourth example of dialogic covenantal relationship.

The Annunciation certainly reveals a real dialogue taking place between an angel and Mary. It is rooted in reality. It is an encounter between two of God's creatures, communicating in a common language or at least a language understandable to both. There is a give and take, a back and forth between the two parties. The narrative unfolds in the context of a dialogue. But there is something more hidden beneath these simple dialogic exchanges. Mary's role reaches beyond this simple straight-forward dialogue. In her dialogue with God through the archangel Gabriel she is the model for all God-human dialogue. Her "yes," free exercise of her will, assenting to God's call in her life, and her intelligent acceptance in faith of God's plan, is the archetype of every dialogue that will follow. The Annunciation scene is a exemplary event of the God-human relation because of its uniqueness and because it demonstrates in an essential manner that an individual becomes a unique person through dialogue with God and through the humble acceptance of role and mission that God has chosen for each creature. The events recorded in the Annunciation scene have an inner power to establish this dialogue with God. The elements mentioned above, referring to Mary's role in the Annunciation scene, will now constitute the necessary essential elements of all dialogue with God.46

46 Relation, call or mission, freedom to say yes
The Annunciation dialogue, regarding the incarnation of Jesus, is exemplary in as much as it reveals the hidden workings of God's relation with man. The dialogue is the vehicle for becoming the person who God has in mind for us to become. The dialogic event of the Annunciation scene is effective in portraying (in a perfect role model) all of the essential ingredients that produce the theological person. Without the Annunciation dialogue, theology loses the exemplary meaning of God's free choice, unmerited grace, divine plan in relation to the creature's uniqueness, yes in freedom, response to call, role and function. These exemplary elements are then to be found in every true dialogue which brings forth personhood and hastens God's kingdom upon this earth. They are most effective when they call forth similar responses and sentiments in the person addressed by God.

Mary is at the center of the history of salvation because God forms the Covenant with her, "Not necessarily so because she accomplished it, but more simply because of her acceptance." What better statement to begin the investigation of Mary as model of personhood than to speak of her acceptance of God's Covenant and her role or mission in it. Covenant means saying yes to the invitation of God in order to be with God. Hopefully in the re-reading of the Annunciation as a dialogic event, Mary's part in this mystery will become clearer.

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48 Ibid.
Modern day exegetes go beyond their philological studies of the texts and the external facts that they yield thereby moving on to the penetration of the mystery that the texts contain and reveal. The Annunciation is not only the most important narrative of Luke but also the most important of all the New Testament texts about Mary. Already regarded as the most important text in the New Testament for the Incarnation and the pursuit of Mariology, the Annunciation still holds within itself further mystery. We have very briefly mentioned that God relates to man (God-human relation) in the dialogic event. From the time of the conversation in the Garden of Eden, throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament, God relates to man through dialogue as uttered in covenants. The discussion of covenant has three purposes: 1) to demonstrate how dialogue has shed light and will shed light upon the God-human relation in the Bible, 2) to help demonstrate the dialogical principle of the dialogal philosophers who utilized Biblical passages to highlight their philosophical positions, and 3) to illuminate the Annunciation in which the Virgin Mary is seen in a dialogal and covenantal relation with God.

DIALOGICAL PRINCIPLE

As already demonstrated, the concept of dialogue can clearly be seen in Biblical covenants. These covenant stories reveal the God-human relationship and point to

49 Ibid., 4.
50 Angelic messages to Hagar (Genesis 16:7-15) to wife of Manoah (Judges 13:3-20) and to Gideon (Gideon 6:11-24)
certain aspects of personhood (relation, uniqueness, mission). However, it is only in the 19th and 20th centuries that philosophers applied ontological and metaphysical reasoning to these Biblical scenes. Their development of the dialogical principle supplied a framework for understanding theological personhood. Martin Buber is the most well known religious thinker who developed the I-Thou relationship as the bestower of personhood. He asserted the unnegatable individuality in relations between any I and Thou and the uniqueness of the relationship between them. In tracing the history of the dialogical principle it is necessary to present Buber and von Balthasar’s thoughts (as will be seen in chapter two) and the thinking of those who influenced them. Buber was not only a translator of the Bible but a man of the Bible. His religious views clustered around what seemed to him to be the center of Biblical religion: the confrontation of man and God in the situation of the I and Thou encounter. He looked to Scripture to portray this I-Thou encounter. In Genesis, the Lord addresses Abraham, “Abraham, where art thou?”; and Abraham replied, “Here I am.” This action of God, this conversation in which God addresses the human person has no parallel in the scriptures of any religion. Buber gives credit to Kierkegaard whom he felt grasped like no other thinker of our time the significance of the person, and is considered the “central link in the history of the philosophy of dialogue.” Hailed as the father of existentialism, Kierkegaard stated that abstract forms of thought cannot grasp the concrete act of existing, which by its very nature is fragmentary, paradoxical, and incomplete. Reality which we subjectively

52 Shmuel Hugo Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy. From Kierkegaard to Buber*, xv.
experience is incapable of rational synthesis. Existence is the sheer factual existence of the individual. Hence, it is something that “I” have primarily to live rather than translate into philosophic concepts. These words became for Buber applicable to the subjective existence of the human person. Both Buber and Kierkegaard believed in faith as a response to the call to self from the beyond. Both looked to Abraham as exercising the power of faith in having a relation to the absolute.

Another element that Kierkegaard developed which Buber incorporated into his thinking about the dialogal relationship was man constituting himself by free choice. Kierkegaard defined the self as freedom thereby baptizing individualism as the hallmark of the person. At the age of twenty-two he mused, “What I really lack is to be clear in my mind, What I am to do, not what I am to know...” His query, like most of his philosophizing, poses the question, “What is reality?”. His answer will be: reality is a dialogue. Martin Buber will be its chief proponent among the existentialists, all of whom stress the dialogical element.

In his historical quest of the dialogical principle, von Balthasar noted that some of these men who were simultaneously developing like aspects of the dialogical principle, were Jews (Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig) suggesting that the “discovery” of the “dialogue principle” was related to the Bible. Christians (Gabriel Marcel and Ferdinand Ebner) are also cited as proponents of the “dialogue” leading von Balthasar to conclude

53 New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 8, 175.
54 Shmuel Hugo Bergman, Dialogical Philosophy, From Kierkegaard to Buber, xvii.
that there is a theological character to their thinking. It is an interesting phenomenon that
these philosophers of the dialogue all begin their intellectual quest with observations on
and connections with the Bible, especially covenant stories. Without formally addressing
the dialogic elements of the covenant, they nevertheless see in these stories the primordial
God - human relation. F. Rosenzweig, F. Ebner and M. Buber all attest to the
individual becoming distinct from every other human being by the name by which God
addresses him, “...only thus is he no longer simply an individual of a species, but a unique
person.” This naming and uniqueness is clearly seen in the covenants of the Old and
New Testaments. The Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig poses the question that both
Buber and von Balthasar can agree to and resonates with them, “How can revelation be
protected from the incursion of thought?” Man must desire God to love him first
because man awaits the liberating word from the mouth of God. Now God not only asks
of Adam “where are you?”, but with a trumpet voice calls to the deaf “I” which is mired
in the depths of its “I-ness.” Only by being addressed by God can the “I” realize that he
has a brother who is a companion of his destiny. Rosenzweig goes on to say what is very
important in von Balthasar’s thinking. The addressed “I” does not love the other person
because they share the same nature, but as someone who is also addressed by God in
“what is most individual to him.” Revelation then creates a reciprocal relationship
between “I” and “Thou,” says the Jewish philosopher Cohen.

55 Theo-Drama, Volume I, 628.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 637.
58 Ibid., 638.
In the *Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig uses the language of “I,” “Thou,” “he” (“she,” “it”). Although man hides from God and from God’s question, “Where are you?,” there enters into the quest for “Who am I?” the active initiator, God who calls. He not only calls but he calls by name. This call or naming is important because it is not manufactured by the subject but is the name the Creator has given him. At this point the “I” emerges in answer to a God who calls. Rosenzweig sees the person as an empty vessel into which the commandment drops as a summons, and the summons is called love. This personal name allows the person to believe that others have been so called and so named. There follows the horizontal recognition of others. This person is an independent Thou.

Ebner held that man cannot exist without his spiritual existence being granted to him by the Holy Spirit of God. In Ferdinand Ebner’s notes and diaries of 1912 there appears the beginning of the dialogue principle. He advances the principle by showing that God is man’s “sole Thou” and, therefore, the basis of all instances of “Thou” between human beings. Ebner’s Christian understanding of Jesus or the Word as seen in St. John’s gospel leads him to believe that Jesus came to reveal the meaning of existence. To him the only thing that was real was that which took place in the genuine word between “I” and

59 Although Buber stated that he had read books of his forerunners and contemporaries in dialogical thinking, he says that this was belated, *Buber’s Way to I and Thou*, 6. However, an exchange of letters shows unmistakably that during the writing of *I and Thou*, Martin Buber consulted with F. Rosenzweig. Rivka Horwitz, based on her research, contends that Buber’s encounter with F. Ebner’s thought “may have marked a turning point in the early stages of the writing of *I and Thou*.” *Buber’s Way to I and Thou*, 8. Buber notes several encounters with Ebner’s work that appeared in an Austrian periodical *Der Brenner* in 1920.
"Thou." The "I" only exists in its relation to the "Thou" and not apart from it. 60 Spiritual for Ebner meant the same as it did for Buber, the medium or between. Man must live in the reality of being addressed by God which makes him an individual. By living in the Spirit the "I" is able to comprehend God as his true "Thou." Ebner makes another point that will be characteristic of von Balthasar -- everything has its roots in the God-relationship; a dialogue principle from above as it were. Ebner speaks of Christ as the "absolute unique":

"In the real meaning of the statement ('I am'), to exist means being not only a physical individual but primarily a spiritual individual; it means being an 'absolute, unique existence'...To other men, however, a man is never an absolute, unique instance. Nor is he in the 'ego-loneliness' of his existence. But before God he is and is meant to be...Of himself, man never becomes as absolute, unique instance, not even in his relation to God. Only through Christ does he become such, through Christ's demand for faith and through his faith. He is an absolute, unique instance in the personal actuality of the word which was in the beginning and in the presence of this actuality. Christ is the absolute, unique instance, not only--as in man's case--in the presence of God; in summoning man's faith, he claims to be such in the presence of men too." 61

As a contemporary of Buber, Ebner, had he not died young, possibly may have been recognized as the chief developer of dialogue. The little known Austrian school teacher Ferdinand Ebner published only one book, The Word and the Spiritual Realities: Pneumatological Fragments. However, this work would contain most of the seminal ideas of philosophical dialogue. Others would either entertain similar thoughts contemporaneously or be influenced by his foundational work.

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60 Theo-Drama, Volume I, 640.
61 Ibid., 640-641.
His greatest contribution to dialogue is the idea that man is a spiritual creature because from his beginning he was created with an affinity with another spiritual entity who is outside of himself. Spirituality then is a reciprocal relationship. Existence is given by the Holy Spirit of God. Only in this affinity can the spiritual being live. The spiritual life is lived out in the relationship between “I” and “Thou.” He turned to language saying the “the essence of language presupposes a reciprocal relationship between people, and it also creates that reciprocity.”

The origin of language is God; language is the revelation of God to man.

Ebner’s ideas exemplify personalism’s beliefs. All psychological or scientific attempts to use the theory of evolution to explain the development of spirit or reason are a waste of time. Spirit cannot evolve from matter. The appearance of man marks a new creation in the world by God. There is no bridge between animal and man. The person is a direct creation by God. Man develops consciousness and the spiritual life is made possible only by the relationship between “I” and “Thou.” I am a person because someone speaks to me. I am open to the other by means of my reason and language.

The Idealists proposed that the “I” exists first. Ebner disagreed since the reciprocal relationship makes possible the “I’s” existence. Shmuel Bergman attributes the First World War as an important primary cause in Ebner’s philosophy of dialogue. He, like Buber, pictured the truly alive and happy person as the one in relationship with another.

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62 Shmuel Hugo Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy. From Kierkegaard to Buber*, 156.
63 Ibid., 159.
Like Kierkegaard, Ebner could not prove the existence of God, since every proof must occur outside conversation and the dialogue. Such proof would be named the “It” of Buber. Ebner’s ideas that God is the “Thou” of man, has a personal existence, and that he has a personal relationship with man can easily be seen in Buber’s “system of thought.” Any searching for God or speaking about God as a concept or in the third-person is seeing God as an object. Again his beliefs about the “I” and “Thou” not existing as objects but only grasped in a personal manner are the centerpiece of Buber’s beliefs. “You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2) was an injunction based on man’s similarity to God as Thou. It is a declaration of the obligation to become more like the absolute Thou.64

These philosophers (Marcel, Buber, Ebner, Rosenzweig and Cohen) did not arrive at the dialogue or I-Thou relation in reaction to previous philosophical debate alone. It appears that living during the First World War and their philosophical musings about the cause of that war was the impetus for all of them to turn to relationship as the key to being a person. “The catastrophes of historical reality are often at the same time crises of the human relation to reality.”65 “The trauma of contemporary events affects all religious belief.”66 As contemporaries the dialogic principle sprang up among them out of the spirit of the time, with a number of teacher-student relationships or through reading each other’s works.

64 Ibid., 161.
65 Pointing the Way, Collected Essays by Martin Buber, translated by Maurice Friedman, 87.
66 Ibid., 6.
The philosophy of dialogue was the intellectual expression of the claim of existence itself. The crisis of Western man did not begin with the First World War, since Kierkegaard had recognized the crisis a century before. It is a decision about ourselves, Buber would say. Buber is in the same mold as Kierkegaard, who insisted on the necessity of faith beyond reason and that human reason could never be totally encompassed in any system. Buber would reinforce Kierkegaard’s description of the existential man as open to the future while striving and changing. Both men shared a deep belief in God’s existence. God is never real in our lives when He is considered an object among other objects. Kierkegaard, like Buber, regarded himself as a messenger, given a task by God (for Kierkegaard it was to teach mankind true religion). A closer look at Kierkegaard reveals great similarity between him and Buber. Since Kierkegaard was not a contemporary of Buber he will not be grouped with the philosophers discussed below. However, there ensues a brief citation of the same dialogal elements discussed.

Kierkegaard believes that man is created by God and actually becomes a man by choosing himself. There is a certain reciprocity between God, the Creator, and man who actualizes the absolute choice by choosing himself. It is choosing my freedom and being oneself. His only interest was his relationship with God, yet he rejects mysticism. As an existentialist he was very concerned with man’s concrete situation that connected him with his surroundings. In choosing self, “absolute isolation is...identical with the

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67 Buber has a great similarity with him.
Regarding mission or call, Kierkegaard views being an individual in such circumstances to be a “terrifying thing.” He mentions both Abraham and Mary, the mother of Jesus, as people of faith plunged into fear and trembling by saying yes to God’s call. The individual steps out from the universal category of mankind by exercising freedom to choose. The call comes to an individual when he is alone, in solitude and it is this solitude which makes difficult the decision. It is in the relationship between man and God, the dialogal relationship, that man as an individual can say yes to the call. It is this emphasizing of the importance of the individual self which lays the foundation for what will be called dialogical philosophy. The dialogue, for Kierkegaard, occurred between God and man. In the future will develop the relationship of man to man, a major element of dialogical philosophy. It will be spoken of by the men cited and will be championed by Buber.

Descartes had stated that the mind is hermetically sealed to the world without and that God had so constructed the human mind to represent the realities outside the mind. Consciousness therefore is substantial but not referential. The self is isolated and one’s existence is affirmed by a primary statement. Buber’s epistemology is distinct from Descartes. It is of course referential, since knowledge is obtained in reference to another.

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68 Shmuel Hugo Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy. From Kierkegaard to Buber*, 73.
ELEMENTS OF DIALOGUE

There follows a brief examination of the salient features of several philosophers (not all existentialists) who developed and advanced dialogical thought in their writings. Hopefully by grouping these philosophers' common beliefs about pertinent dialogal elements, their contributions to the development of the dialogical principle, and specifically any direct or indirect influence on Buber's thinking might be made clear. The discussion for each element is quite succinct with no attempt to adequately deal with each philosopher’s pertinent body of work. The presentation is solely to help situate the birth of the dialogical principle. The philosophers under consideration are Hermann Cohen, Ferdinand Ebner, Franz Rosenzweig, Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Levinas. These men are the fore-runners and builders of the concept of dialogue. Levinas is a post-Buberian philosopher and naturally had no influence upon Buber. He is mentioned as a contributor to and developer of the dialogical principle. The dialogal elements are: 1) relation to God, 2) I-Thou dialogue, 3) uniqueness, and 4) freedom.

I. Relation to God

A. Hermann Cohen was an Idealist philosopher desiring to know the essence of things but he would over the years become a proponent of dialogical philosophy. In his Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, he claimed that the method of correlation produces not only a relation between the "I" and the "you," but also more
importantly between a person and God.\textsuperscript{69} In God’s radical transcendence he is separate from the world. Human reason tells us there is no mediation between God and human beings. Revelation emerges as a two-party relationship, in which both sides are changed but neither becomes submerged in the other.\textsuperscript{70} Only in 1915 did Cohen introduce religion into his system. God himself would replace the concept of God. God is an individual insofar as he is Being: “I am that I am” (Ex. 3:4).\textsuperscript{71}

Correlation for Cohen is a methodological reciprocity between our concepts of the human and the divine. We can neither understand what a human being is without understanding who God is, nor vice versa. “The human is thus created to rationally know and love God; God creates the human in order to be known and loved. The more fully the human comes into relationship with God, the more fully human it becomes; the more fully the divine is brought into relationship, the more fully articulated the divine becomes.”\textsuperscript{72}

B. Franz Rosenzweig followed closely Cohen’s thinking on a number of dialogal elements. He read Cohen’s book, \textit{Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism}, while he served on the eastern front. Like Cohen, he insisted on the separation between God and human beings. He is called a religious existentialist and one of the most important philosophers of Modern Jewish philosophy in this century.

\textsuperscript{69} Robert Gibbs, \textit{Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas}, 17.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{71} Shmuel Hugo Bergman, \textit{Dialogical Philosophy From Kierkegaard to Buber}, 154.
\textsuperscript{72} Robert Gibbs., \textit{Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas}, 86.
God is more than rationality and the “more than”, as defined by Rosenzweig, is the power or freedom to act.73 Rosenzweig, like the other dialogical philosophers, does not attempt to prove God’s existence, since it is as self-evident as the existence of man and the world.

Philosophical reason cannot construct communication; it requires a theological reality.74

His existential thinking is reflected in the following quote, “...truth ceases to be what ‘is’ true and becomes a verity that must be verified in active life.”75 In the same vein he states, “Only when the ‘I’ acknowledges the ‘Thou’ as something external to itself, that is, only when it makes the transition from monologue to authentic dialogue, only then does it become...audible.”76 In relating to God as our Thou then we can hear an actual “I.” We, on the other hand, can address God even in silence, without calling him by name. God has a name only for the sake of man.77 When God calls man’s name, man answers. Unlike the Sinai covenant where God called a people, revelation is now seen as God calling a single person. God loves the individual and through this love the individual is liberated him from his solitude. His love is spontaneous, and man as a recipient of this love, loves in return. The analogy in the Song of Songs, comparing God’s love to man’s love is not just an illustration but it is the essence of love itself.

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73 Shmuel Hugo Bergman, Dialogical Philosophy, From Kierkegaard to Buber, 180.
74 Ibid., 57.
75 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Early Years, 1878-1923, 285. The motto of his book The Star of Redemption was “Ride forth victoriously for the cause of truth” (Psalm 45:4).
76 Franz Rosenzweig, The Star of Redemption, 174.
77 Shmuel Hugo Bergman, Dialogical Philosophy, From Kierkegaard to Buber, 191.
In speaking of love of God and neighbor, Rosenzweig is of like mind with Buber. Both Buber and Rosenzweig saw a definite danger in mysticism. The danger of mysticism is to appropriate God's love as solely its instrument. Man is truly whole only when he knows how to release himself from the mystical experience and goes out into the world and give away the love offered to him by God to the world. The love of God demands completion in the love of one's neighbor. Through acts of dynamic and practical nature man animates the world and creates I-Thou relationships thereby endowing the world with social and personal form. 78

If we refuse to answer God as Adam did, there is no dialogue. We must be like Abraham, when God called him by name he answered, "Here am I" (Genesis 22.1). God orders man to love him when he commands "love the Lord your God." 78

C. Gabriel Marcel was a Catholic existentialist philosopher whose philosophical-religious approach influenced Emmanuel Levinas. He believed in God's ontological personal presence as Being. He stressed God as presence - "that inward realization of presence through love which infinitely transcends all possible verification because it exists in an immediacy beyond all conceivable mediation." 79

His epistemology is shared by Buber - cognition is a mystery, knowledge comes from participating in being. In understanding God or man, love breaks down all distinctions of

78 Ibid., 210.
what is in me and what is before me. Love is the starting point for understanding mysteries of body and soul.

D. Emmanuel Levinas is a modern day philosopher who has carried the dialogical principle beyond Buber’s thinking into new realms. For him, God is the absolute other, but he criticizes both Marcel and Buber for their views on the Absolute Thou, denying the possibility of such a relation with God. He retains only traces of the theological vocabulary of Cohen, Buber and Rosenzweig. God appears but never as a presence. Levinas is influenced by Rosenzweig who espoused a radical separation of God, humanity and the world.80

Although holding different views about a number of the dialogal elements, his work continues that of dialogical philosophers, and he is closely bound to the Jewish authors but particularly to Marcel whose soireés he attended in the 1930’s.

II. I - Thou Relationship (Dialogue)

A. Cohen - Through correlation there is a relation between “I” and “you.”81 As Rosenzweig’s teacher he preceded him in exploring the dialogic structure of relationship. The genuine reciprocity of dialogue is made possible through the category of the concept. The “I” and “you” is a correlation. His claim is that in self-consciousness the other

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80 Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, Collected Philosophical Papers
81 Robert Gibbs, Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas, 17.
comes first, and only through the other do I become aware of myself. The key point of this correlation is that I and the other cannot collapse into each other. He does not stop with the other, a "he," but moves beyond that to the "you." The "I" does not come to self-consciousness except by standing in relation to an other. "The 'I' cannot be defined, nor generated, except if it is determined through the pure generation of the other and then proceeds out of the other." The I-Thou is a mutual relation giving priority to the "you."
The formation of a companionship is a task for the self, in order to become free and as "I."

B. Rosenzweig called his methodology "grammatical thinking." The speech of an "I" to a "you" corresponds to the theological concept of revelation. Speech provides the "empirical" evidence that reason cannot provide for itself. It is in the "I-you" relation that we are called by God. Dialogue is at the center of Rosenzweig's account of revelation. In the face-to-face encounter, the other's looking at me is the key to the dialogue. I speak not in response to any spoken words, but in response to this look which speaks to me, which forces me to respond. The me who is looked at does not come into existence at the moment I am seen. To learn from the other or to speak to the other, I must already be someone.

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82 Ibid., 85.
83 Ibid., 86.
84 Hermann Cohen, Ethics, 212 as cited by Robert Gibbs, Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas, 178.
85 This passage is very similar to Levinas' work. Very likely it had an influence upon his remarks about the human face. Rosenzweig died before Levinas read The Star of Redemption.
86 Robert Gibbs, Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas, 28.
When "I" asks "Where are you?" it reveals itself (Genesis 3:9). The "I" believes that there is a "you" outside of it, and it seeks to see that "you." In the discussion in the garden, the man refuses to become a "you" for God.

C. Marcel eventually discovers that the subject who thinks can never become transparent to itself. The self is opaque to a direct gaze of the subject upon itself. And this otherness, this lack of closure and self-transparency of the self, is indeed exactly what confronts the "I" in this claim by the other. "Insofar as He is more interior to me than I am to myself, God makes this claim upon me."87 In the failure of the subject's finding autonomy he discovers the presence of that subject's creator - a being more interior to the "I" than is the self. What Marcel contrasts with this self unable to ground itself is as image of the self invaded from outside by something other. Marcel here is only explaining that there is a strange consolation in recognizing that the other who claims me is not simply anyone, but should instead be recognized as my very center, as closer to myself than the "I" that thinks can be.88

In the dialogue, presence is a key factor. Presence reveals itself immediately and unmistakably in a look, a smile, an intonation or a handshake. The person who is at my disposal is the one who is capable of being "with the whole of himself" when I am in need.

87 Ibid., 200.
88 Ibid.
D. Levinas - his unique contribution to the I-Thou relationship is his concept of alterity - the importance of the other. In the face-to-face encounter, I find myself responsible for the other, bound to the other. I see the other as higher than me. "Absolute otherness comes to me and surprises me from on high." The individual person, before meeting an other, is a self-constituted, corporeal, specific self; not a member of the species, but in many key ways a self-created person.

III. Uniqueness

A. Cohen is consistent in his belief that we cannot know anything in anyway except through pure reason when he attempts to generate a unique, specific person through pure reason. The uniqueness of God becomes the paradigm for grasping the uniqueness of the individual person.

B. Rosenzweig - the human being has no genus because each is unique. Again looking at Genesis 22:1, Rosenzweig notes that the speaker finds a particular person, an unique other, spoken to in the vocative, not as a member of the class but as a "you." Only the lover can speak, "You shall love the Lord your God" (Deut. 6:5). Only the command "Love me" is the speech of love because the speech of love must itself love. Love for Jewish thinkers is not primarily comforting, compassionate but rather commanding.

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90 Robert Gibbs, Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas, 86.
This dialogue of love that sees each partner as unique continues with a new mode of cognition as the lover then responds, “I have called you by name. You are mine.” The lover now sees that cognition itself takes place in the context of the interaction of an “I” and a “you.” The cognitive discourse of creation is fixed in time and place by the revelatory dialogue of an “I” and a “you.”

The “I” called to speak by its proper name, enables revelation to go beyond the impersonal discourse of creation. “With the call of the proper name the word of revelation steps into real dialogue...”91

C. Marcel - It is difficult to tease out of his writing the isolated concept of uniqueness. Uniqueness is tied to freedom. My unique role is to accept this gift of freedom. I am not even choosing the call to be an unique person rather the call itself gives the power dispensed to me to accept it. The ability to choose to accept is not rooted in a self-revelation, but in the relation to the other.

D. Levinas - Uniqueness comes from the person being radically other than me, not a member of the species, but in many key ways a self-created person.92 Rosenzweig permeates Levinas’ schema and his basic concepts. I then have a unique responsibility to love that beloved as only I can. Uniqueness for Levinas is tied to responsibility, freedom

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92 Levinas derives his emphasis on uniqueness from Talmudic sources. He speaks not only of the unique relation with the other but how this datum of experience calls forth ethical decisions. Cf. Edith Wyschgrod, *Emmanuel Levinas, The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*
and love. He uses the term love for relation and explains that the experience captures the uniqueness of the other. There is no focus on the relation that obtains between the other and me for Levinas; the disrelation, the gap and separation, is the key. Levinas emphasizes that I encounter a stranger who may never get to be my friend, who may always stand as one who commands me. Such a symmetry and absence of reciprocity of the “I-you” characterize Levinas’ interpretation of responsibility for the other. Uniqueness of individuals depends on heteronomy which does not exclude the alterity of God.

IV. Freedom

A. Rosenzweig - human freedom is markedly different than divine freedom. Because all freedom is negation, freedom is in some sense always finite. God has free power, humans have free will. This is a common Jewish theme.

Self emerges as human freedom becomes defiance and human essence becomes character. To become a self, a human must learn to will to be itself, and by so doing, to cease to will according to the world and its categories. The self in contrast to the groups, communities, people, nations and so one, but roots itself in its own being.

B. Marcel in dealing with freedom and responsibility focuses on the performance of speaking. The practice of speaking displays how my freedom to resist the other itself rests on responsibility for the other. Limitation of speech reflects a deeper insight into
the decentered nature of responsibility. I am not enslaved, although I belong to you. "I freely put myself at your disposal." Marcel speaks of belonging to the Absolute Thou. To say "I belong to you" is to make a commitment.

Marcel, in connection with freedom, posits the concept of substitution that Levinas will take up with vigor. Marcel takes substitution to its fullest extreme. Your will is mine; indeed you are my freedom. But to belong to you is to receive myself as task. This "you" is the call to substitution. Speaking to God as "you" seems a form of "I-you" dialogue. The only alternative to the freedom of substitution, of belonging to "you" is to refuse the call, to maintain myself against your will. Freedom means that Being as a whole and oneself is a totality.

C. Levinas - One of the most singularly distinctive features of Levinas' philosophizing is freedom. My spontaneous freedom is secondary, and I am responsible for another person before I can rationally choose to be so. The center of my agency is another person. In the first moment or instant of encounter, I am not autonomous. As a matter of fact Levinas moves away from the term "freedom." He places it second to responsibility. I am first approached, called to response, and from that ability, freed to act. The meaning of truth lies in freedom.

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94 Ibid., 193.
95 Ibid., 223.
This outline summary of the most famous players on the field of dialogism and their ideas cross fertilized by reading each other's books, attending formal and informal lectures in classrooms or in parlors, or in a series of letters, clearly demonstrates how the dialogic principle spread and gained support. Although they may disagree on several points, there is a general consensus regarding the dignity of the individual, the coming into personhood through the I-Thou relation, the weight of responsibility that comes when one stands in the presence of the other, a general consensus that there is a God whose relationship with his creatures is a model for man to man relations. This initial laying out the philosopher’s beliefs will at least familiarize the reader with the main topics of the dialogic principle that will be examined in depth in chapter two.

Much of the dialogic principle derives from an existential stance to being. Existentialism derives from concrete everyday human experience rather than from abstract or highly specialized fields of knowledge. It is a philosophy that confronts the human situation in its totality, asking what the basic conditions of existence are and how an individual may establish his own meaning out of these conditions. One learns to accept that personal form of being for which you were destined, a being which lives in dialogue or in person-to-person relations with that which stands over against it. "Being true to the being in which and before which I am placed is the one thing that is needful."96 Our knowledge of God is the clearest illustration of existential truth, for it cannot be proven, yet man’s very

96 Pointing the Way, Collected Essays by Martin Buber, edited by Maurice Friedman, ix-x.
existence is an assurance of it. The authentic man is made so by being in relationship to God.

The existential philosophers themselves have taught us to re-read in a new and profound way the whole history of modern thought. By showing us philosophy as an essentially human enterprise they have enabled us to see the whole history of philosophy for the momentous human drama it really is. The philosophy of dialogue reached its consummate form in Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* published in 1923. It was Buber’s attempt to answer the existential question, “Who am I?” Von Balthasar would take up the same question and would utilize the dialogic event in his own system of thought. Both men share, in part, these existentialist views of dialogue developed by the above mentioned philosophers.

The following chapter will examine the writing and thinking of these two well known men, Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar, as they pursued the concept of theological person. Both found the answer, to a varying degree, in the dialogic event. Both have been major contributors to understanding and explaining the dialogical principle, and both have promulgated their ideas which has helped modern thinkers grasp an anthropology based on religious/theological concepts. This chapter will furnish the necessary data to either support or not support the first and second hypotheses.
CHAPTER 2
M. BUBER AND H.U. VON BALTHASAR

"The viewpoint of the mind is always interdependent with the life of the person."\(^1\) This quote accurately reflects not only the interplay between life experience and theory, but also the possible cause and effect relationship between even single isolated life events and the major elements of philosophical and theological systems. This interplay of life’s events and theory will be evidenced in the lives of Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

MARTIN BUBER

Martin Mordecai Halevi Buber’s life (1878-1965) spans eighty-seven years of dramatic changes in world history. The world witnessed two great wars, political upheaval and notable advances in technology and thought. Many great men and women emerged from this troubled era. Martin Buber became known not only in Jewish circles as a philosopher, theologian, educator and thinker but became a world figure. "In virtue of the unusually close connection which exists between Martin Buber’s actual life, in the concrete choices and decisions which he made, and the ideas which he developed, it is important to see him against the changing background of the world in which he lived."\(^2\) Only those few events that can be directly related to his expounding on the dialogical

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principle which is being investigated herein, will be examined. The observations and conclusions are based on the author’s study of Buber’s writing and the comments regarding possible causal influence are the author’s.

In his *Autobiographical Fragments*, Buber makes a statement that reflects Blondel’s quote at the beginning of this general introduction. Speaking of reflecting on past moments rising to the surface, he continues, “...moments that have exercised a decisive influence on the nature and direction of my thinking.” This reaffirmation of the earlier introductory thought highlights the importance of certain events in Buber’s life which will be cited in the appropriate topic areas of his work. Each event served as a stimulus for his later theorizing. Each poignant memory elicited a response that became part of Buber’s legacy to the world. His world renown *I and Thou* is the major vehicle of this legacy. He began writing this book in the autumn of 1919 and finished in the spring of 1922.

Upon the divorce of his parents when Buber was three, he moved to the home of his grandfather in Galicia. This move was to be significant since his grandfather, Solomon Buber, was a remarkable man who combined farming and scholarly rabbinical study. Buber was exposed to Jewish tradition, piety, respect for learning, study of the Bible and classical Hebrew. In those eleven years spent with his grandfather, Buber laid the...

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3 *Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 3.
foundation for his love of the Hebrew language and other languages and found love for Hasidism through his contact with Hasidist communities.

The first incident advanced here to demonstrate the great influence of Buber’s early life on his development of the dialogical principle follows. Buber’s parents divorced when he was three and in the fourth year of his life still expecting to see his mother, he mused about her at his grandfather’s estate. Here follows his own words:

“The house in which my grandparents lived had a great rectangular inner courtyard surrounded by a wooden balcony extending to the roof on which one could walk around the building at each floor. Here I stood once in my fourth year with a girl several years older, the daughter of a neighbor, to whose care my grandmother had entrusted me. We both leaned on the railing. I cannot remember that I spoke of my mother to my older comrade. But I hear still how the big girl said to me: ‘No, she will never come back.’ I know that I remained silent, but also that I cherished no doubt of the truth of the spoken words. It remained fixed in me; from year to year it cleaved ever more to my heart, but after more than ten years I had begun to perceive it as something that concerned not only me, but all men. Later I once made up the word ‘Vergegnung’ - ‘mismeeting,’ or ‘misencounter’ -to designate the failure of a real meeting between men. When after another twenty years I again saw my mother, who had come from a distance to visit me, my wife, and my children, I could not gaze into her still astonishingly beautiful eyes without hearing from somewhere the word ‘Vergegnung’ as a word spoken to me. I suspect that all that I have learned about genuine meeting in the course of my life had its first origin in that hour on the balcony.’

One cannot measure the impact of such a happening and memory on an individual’s life.

However, one can hypothesize and make obvious connections between Buber’s reflection on this “mismeeting” and the importance of the key issue of meeting and encounter which

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4 Ibid., 3-4.
is at the heart of his writing typified in I and Thou. Again in like manner, in referring to
his interpretation on Hasidism, he describes the Jewish teaching as “wholly based on the
two-directional relation of human I and divine Thou, on reciprocity, on the meeting.”

There occurred an incident on his grandfather’s farm that would profoundly touch and
shape Buber’s outlook and understanding of life. From this event would spring Buber’s
early concept of the “I-Thou” relationship. Buber recorded the event in a small book of
autobiographical fragments that was published in German in 1961 under the title of The
Horse:

“When I was eleven years of age, spending the summer on my grandparents’
estate, I used, as often as I could do it unobserved, to steal into the stable and
gently stroke the neck of my darling, a broad dapple-gray horse. It was not a
casual delight but a great, certainly friendly, but also deeply stirring happening. If
I am to explain it now, beginning from the still very fresh memory of my hand, I
must say that what I experienced in touch with the animal was the Other, the
immense otherness of the Other, which, however, did not remain strange like the
otherness of the ox and the ram, but rather let me draw near and touch it. When I
stroked the mighty mane, sometimes marvelously smooth-combed, at other times
just as astonishingly wild, and felt the life beneath my hand, it was as though the
element of vitality itself bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was
certainly not akin to me, palpably the other, not just another, really the Other
itself; and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in
the relation of Thou and Thou with me. The horse, even when I had not begun by
pouring oats for him into the manger, very gently raised his massive head, ears
flicking, then snorted quietly, as a conspirator gives a signal meant to be
recognizable only by his fellow-conspirator; and I was approved. But once-I do
not know what came over the child, at any rate it was childlike enough- it struck
me about the stroking, what fun it gave me, and suddenly I became conscious of
my hand. The game went on as before, but something had changed, it was no
longer the same thing. And the next day, after giving him a rich feed, when I
stroked my friend’s head he did not raise his head. A few years later, when I

\[5\] Ibid., 34.
thought back to the incident, I no longer supposed that the animal had noticed my
defection. But at the time I considered myself judged.\textsuperscript{6}

This recounting of an event that occurred seventy years before reveals the incident’s great
import in Buber’s life and thinking. This dapple-gray horse and Buber’s encounter with
it provided, possibly, his first taste of an I-Thou experience. It presented him a meeting
that he reflected upon and thus began his ideas of I-Thou and I-It.

These two incidents (horse and balcony) reflect the two pillars of Buber’s understanding
of man. The first when he was but four had a monumental impact upon all of his later
thinking as he saw all living, all reality through the lens of meeting and encounter. The
second occurring at age eleven furnishes him with seminal ideas of the I-Thou relation
with its immediacy and stress on ineffability and presence. Both incidents spoke to him
of how man experiences himself and the other. Possibly the certain sadness and
depression of later years can be traced back to these two happenings.

From 1897 to 1904 Buber continued his higher education at the Universities of Vienna,
Leipzig, Zurich and Berlin. He studied art history and philosophy and in 1904 completed
a doctor of philosophy degree with a dissertation entitled “Zur Geschichte des
Individuationsproblems: Nicolaus von Cues und Jakob Boehme” ([Contribution to] the
History of the Problem of Individuation: Nicholas of Cusa and Jakob Boehme.)\textsuperscript{7} Both

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 10. So begins Buber’s way of thinking regarding I-Thou, Thou-Thou, and I-It without actually
delineating the differences later enunciated in his book I-Thou.

\textsuperscript{7} Gilya Gerda Schmidt, \textit{Martin Buber’s Formative Years From German Culture to Jewish Renewal 1897-1909}, 1.
men believed in the goodness of creation which presented a unity between Creator and creation that helps solve Buber's preoccupation with dualism.

During the years of 1897 - 1904, he called for an awakening to the Jewish cause. After that period he immersed himself in the knowledge of Judaism, the Hebrew language and the land of Israel. He then called others to do the same. He moved from a personal redemption of the earlier period (1897-1904) to a communal redemption. It was a redemption accomplished by humanity, not won or given by divine grace. 8

A major occurrence was his five year study of Hasidist texts and traditions from 1904 to 1909. Along with the years spent with grandfather Solomon this five year period was to be another major influence on Buber's thinking and outlook. Buber's interests were in Jewish renewal and the renewal of humanity. During his university days he began to renew his ties to Judaism through the Zionist movement. 9 He searched for the life that was spiritual, mystical, 10 concrete, full of trust in God. The Hasidic life provided the answer. The renewal of Judaism was to be accomplished through Hasidism which stressed piety and the Hebrew language. For Buber, Hasidism would serve as a link between Jewish revival and mystical personalism. The Hasidic worldview brings the

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8 Ibid., 4.
9 Theodor Herzl was the modern founder of Zionism which promoted colonizing Jews in Palestine. For many it was a nationalizing movement and not a religious movement. For Buber and others, it was a vehicle for the renewal of Jewish culture that exemplified the spiritual and intellectual manifestations of Judaism.
10 Buber's view on the mystical can be found in the Secular Mysticism section of this paper.
"beyond" into this world and "allows this life to be formed by the other." Hasidism taught, "the productive feeling which is a bond between the human being and God." The goal of Hasidism as understood by Buber was to enable the human being to become a law unto himself. This topic of freedom is addressed in this paper. Buber is renown for bringing Hasidism into the 20th century. Rooted in life and in the concreteness of the world, Hasidism is viewed as pious and an anti-intellectual movement.

In the stories of Hasidism he "...recognized the idea of the complete man. At the same time I became conscious of the call to make this known to the world." From these five years will emerge the Jewish underpinnings of his anthropology as will be developed later as seen in the context of his own call or mission.

In a 1917 essay, Buber recounts his discovery of the spiritual dimension of life which he found in Hasidism:

"It was at that time that I, immediately overwhelmed, experienced the Hasidic soul. I comprehended original Jewish knowledge [Urjudisches ging mir auf], in the darkness of the exile it blossomed in renewed form; humanity's creation in the image of God as deed, as becoming, as task. And I comprehended this original Jewish essence as an original human essence, the contents of human religiosity. I understood Judaism as religiosity, as "piety," as hasidut. The picture from my childhood, the memories of zaddik and his community returned and inspired me; I

11 Gilya Gerda Schmidt, Martin Buber's Formative Years From German Culture to Jewish Renewal 1897-1909, 53.
12 Ibid.
13 Arthur A. Cohen, Martin Buber, 5.
14 Based on the Old Testament, man is made in the image of God and his task is to develop; man is in a face to face relationship with God; true religiousness is piety and duty; the perfect man performs every task with right motivation and love; man meets God in the concrete and in the hallowing of the world by raising the divine sparks as co-creator with God.
recognized the idea of the perfect human being. At the same time I became aware of my calling [Beruf] to proclaim this idea to the world.”

Man discovers his Divine attributes and becomes as the Divine. Buber sought to regain a living Judaism, since many had felt that the Jewish people experienced only a secularized life. The encounter with the Divine would allow the individual to discover his absolute self. This insight brought with it Buber’s great enthusiasm for Zionism. Hasidism provided a religion for the common Jew and the means of the encounter with the Divine. Zionism and Hasidism became foundation stones in Buber’s life and theoretical system. Proclaiming them and their separate messages became his mission and vocation.

Another incident that formed Buber’s thought and was to have a great influence took place in July 1914. It is a perfect example of a “mismeeting,” but more importantly served as highly personal reason to embrace the concept of the “everyday secular mysticism.”

“About this time, as we have seen, Buber was given to hours of mystic ecstasy. The illegitimacy of this division of his life into the everyday and a “beyond” where illumination and rapture held without time or sequence was brought home to Buber by “an event of judgment” in which closed lips and an unmoved glance pronounced the sentence. One forenoon after a morning of mystic rapture, Buber had a visit from an unknown man named Mehé. Buber was friendly toward the young man but, inwardly absorbed by the mystical experience that he had just emerged from, he was not present in spirit. It is not that Buber was indifferent or abstracted in the usual sense. “I did not treat him any more remissly than all his contemporaries who were in the habit of seeking me out about this time of day as an oracle that is ready to listen to reason,” Buber noted, pointing out incidentally the humorous role in which he saw himself as the middleman between ancient revelation and modern reason, offering hope to young men who desperately needed it yet could not accept it unless it was couched in intellectual terms not too disquieting to their world views. Wherein then was Buber remiss? He conversed with all his contemporaries who were in the habit of seeking me out about this time of day as an oracle that is ready to listen to reason.”

15 Gilya Gerda Schmidt, Martin Buber’s Formative Years From German Culture to Jewish Renewal 1897-1909, 94.
attentively and openly with Mehé and answered the questions which he was asked. But he failed to guess the question that the young man did not put. Two months later one of Mehé’s friends came to see Buber and told him of Mehé’s death and of what his talk with Buber had meant to him. He had come to Buber not casually, but as if borne by destiny, not for a chat but for a decision.  

From this single event Buber reached the conclusion that the mystical is not to be sought or valued and that it interfered with real living. He turned away, from that moment, from a mystical relationship with God. God was to be sought and found in nature and in other human beings. Intellectually, he would agree with Bahr, a Viennese writer, who called an individual decadent if he moved away from nature and had a “feverish passion for the mystical.” In contradistinction to the decadent’s search for the strange exception, Buber sought the normal in the concrete life of everyday. By so doing, he placed the mystical to the margins of existence.

Another major dimension of Buber’s life is the academic world. In 1923 he was appointed to Professor of Jewish History of Religion and Ethics at Frankfurt University which he held until 1933 with the rise of the Nazi regime. In 1938 he went to Palestine to accept the Professorship of Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. During the years following from age 60 to 87 he wrote that each individual was being called to a

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16 Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work. The Early Years, 1878-1923*, 188. The works and translations of Maurice Friedman, close friend and highly respected interpreter of Buber, will be frequently relied upon. He knew Buber from 1944, and wrote his doctoral dissertation on Buber in 1950 which Buber considered “the first successful attempt to give a comprehensive and systematic representation of his ideas and to show their essential unity.” Cf. *Martin Buber’s Life and Work. The Later Years, 1945-1965*, 136.


18 Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *Martin Buber’s Formative Years From German Culture to Jewish Renewal 1897-1909*, 7.
“life of trust.” For those years he lived out the teaching of Hasidism by seeing God in everything and reaching God by living in pure deed.

The establishing of a firm relationship with the German-Jewish theologian, Franz Rosenzweig, was to be the most fateful event as far as Buber’s career was concerned. They had first met in 1914 and some years later, after a pleasant visit with Buber and his wife Paula at their home in Heppenheim, Rosenzweig, who directed the Jewish college known as Freies Judisches Lehrhaus, offered him a position at the college. Thus it was in 1922 that Buber delivered “Religion as Presence” lectures at the Lehrhaus.

Franz Rosenzweig was well known for his leadership in the Free Jewish Academy in Frankfurt-am-Main. As a philosopher, Rosenzweig predated the ideas to be known as existentialist philosophy. Famous for his work, The Star of Redemption, Rosenzweig and Buber began a translation of the Jewish Bible into modern German.

Prior to 1913 Day of Atonement, Rosenzweig did not think it possible for a Jew to experience “being alone with God or closeness to God.” He felt that only through Jesus could a person reach the Father. He finally realized that “the situation is quite different for one who does not have to reach the Father because he is already with him.”

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19 During these years he produced Eclipse of God, three books on Hasidism, The Knowledge of Man and Pointing the Way.
20 Pamela Vermes, Buber 36.
21 This Bible was not completed until quite later in Buber’s life. Rosenzweig died of paralysis many years before the completion of the Bible.
22 Franz Rosenzweig, The Star of Redemption., xii.
both Christianity and Judaism with important, if distinctive, roles in the spiritual structure of the world. Dialogue took on some added influence, since Rosenzweig was quite aware of the failure of Idealism which could only point to a monologue between a thinker and himself. For him the fact that people speak to each other and hear indicates revelation. Creation is first contact between God and world and the second contact is revelation. God reveals his love to man whom he calls by his name. This act of God makes man realize that he is an “I.” Both Judaism and Christianity partake in eternity for both are grounded in the experience of love. Rosenzweig kept communication open with philosophical opponents through dialogical thinking. He also addresses God’s freedom in opposition to Nietzsche. For him the reality of God lies before us as an “Ought.” These topics of dialogue, love, and the search for “Who I am?,” discussed by Rosenzweig and Buber, demonstrate what von Balthasar meant by acausal contemporaneity.

From his years of professorship until his last years he wrote and spoke of dialogue, believing that all people were capable of entering a genuine dialogue. Buber held that no philosophy could replace encounter and true dialogue. Buber wished to be free of philosophical systems. He desired the “nonmethod,” found in poetic freedom.23 Again because of his desires and efforts, Buber is hailed as a herald of a new age. He beckons mankind to a new development based on each human being’s personal experience caught up in Nietzschean joy. He calls for unreason, not to be shackled to civilization or tradition but to be free as a genuine self. He turned to Emerson, “the chief celebrant of

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23 Gilya Gerda Schmidt, Martin Buber’s Formative Years From German Culture to Jewish Renewal 1907-1909, 8.
individuality and self-reliance as the person who could answer the riddle of duality of nature and spirit. Emerson taught that there is a universal self which explains the eternal unity's relationship to individual identity. This transcendental approach to reality provided Buber with a more satisfactory answer to the harmony between nature and spirit than Cusa and Boehme had. Emerson's theory provided Buber the words to effect a revival of the spirit. Now each person was capable of enjoying an original relationship to the universe for which Emerson called. Each person could create. Each was part of the oversoul, the universal self.

Hailed as a historian, philosopher, theologian, Germanist and professor of Judaic studies, Buber would reject all these labels. He could easily apply to himself the words he himself had written regarding Nietzsche:

"Is he a philosopher? He did not create a unified edifice of thought. Is he an artist? He did not create any objects. Is he a psychologist? His deepest knowledge deals with the future of the soul. Is he a poet? Only if we think of poets as they once existed [emphasis added]: "Visionaries who tell us what might be," who give us "a foretaste of future virtues." Is he the founder of a new Gemeinschaft? Many rise up in his name, but they do not unite, for each one finds a different guiding light in this blessing night sky, his own, and only that, and each owes him not thanks for general knowledge of a kind that can unite people, but the release of his own innermost powers; it was not his deepest intention to share his innermost self, but to elicit from each that which is personal and productive, the most secret treasures of his individuality, and to transform them into agitating energy; heightening of general productivity, that's what he himself called the innermost meaning of his work."
Psychotherapy is a process in which the individual explores the reasons for neurotic tendencies, troubled thinking and general distress which may be related to earlier specific life incidents. Buber’s life incidents are no different than those of most people. Particular events can have a potent influence on subsequent thinking and emotional states. This paper addresses only those singular events influential to his thinking and writing and does not reflect or even raise psychological issues - healthy or unhealthy.27

These examples from the life of Buber, shape and impact his thought. Spiritual work and spiritual ideas arise not out of the spirit of man, but from the “unreserved meetings of its personal bearers with otherness.”28 Only through being open to otherness does man attain relationship. All great thought evolves from the “self-involving contact with the existing being as it stands over against one.”29 All knowledge, all spiritual work, all “self-imposed spirituality” derives from relationship.

Reflecting upon Buber’s life, one must pause and take note of his absent mother’s influence upon him. This deprivation of a mother’s love and his own admission of his missing her from age four onward raises the issue of fixation, of great psychic energy being devoted to his mother and the idea of meeting her. The lasting psychological effects interestingly bore fruit in Buber’s life in the form of the dialogic process. The I-

27 That is not to say that there are no recorded stories by Buber regarding such events. Two notable ones are the eight years of Polish school where he stood mute each morning during morning prayer and at age eleven when two boys were expelled because of sexual mimicking during recess. He recounts both in Autobiographical Fragments.
28 Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 36.
29 Ibid.
Thou relationship which he so longed for with his own mother now becomes the vehicle for understanding all relations. The psychological determination of his life events produced both limits and genius in him.

Father Johann Roten has stated that von Balthasar saw himself as John the Baptist as sculpted with the oversized pointing finger on Matthias Grünewald’s “Crucifixion” in Colmar, Alsace.\(^{30}\) It is interesting to note that Gilya Schmidt calls Buber a herald figure, ahead of his time, a John-the-Baptist figure, a forerunner.\(^{31}\)

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

“...Balthasar’s theology is indistinguishably intertwined with the history of his life...”\(^{32}\)

Here we have again the motif and proffered hypothesis of this brief introduction which attempts to point out connections between life’s encounters and major components of a man’s work in theology. This brief presentation of the influences upon von Balthasar and his work will keep in mind von Balthasar’s own reflection -- “the best unreliable measure of a man remains his work.”\(^{33}\) Fortunately we are not measuring the man, but only


\(^{31}\) Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *Martin Buber’s Formative Years From German Culture to Jewish Renewal 1897-1909*, 11.

\(^{32}\) *The Von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehland and Werner Löser, 14.

isolating several influences from his life that may have some bearing upon his
development of his theology. The point of his injunction about a man's writing being an
unreliable measure of the man himself underlines a recurring theme in von Balthasar's
thinking -- what counts in the world is action and not words. "You will know them by
their fruits."

On August 12, 1905, Hans Urs von Balthasar became part of the well established
Catholic family of von Balthasar of the city of Lucerne, Switzerland. His family had
been well known in the cultural and political life of Switzerland for generations.34 His
student years were spent in the universities of Berlin, Vienna and Zurich. After his study
of philosophy in these schools, he studied theology in the universities of Munich and
Lyons. His musical ability flourished side by side with his interest in and love of
literature. His cousin, Peter Henrici, S.J., cites the gifts of von Balthasar: his perfect
pitch, his early aptitude for piano, his trilingualism (German, French, and English) which
served him so well in pursuing a doctorate in German studies and his later translation of
Peguy and Claudel and Bernanos,35 and finally his gift of faith passed onto him by his
pious mother.36 He reports that he was born "into a straight - forwardly Catholic
family"37 and that his mother walked to daily Mass down a steep path. "Without doubt it
is to her prayers and her early and painful death that I owe my late and very sudden

35 He was recognized as one of the foremost translators of French Catholic literary figures.
36 "A Sketch of von Balthasar's Life" in Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work, edited by David L.
Schindler, 10.
37 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Our Task, 35.
vocation to follow the way of St. Ignatius." As a result of his mother offering up her pain on his behalf, von Balthasar entered the novitiate of the south German province of the Jesuits. It was a faith one could take for granted and not view it as a gift. But for von Balthasar this gift, bestowed from the cradle, kept him safe from doubts, childlike before God and pious throughout his life. Fascination with Plotinus, Mahler, Nietzsche, Hofmannsthal, Kraus et al. never lead to capitulation.

Unlike Buber, whose early life experiences had a decisive and potent influence, von Balthasar’s main influences come from his contacts with teachers and fellow students. It is to these contacts that attention must be paid in order to note the connection between others’ ideas and his own theologizing. Even though Fr. Henrici has written a brief “Sketch of von Balthasar’s Life,” and others have written briefly and even von Balthasar himself in his Our Task and My Work: In Retrospect has given some details about his life, there is really little recorded. This paucity of biographical information is somewhat purposeful on von Balthasar’s part, however. He believed that he should remain hidden behind his work in the same fashion that an artist is hidden behind his creation. How successful he was at remaining anonymous is difficult to say, since his ideas, erudition and deep spirituality are difficult to hide. Regarding the account of his life, it is sufficient to say that his was a life of quiet, not punctuated by many significant events. Captivated by ideas and the systematizing of these ideas, von Balthasar’s life was marked by an interior odyssey difficult to relate to others and possibly of little interest.

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38 Ibid.
except to a small circle of readers. But there is ample information during his university
days, regarding his reading, relationship with professors and other acquaintances, to
provide the necessary connections between life and theory.

He completed secondary school under the instruction by the Benedictines and Jesuits.
And after some years he entered the doctoral program and he completed his doctoral
dissertation in 1929 on the theme of eschatology in German literature. Shortly after he
entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus. In Lyons, he was to encounter Henri de
Lubac at the Jesuit theologate along with “nouvelle theologie” that attempted to throw off
the encrusted, drab cloak of a manual tradition of theology. The new theology retrieved
the rich patristic treasures of the Church. This “nouvelle theologie” certainly impacted
von Balthasar’s thinking concerning the previously taught gulf between nature and grace.
There is a dynamism within the human being that prompts one to seek and accept grace
thereby making one fully human. These ideas along with the universal saving will of
God will have a definite impact upon further thinking and writing. Von Balthasar credits
his encountering de Lubac with giving new direction to his studies.40

Of course his training and life as a Jesuit had a substantial influence on his theological
writing. Even before entertaining the thought of ever becoming a priest, he experienced

40 Hans Urs von Balthasar, My Work: In Retrospect, 89.
what later he would learn was the "election" spoken of so often by St. Ignatius. He tells it in his own words.

"Even now, thirty years later, I could still go to that remote path in the Black Forest, not far from Basel, and find again the tree beneath which I was struck as by lightning...And yet it was neither theology nor the priesthood which then came into my mind in a flash. It was simply this: you have nothing to choose, you have been called. You will not serve, you will be taken into service. You have no plans to make, you are just a little stone in a mosaic which has long been ready. All I needed to do was ‘leave everything and follow,’ without making plans, without wishes or insights. All I needed to do was to stand there and wait and see what I would be needed for." 41

Herein begins von Balthasar’s placing himself completely at the disposal of God. These are the thoughts that will one day occupy a central place in von Balthasar’s theological system - the mission, election, and sending. It may even be considered a guiding concept by which a human being receives his uniqueness before God and among other persons. Like Buber who felt that he had received a mission from God, so von Balthasar felt commissioned by God to give witness as a theologian of God’s love that was espoused and given through the vehicle of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. This mission shows God as the initiator and is therefore connected to Buber’s “I and Thou” concept. For Buber and von Balthasar the immediate encounter with God, who calls first, who initiates, who addresses the person as Thou, will be the touchstone of each of their theologies.

41 Ibid., 11.
In his student years in Vienna he was to meet Rudolf Allers who as a doctor, psychiatrist, philosopher and theologian was to have a great influence. Two Allerian ideas were to take on grave and central import in von Balthasar's thinking and writing - "...the view of love of the fellow human being as the objective medium of human existence..."42 and the turning away from the "I" to a reality full of "you." It is hard to establish how much of Aller's thought influenced what some consider the basic idea or cornerstone of von Balthasar's thinking, Being is love. Likewise, it is just as difficult to tease out the separate and distinct influence of Allers and Buber on von Balthasar's prime analogue of human experience - the elucidation of Being consists of the presence of the Thou to the I.43 Von Balthasar acknowledges Aller's influence and points to him as an "almost inexhaustible source of stimulation."44

Another major influence on his life and work came from the Jesuit philosopher, Erich Przywara and his work on the analogy of being. Przywara is mentioned as one of the two great influences upon von Balthasar's philosophical work and that many of his chief themes are directly related to Przywara.45 Von Balthasar once said that Przywara was the greatest mind that he was ever privileged to meet.46 Although he was never von Balthasar's teacher, he was looked upon as his mentor. Von Balthasar would meet him each summer when he returned from Fourvière to Munich and then lived with him for

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42 The Von Balthasar Reader, edited by Medard Kehland and Werner Löser, 15.
This issue will be of some importance in this study in comparing the shared ideas and conflicting ideas of Buber and von Balthasar. Although the philosophy and theology that utilize the concept of analogy of being were partly shared by Buber and von Balthasar, with their mutual respect for the transcendence of God, ultimately they will disagree on God's transcendence and immanence among mankind. Ultimately this difference will hinge on the analogy of being.

Choosing the assignment of a student chaplain at the University of Basel in 1940 over that of theology professor brought him into contact with Adrienne von Speyr. John O'Donnell, S.J., says "without a doubt the most decisive influence upon Balthasar after 1940 was Adrienne von Speyr." Adrienne von Speyr was a convert to Catholicism, a medical doctor, mystic and friend. The years from 1902 to 1940 were seen by him as preparation years in von Speyr's life for their collaboration and what he called their "complementary task." The complementarity was based on their differences, when two halves are different. "It is a different route, but the destination is the same." He would spend a great deal of money publishing her works (sixty volumes). Her work corresponded to his both in themes and tone. She is mentioned, along with Przywara, as one of the two greatest influences on his theological work. Her writings, vision, and

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48 Cf. Martin Buber, Eclipse of God, 28-29, 74-75, and Gilya Gerda Schmidt, Martin Buber's Formative Years, From German Culture to Jewish Renewal, 1897-1909, 38.
49 Ibid., 5.
50 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Our Task, 17.
51 Ibid., 18.
52 Hans Urs von Balthasar, My Work: In Retrospect, 19.
thought laid the basis for most of his published work after 1940. Balthasar himself attests to the import of the relationship by stating it is impossible to separate her thinking from his. "Her work and mine are neither psychologically nor philologically to be separated: two halves of a single whole, which has as its center a unique foundation." He points out that his own ideas were not extinguished but enriched by what he received from her. From the many "theological impulses" which he received from her, those most relevant to this study are: faith as Marian-womblike receptivity and personhood as unique sending from God.

With such a declaration by von Balthasar, any investigation must examine how this close relationship influenced his life and thinking. Again Henrici would support such an examination, since he too felt that Adrienne von Speyr had a "determining influence" on von Balthasar's life and work. Time and again he insisted that his work was "absolutely inseparable" from Adrienne's. In the introduction to his book, Our Task von Balthasar states, "This book has one chief aim: to prevent any attempt being made after my death to separate my work from that of Adrienne von Speyr." For this reason some view his work in two different phases -- pre and post Adrienne. This study must then allude to, "...the psychological and theological symbiosis" that he shared with Adrienne von Speyr and how such a relationship bore theological fruit in von Balthasar's writing.

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53 Ibid., 89.
54 Ibid.
55 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Our Task, 73.
Another biographical phenomenon of investigation will be the relationship between von Balthasar’s personality structure and his Mariology.⁵⁹ This is of vital importance since an aim of this paper is to study Mary’s “yes,” her obedience and her uniqueness of mission in the role she played. Not only is the Virgin Mary a model for all, but as Roten states, “...a rightly understood Mariology is no more and no less than the reflective contemplation of a theological anthropology in actu.”⁶⁰

Although Roten points to a common mission of von Balthasar and von Speyr, this joint mission, especially in the establishment of the community of St. John, will not be investigated. The study is interested, however, in von Speyr’s influence on von Balthasar’s Marian attitude and thinking. As this introduction briefly shows, the main influences upon von Balthasar’s theology are the Fathers, Scripture, Ignatian spirituality, theologians and anthropology. These same major sources influenced his Mariology, but now von Speyr sharing with him her personal revelations and insights must be added to the list. Von Speyr is the link between Mary and Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁶¹ Although von Balthasar had a personal relationship with Mary, it is through von Speyr’s hands that

⁵⁹ Ibid.
he will experience the personal unseen visitations and graces of Mary. It will be through von Speyr that von Balthasar will meet and be touched by Ignatius and Mary.

What was a fleeting thought in the Black Forest held the seeds for the further theological development not only of mission but of the “yes” and the shared destiny that servant and master experience. This Marian personality structure, so called by Roten, will be reflected most noticeably in his shared life with von Speyr. This part played by von Speyr is of critical importance since this paper addresses the topic of person, with Mary serving as both the anthropological model and fulfillment of personhood. In one grand sentence yielding a panorama of Balthasarian theology, Roten outlines some of the main features of this present Marian study. Pointing to Mary as bringing unity to love and obedience, Roten continues in speaking of a Marian influence on von Balthasar’s epistemology, he states:

“Von Balthasar’s epistemological Yes is a deeply realistic one: it is a Yes to reality in concreteness and totality, the affirmative and joyous acceptance of God’s incarnational challenge to humanity, the creature’s ready self-recognition as a creature, and the truly Catholic affirmation of all dimensions in the relationship between God and the human being.” 62

Von Balthasar will certainly be remembered for his prolific writing as evidenced in eighty-five separate volumes, over five hundred articles and nearly a hundred translations. 63 To read the works is not to know the man. After the death of Adrienne

62 Ibid., 84.
von Speyr, Fr. Henrici says that von Balthasar was more willing to make autobiographical statements, but even at that, these statements are too fragmentary to yield an adequate picture of Hans Urs von Balthasar. He will be remembered for his immense giftedness, his courageous faith that allowed him to leave the Jesuit Order to pursue what he considered a mission from God and for his theological impact upon modern society. Loyal son of the Church, he died two days before the consistory that was to elevate him to the Cardinalate, on the morning of June 26, 1988. And so concludes a few introductory remarks hopefully demonstrating the potent truth that life’s experiences, singular or multitudinous, bear directly on thinking and theory building. This introduction has attempted to reveal this “potent truth” in the lives of Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar. These biographical comments also serve as a preface in outlining the parameters of this study.

Through an examination of the concept of person in relationship with God in the writings of Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar, it is hoped that the relevant issues become clear and concise enough so that they can be applied to Mary as she appears in the Annunciation scene. Again it is hoped that a study of the Virgin Mary would redound both to her humility as the “humble handmaid” and to her glory as the assumed one in heaven. I invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary’s intercession, keeping in mind and relying on Adrienne von Speyr’s words, “...wherever in Christianity Mary appears...everything abstract and distant, all veils and obstacles disappear, and every soul is immediately touched by the heavenly world.”64 May this paper advance both the theological concept

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64 Ibid., 86.
of the human person and its fulfillment in the Virgin Mary, and may such advancement
be only for the greater glory of God.

Now that there has been a brief biographical sketch that attempted to link each man's life­
events to his theorizing, the study will now take up the work of Martin Buber. The
majority of this study references his book, I and Thou, which made him world renown.
The next sections will examine those vital issues addressed in I and Thou and some
subsequent works which comprise his development of the dialogic principle.

The method of investigation for both men's work will be descriptive. The means of
"proving" or "supporting" hypotheses will be based on the inner consistency of their
theorizing which, of course, means how their theories are aligned with philosophy,
theology and anthropology. Does dialogue add anything new? A second consideration is
how the parts of each man's system are intra-consistent. Lastly, it would seem logical
that the dialogical principle would be in harmony with the accepted Scriptural,
magisterial teaching and Church tradition regarding the human person. Let us reiterate
that the study's purpose is to provide a tool to enrich philosophical, anthropological and
theological understanding of the human person.
The three hypotheses will be supported as the study progresses through four chapters. The first two hypotheses will be addressed in this chapter by examining the dialogical elements embedded in the work of Buber and von Balthasar. The third hypotheses will be answered in chapters three and four.

The following section, "Religious Influences" should be considered part of Buber's life events that shaped his dialogical principle. He would later move beyond some of these ideas even before writing of *I and Thou* but some of the basic tenets of "secular mysticism" or the "concrete everyday" he would retain. Even late in life he would harken back to and repeat the same beliefs espoused in his university day, e.g., Cusa's ideas about opposites. Within this section lies some of the seeds of Buber's dialogical thinking, which, despite the implication of a God-human relationship, causes him to place most emphasis on the man to man relation. Seeds that took root in the Biblical God, a God he never really abandons and whose vertical relationship he would assert lies behind every I-Thou encounter, even though evidence of it is absent in most of his writing.
M. BUBER

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

This section, "Religious Influences," will include Buber's religious thinking that is known as "secular mysticism" and his adaptation and incorporation of Hasidism into his religious thought. Tracing his philosophical/theological footsteps allows us to discover how Buber established the Absolute (Eternal) Thou as the "Thou" of the I-Thou relation. The method that he employed he called "holy insecurity" which he defines as the willingness to risk by giving up well-defined traditional ways of viewing God. His belief system was an amalgam of Hasidism, Judaic theology and philosophy, medieval Catholic thought and panentheistic Eastern beliefs.

What is recounted here forms the religious foundation of the dialogical principle. He begins to speak about the realization of the person through the dialogical principle during the 1920's. The encounter takes on greater meaning as the dialogue becomes a fixed idea. During these years, possibly not even consciously, he was formulating the ontological description of the "Thou" (God) in the I-Thou relationship. It is interesting to note, that although his major stress in the I-Thou relationship, as seen in his book *Land and Thou* was the human person (the "I"), that he chronologically first searched for the existence of the "Thou" and its interaction with the "I."
During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a movement was to shape, if not transform, the face of East European Jewry; its name was Hasidism. The movement began in Poland and at one time during the eighteenth century included one half of the Jews of eastern Europe.¹ Buber’s contact with Hasidism as a young boy would eventually change him and the face of Hasidism.

Hasidism was to provide one of the “little revelations” of Buber’s life and work.² During his busy days of Zionist work, scholarly and journalistic, Buber “discovered” the thought of the founder of Hasidism, Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), a name which means “Master of the Good Name.” The result of his reading provided him with a firm grasp of the “religiousness” of Judaism and particularly the time honored Judaic belief that man is made in the image of God. This “little revelation” had such an impact that Buber would shortly thereafter withdraw from his participation in Zionist activity to devote himself to the five year study of Hasidism.

In examining history, in order to situate the historical manifestation of Hasidism, Buber cites the death of two prominent Jews (Spinoza and Sabbatai Zvi) that preceded the writings of Baal Shem Tov.³ Both men were part of what Buber called the “late exilic catastrophe of Judaism.”⁴ Both men’s failures helped to give birth to Hasidism. The philosopher Spinoza was excommunicated from the synagogue when he questioned the

¹ Malcolm L. Diamond, Martin Buber, Jewish Existentialist, 110.
² Pamela Vermes, Buber, 8.
³ Both Spinoza and Sabbatai Zvi died thirty-two years before his birth.
⁴ Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, 90.
Jewish belief in God. Sabbatai Zvi, a gnostic who had many followers, maintained that he was the Messiah and through his apostasy, by converting to Islam, dealt a serious blow to Jewish Messianism. Hasidism was viewed by Buber as a reply and correction to the damage done by these two men. Spinoza attempted “to take from God His being open to man’s address.”

Whereas Judaism teaches that God can be addressed by man in reality (since He dwells in it), Hasidism answers Spinoza by stating that God makes the world a sacrament even as he transcends the world. For Buber Judaism points out that man, 1) can say Thou to God, 2) can “stand face to face with Him” and, 3) can have intercourse with Him. The Hasidic answer to Sabbatai Zvi’s auto-messianism was that all action performed for God’s sake is Messianic and all mankind engages in the redemptive activity. There is no self-differentiation of one man from another as the Messiah.

Hasidism stood in contrast to these two other religious choices: the philosophy of Spinoza and Sabbatianism, named after the pseudo-messiah Sabbatai Zvi, were both contemporaneous with the rise of Hasidism in Poland. Hasidism was steeped in the esoteric tradition of Jewish mysticism and the more modern image of “raising the sparks” of Jewish thought.

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5 Ibid., 92.
6 Ibid., 96.
7 Ibid., 91.
8 Ibid., 111.
9 Ibid., 9.
10 Arthur A. Cohen, Buber, 11.
In the Spring of 1959 Buber would write in an introduction to his third book on Hasidism,11...“Hasidism has never set foot in the world of man as Christianity has done. Because of its Truth and because of the great need of the hour, I carry it into the world against its will.”12 By this statement Buber means that Hasidism is not a system of belief that promotes itself, but simply a way of life. It is not a teaching but a way of life that is to be grasped but not in words.13 It is a collection of legends.

Buber would sieve the material of Baal Shem Tov’s legendary stories and reshape them as he saw fit. As Baal Shem Tov opened Jewish thought to peasants, shop-workers, and innkeepers of eastern Europe, so Buber two hundred years later opened the refashioned thought of Hasidism to the twentieth century Jewish audience. What may be called neo-Hasidism was now available to Jew and Gentile alike.

On reading the book *Zevaath Ribesh, The Testament of Rabbi Israel Ba’alshem*, Buber was struck by the concept of ardor in becoming holy. And more importantly he relates how he began to understand man’s likeness to God as development and task. His own words capture his mind-opening encounter with Hasidism:

“It was then that, instantly overwhelmed, I came to understand the Hasidic soul. I discerned that most ancient of Jewish insights flowing in the darkness of exile into newly-conscious expression: man’s likeness to God as deed, as development, as task. And this most Jewish notion was a most human one, the content of most human religiousness. It was then that I began to understand Judaism as religiousness, as piety, as *hasidut*. The image of my childhood, the memory of

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12 Ibid., 22.
13 Ibid., 25.
the zaddik and his community, arose and enlightened me. I perceived the idea of the perfect man. Immediately, I was aware of the call to proclaim it to the world.”

The Zaddik was the recognized authority, an almost holy man chosen by the Hasidim. The emphasis was on motivation and not on performance of acts of Torah. The Jews of the Diaspora had reshaped the discipline of the Torah in complex mental activities divorced from everyday life. The perfect man of Judaism was the strict keeper of the law. The scholar of Torah became the example of the perfect man.

That flash of insight that Buber received regarding man’s task was already espoused in Judaic thought, “...Since in Judaism every human soul is a useful link in God’s creation which through man’s word, is supposed to become God’s empire, each soul should purify itself, not for terrestrial happiness or for heavenly bliss, but for the sake of the work that everyone is to do in God’s world.” Buber would proceed in his developing the idea of the perfect man who works for the sake of God by stressing the concepts of motivation, piety, and love as found in Hasidic thought.

It was the thinking of Baal Shem Tov that both challenged and offered the Rabbinic Tradition the simple man of true piety as the perfect man. Buber discovered that religion and its outward form tend to separate the devotee from the divine will. Whereas the

15 Werner Manheim, Martin Buber, 78.
16 Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, 84.
17 Malcolm L. Diamond, Martin Buber, Jewish Existentialist, 127.
man who performs deeds only for God's sake, in true religiousness, is the perfect man. The Hasidic teachers by living in a certain way had managed to achieve integrity that allowed a person "to become perfectly human." 

Buber would through the following fifty-five years recreate the legends and teachings of Hasidism, forging them into a link with the dialogic principle or more aptly creating a foundation for the dialogical principle.

**BUBER'S CONTRIBUTION TO JUDAIC THOUGHT**

For the Jew, the here and now is the beginning of the road; immersing oneself in the task of living is the only important venture. It was not only the performing of the act but the consecrating of all acts of everyday life to God, the hallowing of life and world. This consecration and motivation would become a basic tenet of Buber's life and work. Hasidism specifically negated action toward personal salvation. Buber's development of the concept of "holy insecurity" is the antithesis of personal salvation. He draws a sharp distinction between the security of gnosis and the "holy insecurity" of devotion.

Gnosis or knowledge is not important. "Holy insecurity" is a daring aspect of the dialogical principle, for living in the "Face of God" means not being able to take refuge in a static relationship with God but to encounter God in each situation or relation as ever new. The "insecurity" derives from not knowing what each encounter will bring. Each

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18 Buber, 10.
19 Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, 84.
20 Ibid., 14.
21 Ibid., 13.
encounter with the holy must be open to the fullness of the relation with no surety as to the content or the result of the encounter.

This “holy insecurity” is closely related to another aspect of the dialogical principle - the “lived concrete.” For Buber, Hasidism stresses the aspect of Judaism that teaches the provisional character of the distinction between the sacred and the profane. God is only to be found in the “concreteness of life” and not outside this reality. The “profane” is that which has not yet been sanctified. The dialogical character of meeting God in each concrete relation or situation reveals the presentness of God and the uniqueness of each encounter. It is in this relation bereft of knowledge and wisdom, that man simply shares with his fellowman in dialogue. In a similar fashion when man prays and is therefore in dialogue with God, God responds and fate is changed. Buber would expand upon the thought of one of the Hasidists, the “great Maggid,” who said man can fulfill himself only in dialogue. This fulfillment as a person in relation will be at the heart of the dialogical principle. Like the “great Maggid,” Buber felt that man’s dialogic goal was the recognition of the otherness of the fellow man, the acceptance of full relationship and the power of the word that connects the two partners. These early Hasidists reflected on the dialogue where the listener becomes the speaker (the beginning of an I-Thou formulation.) The Hasidic Tales provide the soil from which will grow Buber’s often quoted fundamental declaration in I and Thou “To man the world is twofold, in

22 Malcolm L Diamond, Martin Buber, Jewish Existentialist, 137.
24 Werner Manheim, Martin Buber, 75.
25 Ibid., 76.
accordance with his twofold attitude." Man can relate to God by bringing every aspect of his life into relation with God. For Buber it was Hasidism that reminded man of the purpose for which he is placed on this earth: the task is to not overcome the world but to hallow it. To Buber ancient Israel had professed that "the world is not the place of God, rather that God is 'the place of the world,' and that he still 'dwells in it.'" Hasidism carried this belief further in stating that the world was a sacrament because of God's indwelling. Man redeems the world by his sacramental contact with it. It is by his conscious effort and right motivation that the world is redeemed and so too the divine sparks that exist in all things are returned to the Godhead.

Although in the beginning God was "relationless unity" he desired to be known, loved and sought after. God has decided to clothe himself with the world, dwell in it and place His Shekina in it. Therefore it is man's destiny to relate to God who desires relation. Everything now depends on man to redeem the world and to relate to God. This meeting is now a religious meeting. The contribution of Baal Shem Tov was that the spiritual man is called to love and to see in all flesh a holy life through which man can lead all the divine sparks back to God by hallowing all in this life. The means of hallowing the world and elevating the sparks was, for Buber, relationship. Buber also utilized the Hasidic belief of the doctrine of the sparks in the understanding of love. Even the wicked must be

26 Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, 96.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 119.
29 Ibid., 119-120.
30 Ibid., 125.
loved, because, "The soul of every man is a divine particle from above. Even so you have to show pity to God when only one holy spark of His has been trapped in a shell." This doctrine of the divine sparks stands at the center of Hasidic teaching. The Hasidists drew this belief from the Kabbala. When God contracted himself, as a person might draw in his breath, he created space for the world. His light was then caught in bowls or vessels throughout the universe. Some of these vessels of light broke spreading sparks in the millions to all parts of creation. Each spark was now trapped in a "shell." It is the task of each man to re-unite these sparks to the Godhead that his glory might be completely reunited and made one. This doctrine makes the daily life of the Jew full of redemptive significance, since raising the sparks is a messianic activity which would bring about the Messianic Era.

Buber would incorporate this central doctrine of Hasidism into his own belief "system." It is the touchstone of his "hallowing of the everyday," since all daily activities from eating to praying, from resting to loving a spouse, if done with devotion, redeems the fallen sparks enclosed therein. The act of love, spousal or friendship, is based on the divine sparks, since the soul of every man is a divine spark from above. This receiving of God in things is a completion of the teaching of Israel and an additional contribution of Hasidic belief. This contribution completes the injunction, "Be holy, for I am holy,"

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32 Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, 83.
33 Ibid., 121.
35 Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, 119-120.
36 Martin Buber, Hasidism and Modern Man, 32 ff.
37 Ibid., 240 ff.
which for the Hasidist meant the hallowing of things through man. So, in Hasidism’s doctrine of the divine sparks, Buber saw a deepening of the call to holiness; and in the everyday concreteness of life, Buber proposed that the way to be holy was by leading a life of simplicity and true piety. In contradistinction to this simple everyday living of true piety, Buber painted mysticism as removed from the concreteness of life. Buber would speak in strong words against mysticism calling it this “exalted form of being untrue.” He would state:

“In my earlier years the “religious” was for me the exception. There were hours that were taken out of the course of things. From somewhere or other the firm crust of everyday was pierced. Then the reliable permanence of appearances broke down; the attack which took place burst its law asunder. ‘Religious experience’ was the experience of an otherness which did not fit into the context of life. It could begin with something customary, with consideration of some familiar object, but which then became unexpectedly mysterious and uncanny, finally lighting a way into the lightning-pierced darkness of the mystery itself. But also, without any intermediate state, time could be torn apart - first the world’s firm structure, then the still firmer self-assurance flew apart and you were delivered to fullness. The ‘religious’ lifted you out. Over there now lay the accustomed existence with its affairs, but here illumination and ecstasy and rapture held, without time or sequence. Thus your own being encompassed a life here and a life beyond, and there was no bond but the actual moment of the transition.”

Buber, after his earlier mystical experiences, stated he did not have mystical experiences later in life and that he no longer experienced ecstasies through quiet “meditation” or spontaneous meditations. Although it seems that Buber had by the end of the First World War rejected mysticism completely in his personal life, he still retained in his

38 Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, 97.
39 Ibid., 92.
40 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Early Years, 1878-1923, 93.
41 Ibid., 91.
thinking about anthropology, the concepts of presence, immediacy, and ineffability which are very much part of mystical experience present in *I and Thou.* Buber rejected the label of mysticism because of its usual connotation that implies a turning away from the world, denying the senses and losing oneself through absorption into God. Of course, his own thinking is quite anti-thetical to all three notions, since God presents Himself through the world and we perceive Him through our senses and we encounter God through relation never losing who we are. Even the term “personal mysticism” needs to be qualified and might best be called “secular mysticism” which incorporates mystical elements of Hasidism and panentheism, but denies any mystical unification of the person with God.

**BUBER’S “SECULAR MYSTICISM”**

The Hasidic setting of mysticism and contemplation could have provided Buber the framework for his development of the dialogical principle, i.e., a mystical relation with God as Thou. Instead, Buber criticized the Hasidic mystical emphasis on unity and instead chose relation, as the basis of the dialogical principle. Even though his earlier writing and actual religious experience involved a mystical element, he gradually shifted his view, renounced mysticism as a unitive phenomenon and replaced “religious mysticism” with a “secular mysticism of everyday life.”

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42 Ibid.
44 Will Herberg, *The Writings of Martin Buber,* 12.
Buber regarded his "mismeeting" with Mehé as a judgment and decided that ecstasy took him out of everyday life.\textsuperscript{45} Hence one of Hasidism's tenets was an ideal vehicle for him with its stress on "active mysticism" which stated that the world is not an illusion from which man must turn away to reach true being. "His soul opens for God, but because it opens only for God, it is invisible to all the world and shut off from it. The mystic rotates the magic ring on his finger in arrogant confidence, and at once he is alone with 'his' God, and incommunicado to the world...he must deny the world, and since it will not be denied, he must in reality repudiate it."\textsuperscript{46}

This indictment of mysticism by Rosenzweig certainly reflects Buber's thought and writing. It is the world with whom we enter into creative and loving relationship. It is Buber's thinking that God is allowed to enter the world when one lets him in. God allows man to let Him in or to let Himself be won by man which places God himself in man's hands. God wishes to come to this world but He wants to come to it through man. In Buber's Hasidic novel, \textit{For the Sake of Heaven}, he speaks of not being concerned with individual salvation and not preoccupied with oneself, but with "letting God into the world."\textsuperscript{47} Interestingly enough this "letting God in" did not encompass mysticism or mystical relationship with God. Such religious ecstasy would take him out of everyday life, the very place of the encounter with God. Hasidism was a mysticism that hallowed

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. 7.
\textsuperscript{46} Franz Rosenzweig, \textit{The Star of Redemption}, 207.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 15.
the everyday events of life. It engages life as sacred and so life should not be escaped through withdrawal. Buber revitalized Hasidism and made it palatable to the mystical tastes and inclinations of modern day Jewry. The world was to be engaged, "for man cannot love God in truth without loving the world." For Buber such a statement reflects his belief in the unity of being.

The discussion of mysticism and the elements of mysticism are two of the more difficult aspects of Buberian thought. Let us begin by trying to avoid the trap that Maurice Friedman thinks most authors fall into, namely making an attempt to label Buber as a mystic or non-mystic. Even though wary of categories, Buber as a writer and philosopher had to engage in their use. Unity of being (duality and non-duality) is one of these categories. This differentiation takes on such import for Buber because the relationship of the creature with the Creator, or the unity of the I and Thou, is of utmost significance. That is why the thinking of St. Francis and Hindu mysticism appealed to him since he saw in both, correctly or not, that all reality is non-dual. It is an illusion of creation, which Hindu mysticism calls maya, that there appears to be multiplicity. But even operating out of this premise (early in his thinking) he still views as a basic philosophical-theological tenet that all reality is divided into "I" and the world. Such inconsistency seemed not to bother him. His understanding of the I-Thou and, at the same time, his understanding of mysticism, shows the aspects of reality as neither rigidly

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48 Martin Buber, Hasidism and Modern Man, 10.
49 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, The Early Years, 1878-1923, 77.
50 Ibid., 78.
separated nor as melting into one another, but each “reciprocally condition[ing] one another.” In some aspects of Boehme’s thinking, Buber found kindred beliefs. Boehme held that the “I” is the world. Each individual bears the properties of all things in himself. To him even God lies in man. Nicholas of Cusa of the fifteenth century and Jacob Boehme, a theologian of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, about whom Buber wrote his dissertation for the University of Vienna, proposed what was a renewal of Neo-Platonism (the mysticism of the Greek philosopher, Plotinus and his followers.)

Plotinus and his followers believed that the idea of multiplicity, as seen in the world, developed from man’s sense of unity and the simplicity of the idea. Cusa and Boehme further developed this idea of multiplicity which appealed to Buber. Multiplicity for Cusa was the emanation of all relative reality out of the absolute reality; while for Boehme, in contradistinction, multiplicity provided for the actualization of absolute possibility. Each man still held that individualization was a reality which provided each man a metaphysical basis for all reality. Both Buber and Cusa valued the individual in his particularity with the uniqueness and unrepeatability of each individual, regardless of utility or function, and despite any relation to others, being the absolute center of oneself. Friedman sees, in such thinking about uniqueness, the seeds of the philosophy of dialogue, the I-Thou relationship. Buber’s dialogic principle rests on the idea of uniqueness received through dialogue.

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 79.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 80.
Another idea incorporated into Buberian thought from Cusa is the coincidentia oppositorum which unites, without diminishing, oppositeness. The mystical character of this coincidence of opposites finds its conclusion in God in whom all opposites lose their opposition. God is the absolute unity; all is God. Creation's purpose is to activate this divine potential that lies within each creation thereby realizing the spiritual power that each contains. God reveals Himself through the multifarious forms and wishes to perfect Himself through each manifestation of Himself. Buber carries this thinking one step further than the above cited Boehme thinking. Friedman quoting Buber states, “Each thing longs for the other, for it is determined by the other.”55 This hidden spiritual potential is elicited from it and made actual through the encounter with the other. All such thinking leads to a deepening of the belief in individuation.

Whereas individuation, during the lifetimes of Cusa and Boehme, was to be renounced in favor of losing oneself in the transcendent, Buber's stance, that evolved through his correspondence with others, i.e., Landauer, and his reflecting on Cusa, Boehme and Meister Eckhart, disagreed with past and present mystics who negated the world, reality and experience. Therefore according to Buber there was no losing oneself in the transcendent. He slowly developed the concept, of the “lived concrete” a term that he seemingly coined. The man who is freest is he who is inwardly attached to the world. This world in turn belongs to the person who creates it by entering it with his whole

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55 Ibid., 81.
personal being. In his earlier writing, Buber believed that the mystic did achieve unity in which the world and the I become one, as multiplicity disappears into unity. He would later claim that such ecstatic states were purely subjective. Resorting to Eastern thought, he stated that each "I' already contains the world 'I.'" This evolvement of his view of mysticism preceded the writing of I and Thou. One could say he remained a "mystic" even after his denial of certain forms of mysticism but it was a philosophical "mysticism" based on Eastern thought. His "mysticism" was comprised of the fragments of everyday existence that formed a unity with the subject who experienced such existence. "We cannot penetrate behind the manifold to find living unity. But we can create living unity out of the manifold." This statement speaks quite clearly in tones of panentheism in which existence is only potentially holy and needs to be hallowed.

PANTEHEISM AND PANENTHEISM

A close examination of the main tenets of Buber's beliefs reveals an obvious parallelism with panentheism which "views all things as being in God without exhausting the infinity of the divine nature." His views on mysticism are based on the encountered beliefs of Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. Meister Eckhart emphasized God's transcendence and proposed a certain polarity in God. Nicholas of Cusa moved even closer to panentheism in holding, that the "world is explication of what is implication in God."

56 Ibid., 90.
57 New Catholic Encyclopedia, 943.
58 Ibid., 944.
59 Ibid.
The notion of polarity proposes God as eternal and temporal, and as including yet transcending the world. Because God holds within himself the coincidence of opposites (rest and motion, past and future, divisibility and simplicity) he overcomes their opposition. They all coincided in Him prior to their opposition, says Nicholas of Cusa.\(^60\) Cusa is a good example of those who combine scientific cosmologies with religious philosophy. His mysticism might best be labeled Neo-Platonic cosmic mysticism.\(^61\) Buber incorporated these ideas which he first encountered while pursuing his doctoral degree. Cusa’s distinction of *enfolded* and *unfolded* became major elements of the Buberian understanding of who God is, since Buber’s statement that God wraps the world about Himself reflects Cusa’s *enfolding* whereby everything exists in God without differentiation.\(^62\) As things *unfold* they are distinct from each other. Panentheism regards the world as an actual fulfillment of God’s creative possibility.\(^63\) There are two major Cusan beliefs, 1) that all things are present in God as God and that God is present in all things but not as God is in His Godself and 2) that God is in all things but only as they are *enfolded* in God. All things exist *enfolded* in God, they exist there ontologically before they are created and not as themselves in plurality.\(^64\) Such thoughts are the philosophical underpinnings of panentheism which states that as things exist and come into existence God’s actuality is added to.\(^65\) This implies that the Absolute is a never-ending process -- the becoming of God.

\(^{60}\) Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 336.
\(^{62}\) Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 337.
\(^{63}\) *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 944.
\(^{64}\) Ibid., 337.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 944.
In this early state of his development, Buber did think that God became God only through the creation of the world. Later, in 1923 just after completing *I and Thou*, Buber would condemn any idea of God becoming. God is present in the universe, in each part, in an uncontracted way and the world is the contracted likeness or image of God. In such thinking God is yet to be fully realized. As Buber stated, there is a dependency between us and God, we depend on God but he also depends on us to actualize Him and his presence in the world and to hallow this world. The concept of “becoming” in Buber’s thinking presents obvious paradoxes, especially if God’s “dependency” on us and his actualization by us has no consequences on his “becoming.” Even though Buber eschews God’s “becoming” he still feels justified in writing about a God who must yet be realized.

A further difficulty of much of this panentheistic formulation, in discussing a mystical relation with God, is its close relationship to pantheism. The Scholastics claimed that pantheism is a form of atheism. There is a tendency in both Platonism and Neoplatonism toward pantheism. God is the only reality in pantheism and all else is appearance. Creation is but a *theophany*. For Cusa God is infinitely one in whom all opposites are reconciled. Some of Cusa’s beliefs already cited are very similar to Hindu belief and Plotinus’ teaching on the One. Boehme can be included in this discussion of Pantheism and Buber felt that Boehme oscillated between theism and pantheism. For

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67 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 947.
68 Ibid.
Boehme God is seen as a spiritual force that exists solely as a divinity in man. These beliefs and the men who proposed them had a great impact on Buber’s religious thought and “theory” development. All of it definitely cast a pantheistic/panentheistic shadow over his beliefs.

Panentheism describes the non-dualism of the One who becomes the many and in turn the many becomes the One. It is a “mystical” view of reality even though Buber denied being a mystic. His view of mysticism must be quoted for it influences his understanding of person and his writing of I and Thou.

“No,” I answered, and looked at him in a friendly way, “for I still grant to reason a claim that the mystic must deny to it. Beyond this, I lack the mystic’s negation. I can negate convictions but never the slightest actual thing. The mystic manages, truly or apparently, to annihilate the entire world, or what he so names - all that his senses present to him in perception and in memory - in order, with new disembodied senses or a wholly supersensory power, to press forward to his God. But I am enormously concerned with this world, this painful and precious fullness of all that I see, hear, taste. I cannot wish away any part of its reality. I can only wish that I might heighten this reality...the reality of the experienced world is so much the more powerful the more powerfully I experience it and realize it...And how can I give this reality to my world except by seeing the seen with all the strength of my life, hearing the heard with all the strength of my life, tasting the tasted with all the strength of my life? Except by bending over the experienced thing with fervour and power and by melting the shell of passivity with the fire of my being until the confronting, the shaping, the bestowing side of things springs up to meet me and embraces me so that I know the world in it?”

Buber rejects such labels for they imply a turning away from the world. Some call his, more accurately, a “personal mysticism” that creates a unity out of the many.

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69 Ibid., 949.
70 New Catholic Encyclopedia, 949.
71 Buber wrote an essay in the same year in which he spole of dualism and the “One and the many” stating that he did not consider himself a mystic. Friedman finds this denial astonishing.
72 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, the Early Years, 1878-1923, 91.
73 Ibid.
The question still remains, is Martin Buber a mystic? And closely following that, what is a mystic? The answer to the questions is important for this investigation, since Buber’s concept of the person is related to his perception of who God is, as ascertained through his religious beliefs and religious experiences. The manner in which God relates to His creatures, especially through religious experiences or encounters, is crucial to a discussion of who God is for Buber, and the counterpart is just as important - how the creature relates to God. These relations would directly influence his anthropology as viewed through philosophical and theological windows. Therefore the answers are sought not for personal knowledge about Buber’s religious beliefs, but to help clarify how the human person relates to God and how such relation, if it exists, affects the human person. Beyond that, these answers will help with developing a framework for studying the Annunciation scene as an archetypal example of mystical relation with God. Does Buber’s theological anthropology of man have anything to contribute to such an investigation?

In support of Buber’s view that mysticism’s realm was to be found in the fragments of everyday life, Baron von Hügel pointed out that mysticism is only one part of concrete religion \(^74\) and more importantly that the essential element of mysticism is “presence” not the union of absorption or identity (where the individual personality is lost.) For von

\(^{74}\) Bernard McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, Origins to the Fifth Century, xvii.
Hügel the idea of “presence” was a much more compelling category for grasping the Christian mystical tradition. Best known for his classical two volume work on mysticism, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, von Hügel stated that union with God is not the central category for understanding mysticism. It is the author’s contention that some of the remarks regarding Christian mysticism are readily applicable to Judaic mysticism as described in Buber’s works. McGinn’s definition of the mystical element in Christianity is easily applied to Buber’s description of his relation to God: “…that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God.”

Another point that would agree with Buberian thought as presented by McGinn is the ineffability of the mystics. The experience defies conceptualization and verbalization in part or in whole. This direct presence with God or consciousness of Him cannot be adequately described. Buber, true to his belief, makes no attempt to describe the I-Thou experience with God, since such discussion or description would make I-Thou into I-It.

John of the Cross, Origen, Meister Eckhart all emphasize the new awareness, the heightened consciousness, that involves both loving and knowing that is given in the mystical meeting. Such thinking is found in Buber’s description of the I-Thou encounter. Where there is a disagreement between Buber and the recognized Christian

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75 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
mystics is in the topic of “ordinary consciousness.” The immediate consciousness mentioned by most mystics⁷⁸ is that which is not found in ordinary consciousness nor in religious activities of prayer or the sacraments. Whereas Buber, who believed in the immediacy of the relation, felt that the “mystical relation” could be experienced through the ordinary consciousness of any person. The mystics make it quite clear that the experience is subjectively different and objectively different as the experience moves beyond the usual conscious activities of sensing, knowing and loving.⁷⁹ Buber on the contrary stresses the usual senses that one employs in meeting both God and man as Thou.

In general the consensus of expert opinion on the matter of consciousness is that the mystic engages in the “perfection of supernatural prayer,” enjoys a “special grace over and above the ordinary graces available to all Christians,” and receives a special gift of faith and power to love and serve.⁸⁰ Even these theological opinions are debated, since some theologians believe that there are two ways of perfection through a mystical relationship -- an ordinary and extraordinary. Garrigou-Lagrange who represents the school of the ordinary felt that mysticism was open to all.⁸¹ However, St. Thomas Aquinas stated that the immediate awareness of God was not possible for the man in his fallen state. For the mystic to experience God there would have to be a suspension of

⁷⁸ Ibid., xix.
⁷⁹ Ibid.
⁸⁰ New Catholic Encyclopedia, 176.
⁸¹ Ibid.
normal consciousness. Such thinking is alien to Buber’s non-extraordinary, everyday approach to a relation with God.

The difficulty lies in the highly subjective nature of mystical experience. Even though mystics speak of knowing something as a result of the experience, they cannot describe it. This lack of articulation and justification of the encounter can be witnessed in the reports of recognized Christian mystics and in the work of Buber. Both Christians and Buber recognize the ineffability of the encounter with God. There appears to be some similarity between the Christian mystics and Buber’s description of the I-Thou encounter. The question arises “can these seemingly mystical encounters be verified when it is difficult to ascertain if someone like Buber is experiencing a personal God through prayer and in charity?”82

Another point of comparison between Christian mystics and Buber is this direct experience of God. This point addresses a firsthand personal knowledge of God. For Augustine and so many others the mystical life or mysticism is equivalent to the spiritual life based on an intimate daily union with God.83 This direct experience can be had through a range of mystical encounters entailing the humble and dimmer experiences of God. This harkens back to the concept of presence, a living and loving presence. But the history of mysticism in the Christian tradition has always stressed prayer in religion as the means of entering the relationship or of even seeing God’s immanent presence in

82 Ibid., 179.
83 Evelyn Underhill, Mystics of the Church, 10.
nature. Buber has been criticized for his contempt of religion, his not attending synagogue and engaging in no formal prayer.

Again, Buber’s life and writings would meet the definition that Evelyn Underhill uses for mysticism - “the life that aims at union with God.” At the same time she describes how mystics need food for their souls which they receive from prayer, reading, and silent contemplation. She states emphatically that it would be an illusion to think that someone could be a mystic who was a religious freelance, and independent or someone contemptuous of tradition and organized worship. Buber, by such a statement, would not be considered a mystic.

Buber’s concentration on the Absolute would be called “theocentric.” By temperament he shares in his passionate striving for God with those Christian “theocentric” mystics (Augustine, Catherine of Genoa). However this need not be called mysticism when a common element, namely passion for God, is shared. Buber also seems to share in Boehme’s philosophical mysticism. Boehme had a “mystical experience” in 1600 when gazing upon a highly burnished pewter dish: “I saw and knew more than if I had been many years at a university...the Being of Beings, the Byss and Abyss...the essential nature of evil and of good...The greatness of the triumphing that was in the spirit I cannot

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84 Ibid., 15.
85 Maurice Friedman, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge, A Life of Martin Buber*, 348. Gershom Scholem had contested that Buber had not set foot in a synagogue during his thirty years in Israel. Others feel this is an exaggeration. Buber himself did relate one instance of going to the synagogue with a friend.
express...in the Light my spirit suddenly saw through all, and in and by all the creatures, even in herbs and grass, it knew God - who He is and how He is and what His will is - and suddenly in that Light my will was set on by a mighty impulse to describe the Being of God." 87

When one places upon the scale the various statements of Buber regarding mysticism in order to judge him by his own beliefs whether he is a mystic or not, the answer is clearly "no," as he himself admits. His own statements tip the scale: 1) God is found only in concreteness, 88 2) the hallowing of things occurs only through man, 89 3) religious mysticism was replaced by relating to the concrete in everyday life, 90 4) mysticism is not unitive, 5) God enters when man lets Him in but not through mysticism, 91 6) reality is non-dual, 92 7) spiritual potential is elicited from the other not God, 8) and that the encounter with God comprises a "reciprocal conditioning of one another" rather than a separation of each. 93 Like Plotinus, Buber would agree with "auto-salvation" when the individual realizes his own divinization through self effort which is epitomized in Plotinus' statement, "to obtain the vision is solely the work of him who desires to obtain it." 94 This clearly emphasizes man's role in the relation and not God's self revelation to and involvement with his creature.

87 Ibid., 215.
88 Cf. 22.
89 Cf. 24-25.
90 Cf. 26.
91 Cf. 28.
92 Ibid.
93 Cf. 29.
There is a great separation between Augustinian view of the mystic as the person who can "touch" God (*ut eum tangerem*) only as he passes beyond self in ecstasy⁹⁵ and the Buberian view of the "mystic" as the person who through his senses encounters God in the "everyday-ness of life." Nor does Buber speak in ways common to a mystic's language in mentioning either goodness or love in relating to God as does Augustine who said that "We need to become like him in goodness and 'loving in thought in order to grasp him.'"⁹⁶ For Buber feelings like love are not in the soul but between *I and Thou*.⁹⁷ In his discussion of being present to Thou when referring to God, Buber never stressed the idea of clinging or cleaving to God as did St. Augustine who said in his work on the Trinity 8.4.6 that "in order to enjoy the presence from whom we are we must remain steadfast in relation to him and must cleave to him."⁹⁸ Buberian closeness to the Absolute Thou would not allow for a spiritual closeness or clinging let alone a physical contact with God in some form. When Buber says in the *Eclipse of God*, to hold fast to the existing God, he means this in a different sense than Augustine's cleaving to God.⁹⁹

Even when the Judaism that Buber embraced shares the same Christian belief espoused by Augustine regarding loving God through our fellowman which means that the love of

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⁹⁵ Ibid., 238.
⁹⁶ Ibid.
⁹⁹ *Eclipse of God*, 123.
neighbor is the love of God, this still does not translate into shared beliefs on the mystical relationship with God.

Augustine and Buber shared the belief that our relationship with God never involves any confusion between God and humanity. Buber embraced the Gnostic belief of uncovering the hidden divine spark within, whereas Augustine believed that through Christ our inner powers (present in the Garden of Eden) are reactivated. It is through grace that these powers “attain a temporary, direct, and ineffable experience of the presence of the triune God.” Buber was not concerned with grace as fully understood in Christian thinking but, in keeping with Catholic theology, he did consider grace as presence.

This brief comparison between Buber and Augustine is offered because Augustine is classified as an “I-Thou” mystic who like Buber spoke of the ineffability of the God encounter. Buber, unlike Augustine, did not deal with the cooperation of the soul and God nor with the important Christian topic of grace. All Christian writers do agree, however, that genuine mystical experiences are not the result of the mystics themselves, but are special graces that are beyond the ordinary graces given to all Christians.

101 Ibid., 256.
102 New Catholic Encyclopedia, 179.
103 Ibid., 176.
Secondly, Augustine was chosen as a quintessential representative of mysticism in the West stressing the immediate consciousness of the presence of God, the mystic’s place in the Church, and the importance of caritas in the mystic’s life. Buber’s beliefs, as expressed in the explication of the I-Thou encounter, addresses the presence of God but does not reflect the other cited ingredients of the mystical relationship with God.

Some of Buber’s ideas that comprise his I-Thou relationship are either closely related or at times seemingly identical with the widely accepted elements of Christian mysticism. This brings with it a certain confusion when attempting to “label” Martin Buber a mystic. He shares with the Christian mystics the concept of presence, consciousness, ineffability and love of neighbor. He does not share or expound on the other widely accepted elements of reciprocal love, grace, and of course the relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore one might conclude with von Balthasar and Anselm Stolz or Albert Schweitzer that only Christian mysticism is true mysticism.\(^{104}\)

\[\text{PHILOSOPHY AND MYSTICISM}\]

Buber’s “mysticism” might be considered a “secular mysticism,” since some of the elements of his I-Thou relationship are explained by a philosophical understanding of the mystical relationship with God. Maréchal’s essay “The Feeling of Presence” accounts

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partially for Buber’s concept of presence when he states, “[it is] the intuition of God as present, the feeling of the immediate presence of a Transcendent Being.”

Even the subject of the ineffability of the mystical experience is explained by philosophical reasoning in the work of De Certeau who said that mystical experience could not be studied in itself but only through the body and language of the mystic. To the philosopher, if an experience is ineffable how can it convey knowledge and how can one describe either the experience or the content of the experience? Can a case be made for the difference between the experience and interpretation? It is safe to admit that the ineffability of the core of the mystical experience makes it, at the best, less than totally comprehensible.

The philosophical approach, as seen in the work of Louis Dupré, can also account for the experience of transcendence. Dupré sees in the teaching of Meister Eckhart, with whom Buber shared his thinking, that through self-awareness an individual realizes the ground of its identity with God. The inherent difficulty of the study of mysticism is the ambiguity in the description of mysticism in both Catholic and Protestant circles, not to mention the difficulty of comparing so called “mysticism” outside of the Christian realm with Christian mysticism. Buber refers to the wholly other in I and Thou which most

105 Ibid., 299. The quote is from Maréchal’s Studies, 102-103.
106 Ibid., 312.
107 Ibid., 318.
108 Ibid., 325.
109 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 79.
likely is a reference to the thought of Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), a professor of theology at Gottingen, Breslau and Marburg. One idea advanced by Otto was the typology of mysticism. The extrovertive mystic seems to describe the writing of Buber. Otto states that the extrovertive mystic, "looks upon the world of things in its multiplicity, and in contrast to this, leaps to an 'intuition' or a 'knowledge,' that is the recognition of the unity of all things that eventually leads to seeing the vital immanence of the One in everything."\(^{110}\) This definition would also accurately describe Buber's, at times, panentheistic view of reality. This theological view of Otto is very close to Plotinus' view that the All is to be found in everything (a rejection of particularity), that "we are all and one" and "all things are one."\(^{111}\) Plotinus concludes the *Enneads* with a declaration that touches upon the negative and positive poles in the One's relation to all things. "The One is absent from nothing and from everything. It is present only to those who are prepared for it and are able to receive it, to enter into harmony with it, to grasp and to touch it by virtue of their likeness to it, by virtue of that inner power similar to and stemming from the One when it is in that state in which it was when it originated from the One. Thus will the One be 'seen' as far as it can become an object of contemplation (Enn. 6.9.4 translated by O’Brien)."\(^{112}\) This philosophical description of the One is very similar to Cusa's description of the coincidence of opposites which Buber embraced.\(^{113}\)

The One, of course, is not a person.

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\(^{111}\) Ibid., 52.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.

\(^{113}\) Baron von Hügel cites Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa as a precursor of modern philosophy, Volume I of *The Mystical Element of Religion*, 62.
Even Buber’s belief in the unceasing dialogue between heaven and earth, between I and Thou, between call and response, does not constitute mysticism. N. N. Glatzer, professor at Brandeis University, raises an extremely important question in the introduction of a book of Buber’s writings. He muses whether Buber’s teachings about the I-Thou relationship of response, immediacy and spontaneity of contact between man and man, are a record of personal experience or a record of expectation and anticipation.

Glatzer, in contrast to Friedman, agrees with Buber’s denial of being a mystic and sees him as antimystic - committed to the everyday, claiming mysticism as an escape, espousing that the Thou is to be met only in earthly existence. Even the question of God being transcendent or immanent depends not on Him but depends on man. Buber, unlike the mystic, did not believe that a human person could be united with God. We can only profess His unity.

Unity was not the issue for Buber but presence. An ever abiding presence of God is one of the most central points in all of Buber’s works. It remains the most prevalent issue in his personal life and particularly in the formulation and presentation of the dialogical principle. It is most obvious in his personal translation and interpretation of God speaking to Moses in the burning bush. Buber, unlike the majority of translators of this

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114 The Way of Response: Martin Buber, Selections From His Writings edited by N.N. Glatzer
116 Ibid., 30.
117 Ibid., 36.
famous passage Exodus 3:14, “I am that I am” translates the Hebrew *ehyeh asher ehyeh* into German *ich bin da als der ich da bin*, “I will be there such as I will be there.”\(^{118}\) This highly personalized translation accurately reflects Buber’s idiosyncratic belief in God’s presence - always ever-abiding. To him religion is presence. His love and attention to God’s presence is seen in his fondness for Psalm 73:23 (his favorite psalm),\(^{119}\) *Va’ani tamid imakh* - “I am continually with Thee.”\(^{120}\) For that reason these words are etched on his tombstone.

Just as there are the ambiguities in the Christian world regarding mystics and mysticism, there are ambiguities and inconsistencies in the non-Christian understanding of the same topics. Such ambiguities are evident even in the attempt at differentiating pure transcendence from pure immanence.\(^{121}\) One must remember that even pantheists manifest deep affinity for God in some fashion and for the most part never can completely make the identity between God and the world complete.\(^{122}\) Failure to do so has produced the panentheistic approach to God. Both forces (pantheism and panentheism) have influenced Buber’s thinking. Such confusion, brought upon Buber by both pantheistic and panentheistic thinkers,\(^{123}\) did not allow him to see clearly the solution inherent in analogy of being which allows the finite individual to be in union with God as an infinite and distinct personal being.\(^{124}\) Just because he cannot be labeled a

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\(^{118}\) Pamela Vermes, *Buber*, 56 and 64.

\(^{119}\) Aubrey Hodes, *Martin Buber, An Intimate Portrait*, 144.

\(^{120}\) Ibid., 226. Vermes translates the Hebrew as “Nevertheless, I am with you always.” Cf. *Buber*, 104.

\(^{121}\) New Catholic Encyclopedia, 947.

\(^{122}\) Ibid.

\(^{123}\) Plato, Neoplatonists, Plotinus, Eckhart, Cusa, Boehme, Spinoza

\(^{124}\) New Catholic Encyclopedia, 949.
"true mystic," for reasons already stated, does not or should not mitigate his authentic search for God in relationship, nor lessen the understanding of his ardor in appreciating and pursuing the presence of God in his life. His pursuit of, and wrestling with, these issues and his subsequent attempts to explain God's relationship with creatures merely reflects the problem throughout time that thinkers have experienced in trying to comprehend an infinite God.

SUMMARY

For Hasidists, the hallowing of the world occurs in this letting-in process. God's indwelling is temporary, however. The presence of God, called shekinah, which dwells in the straying and wandering of this earth is half of the dualistic Hasidic view of God. The other half is the essence of God, Elohim, which has been withdrawn from creatures. Redemption will one day reunite the two in eternity. The Hasidists take up and expand the Jewish idea that what we do in this world is just as important as what is done in the world to come. Buber expanded this idea in his theme of responsibility and the sacredness of everyday living.

The Hasidic way began with the relation between man and God. The act of living in the world takes man along a spiritual path that leads to a life of redemptive worship. Buber moved out of this context and stated in I and Thou a philosophy removed from Hasidic mystical roots. Moving from the mystical development of everyday life, he spoke about
the means of unification and realization of the person through the dialogical principle.

The journey ends with what Buber calls the “perfect relation” the one we know as God.\textsuperscript{125} Buber eventually identified the Hasidic way as religion and rejected it for his own “religiousness” that contained no doctrine.\textsuperscript{126} It was for this reason that Buber creatively transformed the Hasidic legends and tradition into his own theological anthropology.\textsuperscript{127} What Baal Shem Tov originally discovered in God as “the seeker and the one who responds,” Buber would develop into “the calling of the infinite and the answer of the finite.” He would frame the encounter in the dialogical schema.\textsuperscript{128} Baal Shem Tov’s mystical ecstasy would be turned into relation and action by Buber. The task is now to mend the world by entering the relation. Buber had traveled far from his first contact with the \textit{Midrashin} when he visited the \textit{Zaddikim} in Sadagora as a boy. Although he popularized Hasidism, he never became a Hasid but combined the Hasidic spirit with the world of dialogue.\textsuperscript{129} He retained Baal Shem Tov’s principle of polarity but heightened it in the I-Thou relation in adding the concept of uniqueness that strives for perfection through the successive encounters. As Baal Shem Tov brought to all Jews the distilled message of the divine sparks that stated that every facet of existence was infused with the spark of the divine, so Buber opened to Jew and Gentile the always present I-Thou relationship through which a person becomes that which God intends through their mutual encounter.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{125} Pamela Vermes, \textit{Buber}, 12.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Manheim called it a poetic-philosophical product.
\textsuperscript{128} Werner Manheim, \textit{Martin Buber}, 5.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 80.
Hasidism influenced Buber's view of mysticism, the holy and the “I-Thou” relation. This religious movement provided a good solution to Buber’s 1) fear of mysticism as a technique of losing the I in relationship, 2) his admonishment of those who do not take personal responsibility for life and, 3) Buber’s sense of the grave importance of truly being present to others as was seen in the Mehé meeting. Hasidism was a mysticism that hallowed the everyday events of life. It engages life as sacred and so life should not be escaped through withdrawal. Single-handedly, Buber revitalized Hasidism and made it palatable to the mystical tastes and inclinations of modern day Jewry. The world was to be engaged, “for man cannot love God in truth without loving the world.” 131

Human life then does not touch absoluteness through some absorptive mystical state, but only in relation with the absolute in a dialogical, I-Thou relationship. The creature is not to become like God or like another more famous figure than himself. Every man is to fulfill his own uniqueness by being whole, by being fully himself. Buber was fond of quoting this snippet of a Hasidic saying, “‘In the world to come,’ so runs a celebrated saying of the Hasidic rabbi Zusya, they will not ask me, ‘Why were you not Moses?’ They will ask me, ‘Why were you not Zusya?’” 132 The saying exemplifies that God and man stand in a dialogic relation through which a person becomes who they are meant to be in this life.

131 Martin Buber, Hasidism and Modern Man, 10.
132 Franz Rosenzweig, The Star of Redemption, 17.
One can detect Buber's moving away from Hasidism's mystical roots to the existential element in Hasidic teaching. It is not in the mystical relationship or absorption that authentic personality occurs but in the dialogic meeting of the I with Thou (God).\textsuperscript{133} Buber rejected the mystical because he felt it represented a separation from the "religious" and the "non-religious"\textsuperscript{134} whereas he saw life as undifferentiated with no distinction between sacred and profane. The dialogical relationship applied to history also, especially the history of Israel. History therefore is "the work of God and man together," for history is man's response to God's call. All history takes place within the dialogue due to the act of personal appropriation.\textsuperscript{135}

Buber's own highly personal appropriations and their subsequent influence is most clearly seen in his understanding of Cusa, Boehme, pantheism and panentheism. They are notable due to the impact upon Buber's thinking and development of a "secular mysticism." In his own words he denied being a mystic and according to most definitions of mysticism he would not be considered one. However, some distinctive elements associated with mysticism are important in his theorizing - presence, ineffability, and love of neighbor. His "secular mysticism" is considered as a philosophical explanation of a religious or theological relationship.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{134} Martin Buber, Moses. The Revelation and the Covenant, 131.
\textsuperscript{135} Will Herberg, The Writings of Martin Buber, 33-34.
One must read Buber carefully to fully understand, in his circular, and at times poetic writing, his unqualified endorsement of our relation with God as Absolute Being or Absolute Thou (they are the same for Buber). The infinite calls and we respond. Buber synthesized the thoughts of Baal Shem Tov and Buber's contemporaries adding them to his own novel ideas received from Cusa and Boehme. From this melange he brought forth a highly convincing approach to the anthropological study of the human person. The person stands before God and all happens in view of God. That is his basis for philosophical, theological and anthropological thought.

The following section is a presentation of his understanding of God and our relation with him as the Absolute Thou. If all of our I-Thou relationships are based on our relation with the Absolute Thou (God) it is imperative to begin here even if the following sections may have served as a good introduction to the terms used in this brief section. Buber's view of God is highly idiosyncratic. He has left significant parts of Hasidism behind and has forged his own view of God and his relationship with him.

Reacting to the rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment, Buber viewed religion as "presence." Man's true religious situation was "being there in the Presence..."\(^1\) He separated himself from religion as it was presented in history and defined it in relation to

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\(^1\) Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 95.
God alone. As was seen in this paper's previous section of "Secular Mysticism," Buber turned aside from any concept of mystical union with God, choosing instead, as the foundation of his "religion," the encounter, being present to the other.

Buber abandoned philosophical Monism to embrace the existential concept of confrontation. He also shifted his attention from "the pantheistic Unconditioned Drive" of the religions of the East and turned to the Biblical God whom he began to address as the Absolute Thou. The series of lectures that Buber delivered in January, February and March of 1922 at the Frankfurt Lehrhaus became the source of much of the material used in I and Thou. Through those lectures Buber developed the connection between the Absolute Thou and religion as presence. He entitled the course "Religion as Presence" which dealt with God as presence. The Eternal or Absolute Thou is ever-present. Man is capable of living in the presence of the divine because God is constantly Thou, who stands over against man. God, unlike other Thou's in I-Thou relationships, cannot become an It. Therefore we can say nothing about God, who can "only be addressed and not expressed." We can only respond to the God who presents himself in the meeting. We cannot discover Him.

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2 Ibid., 20. He began to change his thought on this subject around 1919.
3 Ibid., 12-13. This occurred by 1922.
4 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber and the Eternal, 22.
5 Martin Buber, Land Thou, 80-81.
6 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber and the Eternal, 79.
Clearly Buber has moved from the God of the philosophers, who see God as an object of thought, to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob, whom man knows in the meeting and to whom man can say only Thou. As a Jew, Buber did not feel compelled to defend the existence of God. He accepted it. God was always present. This idea of presence became an abiding treasure for Buber when he realized how Moses had experienced God. 

Buber’s understanding of the eternal Thou is closely linked to his portrayal of the I-Thou relationship. More specifically, from the dialogical principle flows Buber’s context for conceiving the eternal Thou. Therefore as in the I-Thou relationship of man to man, there is no self-appropriation that is exchanged or known in the meeting but only the ineffable revelation of each person to the other. In the burning bush, God does not reveal what he is as Buber would state some translators of the Bible contend, when they translate God’s words as “I am who I am.” Instead, Buber translates the Hebrew, Ehyeh asher ehyeh as “I will be there as I will be there.” This translation highlights the existential relationship of God with his creatures and not the essentialist or content approach. It looks to the future, which is a Jewish theme, when God will be in whatever fashion he decides to reveal Himself. It is a promise of everlasting presence, not restricted in anyway or to any place. The statement reveals God through relationship. No one can learn to meet God. We simply meet Him when we meet Him. God is revealing Himself in the present, in the here and now, in whatever form that he chooses. This God of Israel is present to his people and the Egyptians soon learned that He is present to the Israelites, stood in their midst and directed their cause. Buber during his life became utterly convinced of God’s

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eternal presence and that he could address this God in the encounter as Thou. One of the central themes of Hasidism was "presentness." Buber took this idea of the ever-newness of every day and every situation and baptized it for his own anthropology of man. He named it "holy insecurity." It means believing that God will be present in every situation because he has promised to be there, not in the expected way, but in the way he so chooses to reveal Himself. God as the eternal Thou is always present, but man has to turn to Him.

But how does one encounter this eternal Thou? Every time man speaks the primary word "I-Thou," he is also addressing the eternal Thou. Every Thou points to the eternal Thou. "The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal Thou."9 These lines of relation extend beyond each singular Thou and all meet in the eternal Thou. "Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou; by means of every particular Thou the primary word addresses the eternal Thou."10

Not only does dialogue serve such a unique purpose of encounter, but the I-Thou relation allows the person to dedicate to God not merely our personhood but also our relations to one another. As a person turns to God, he "need not turn away from any other I-Thou relation." This explains Buber's statement that every I-Thou relation is found in and is part of the I-Thou relation with the Absolute Thou. We are to bring every I-Thou

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9 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 75.
10 Ibid.
relationship to Him and let them be fulfilled in the "face of God." Therefore, to Buber, every man who says Thou ultimately means his eternal Thou.\footnote{Maurice Friedman, \textit{Encounter on the Narrow Bridge}, 135.}

"In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us, we look out toward the fringe of the eternal \textit{Thou}; in each we are aware of the breath from the eternal \textit{Thou}; in each \textit{Thou} we address the eternal \textit{Thou}.\footnote{Martin Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 101.} No matter in what sphere (world of nature, animals or man) man travels, he is always confronted by the eternal Thou. It is always in the context of I-Thou that Buber explains who the person is for another person and who God is for each person. Therefore, the way of meeting the Absolute Thou occurs in the same way as meeting any other individual i.e., the meeting leads to subjects becoming persons.

"Men do not find God if they stay in the world. They do not find Him if they leave the world. He who goes out with his whole Being to meet his 'Thou' and carries to it all being that is in the world, finds Him who cannot be sought. If you explore the life of things and of conditioned being you come to the unfathomable, if you deny the life of things and of conditioned being you stand before nothingness, if you hallow this life you meet the living God.\footnote{Ibid., 79.}"

In every relation man seeks the eternal Thou. He holds within himself an inborn \textit{Thou} that is realized in each relation but consummated in none.\footnote{Ibid., 75.} This "inborn \textit{Thou}" might be explained by saying that man possesses an "inborn drive" for the presence of the eternal Thou. "His sense of \textit{Thou}, which cannot be satiated till he finds the endless \textit{Thou}, had the \textit{Thou} present to it from the beginning; the presence had only to become wholly real to
him in the reality of the hallowed life of the world.”\textsuperscript{15} It is in being present to the world that man is present to God.

Man can know God only in relation. He cannot possess Him\textsuperscript{16} nor hold Him within.\textsuperscript{17} Although God is incomprehensible we can know Him through mutual relationship with other persons.\textsuperscript{18} Man is caught up in pure relation and his being is seized by the presence of the eternal Thou.\textsuperscript{19} The action of being seized by the presence is not equivalent to “experiencing God,” a term which Buber abhorred.\textsuperscript{20} We can however know only the God of the moment which raises the issue of continuity.

Buber points out how others ruin the sense of continuity by concretisizing or appropriating the event. To Buber the term “living experience” deals with man’s subjectivity and concretizes the true encounter into a reflected upon encounter. He recognizes this as man’s attempt to hold onto God and the experience of God. “Man desires to possess God; he desires a continuity in space and time of possession of God.”\textsuperscript{21} Religion tends to hold onto these experiences in order to give the “experience of God” continuity. Buber saw this separation of the God-human experience from everyday life as the destruction of continuity.\textsuperscript{22} When man lifts the encounter with God out of his total

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 80.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 113-114.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 104-106.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, 14-15.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Martin Buber, I and Thou, 116-117.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Rivka Horwitz, Buber’s Way to I and Thou, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Martin Buber, I and Thou, 113.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Rivka Horwitz, Buber’s Way to I and Thou, 50. Even as early as February 5th of 1922 the topic of continuity was an issue.
\end{itemize}

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life experience or out of the encounter, he is making an idol of the experience. He has forgotten that the religious does not occur *within* the human being. Buber cautions against the frequent manufacturing of idols: money, power, woman and God. When man approaches God he must leave all behind, e.g., his possessions and pre-conceived notions about God. Stripped of everything, man enters the relation with the eternal Thou hallowing this life by meeting the living God.

Buber is still left with the problem of the lack of continuity since each I-Thou encounter is a single, non-repeatable moment. These encounters are limited, discrete, and non-extended events. The only uniform progression for Buber is found in the I-It world. But the I-It is a non-actual world. As he was working out his beliefs in the lectures delivered in 1922, he would ask in a discouraged voice regarding the I-It relation: "Is it indeed true that this is our life, that this is our world?"

The relationship with the Thou cannot be looked upon as moments of experience, to be remembered or embraced in any way. The essential character of this relationship can only be the human being standing in relation to a Thou. The same holds true for the eternal Thou and is exemplified in the burning bush passage from Exodus. The eternal Thou stands in relationship and reveals himself as Being. His essence is Being. This essence is not content but relationship. The Lord is the God of the covenant and he remains the same. Moses wished to know his name so

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23 Ibid., 53.
25 Ibid., 79.
27 W. H. Gispen, *Exodus, Bible Student's Commentary*, 55.
that he might know who God is. From Buber's viewpoint Moses never did discover who God is or what his essence is except that he is always in relationship and that the God who was present to the Israelites does not change, is faithful, and will be there as he shall be there in the future. The existential encounter is highlighted and never the essence of an I-Thou encounter.

The I-Thou relationship is never fulfilled through knowledge only but through existential actualization. Religious knowledge, however, has no content other than the mutual contact between two active existences facing each other. In other words, religious knowledge = mutual contact. Buber sees these Thou-relations, which of necessity change from Thou into an It, as moments of life that come and go, lightning flashes in the sky of life that disappear, among which there is no continuity. One would reach the conclusion that a Thou-world is impossible. It is nothing but an infinity of Thou-moments.

It is only the relationship with the eternal Thou that cannot turn into an It. Therefore the pure relation of finite creature with the eternal Thou offers the only chance for continuity. The absolute Thou in our relation is the "inviolable core of a continuous Thou-world." The Absolute Thou's being unfolds only in relation. "I shall be there as I shall be there" takes on an even greater significance in Buber's thinking. The very being of God provides the continuity, for he is always present, and our relationship from day to day in

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28 Rivka Horwitz, Buber's Way to I and Thou, 77. A quote from Buber's February 19, 1922 lecture at Lehrhaus.
29 Rivka Horwitz, Buber's Way to I and Thou, 85. February 26, 1922 lecture
all life's encounters becomes part of that continuity. It is the other half of the continuity, if you will, for the continuity is only found in the I-Thou relationship. From the eternal Thou's everlasting presence flows the continuity of Thou-moments. It is the pure relation to an absolute Thou that creates continuity. "Actually, however, pure relation can only be raised to constancy in space and time by being embodied in the whole stuff of life." Man must realize God anew each day. In this idea lies the only authentic guarantee of continuity. From each pure encounter man comes away not having received a content but a presence, a presence as strength. This Buberian concept of continuity is to save man from the world of It, from a faith that provides for continuity in time and from cult that provides the continuity in space.

The Jewish concept of God was widened and deepened by Buber's thinking. God's action continues without pause, with God calling man and his world into being. Judaism states that man is the completer of creation and the initiator of redemption. Such a man can attain the fullness of dialogue only as a whole being. He must enter this dialogue with his whole being which includes every aspect of life i.e., social and political life, private relations, inner intentions and outer acts. The eternal Thou enters the world only when man lives a true life and this is called redemption. God can only be found in this concrete sphere of being where man lives in concrete reality.

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30 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 114.
31 Ibid., 110.
32 Ibid., 114.
Encountering God in this concrete reality calls for a response. Only through the
wholeness of the person's response to God can the person become aware of his or her
own personal direction. This personal direction arises from the ever-renewed act of
entering into the I-Thou reciprocal relation and the going back and forth between this
relationship and the "I-It" which is taken up and interpenetrated by the Thou. From this
exchange the person becomes more aware of his personal direction, not as mission from
God specifically, but as a deeper realization of who he is as a person. As this ever-
renewed person, fresh from each encounter of I-Thou, goes out to meet the world, he goes
forth to God. There is no empirical way of knowing what is communicated in the
encounter with the eternal Thou especially since the encounter is ineffable. Nor can it be
ascertained how the repeated I-Thou meetings reveal a more distinct or focused direction
to the human person. God is in the world in others, in I's. To love this world means to
be ready to meet the real world. Anything less is to psychologize or philosophize the
world. By such processes the proponents of these fields of study focus only on the I. But
according to Buber, "Dialogue" is the only way of describing the interhuman relationship.

PRAYER AND THE ETERNAL THOU

Dialogue serves another purpose: meeting inborn desire. It follows that if man has an
inborn desire to relate to the eternal Thou, then there must be optimal ways to achieve the
desired end. As always, Buber has a highly personalized solution. Even if the human

33 Maurice Friedman, Encounter on the Narrow Ridge, 135.
being would rather attend to God in such pursuit of God-relationship, rather than the
world, Buber says he cannot forget the world and go directly to God. Nor can he have an
I-Thou relationship with God alone, putting aside all others into the I-It relationship. You
cannot both truly pray to God and profit by the world for in the end you know God in the
same way as the world. All of this speaks to man’s religious life. No solution can be
figured out, only that life is to be lived “continually, ever anew, without foresight,
without forethought, without prescription.”

Even though man reaches God through his relationship to the world, there comes a time
when man turns to God in his solitude and addresses Him in prayer. Prayer, for Buber,
refers to man turning directly to God. The creature asks to be present to the Presence in
dialogue, an I to Thou relation. Prayer demands that man be wholly turned toward God.

We begin to speak to God only when speech dies within us.

True prayer is nothing other than standing in reciprocity, speaking “Thou”; such prayer is
included in the term, “pure relation.” Prayer is an entering into relation over and over
again with the eternal presence. God does not name himself in prayer but reveals that he
is the revealer. Prayer, true prayer, was the solution to the problem that Buber saw in

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34 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 107.
35 Ibid., 95.
36 Martin Buber, Eclipse of God, 126.
37 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 103-104.
38 Rivka Horwitz, Buber’s Way to I and Thou, 122.
39 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 112.
religions. Now cult and belief could unite in pure relation. True prayer assures the authentic life. Instead of objectifying God, true prayer enters into relation with Him.

Shortly after Easter in 1914 an elderly English clergyman visited Buber in Berlin. At the end of the visit, the clergyman asked: “Do you believe in God?” Buber could give no real answer. Seven years later riding on the train to visit friends, the answer came:

“If believing in God means to speak of Him in the third person, then I probably do not believe in God; or at least, I do not know if it is permissible for me to say that I believe in God. For I know, when I speak of Him in the third person whenever it happens, and it has to happen again and again, there is no other way, then my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth so quickly that one cannot even call it speech.”

That inspiration brought the sudden awareness that God must always be addressed in the second person, as the Confronted -- as Thou. His book I and Thou would spring from such inspiration and his entire philosophical anthropology would rest on this discovery of the new name for God. It was the beginning of a new way to pray.

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40 Rivka Horwitz, Buber’s Way to I and Thou, 136.
To date Buber has presented the genesis of the dialogic principle that arose from life's experiences, his wrestling with the concept of God and how a human individual can relate to him. Next is the development of the principle itself that will continue to explain how the dialogue adequately accounts for man's becoming a person through relationship. This presentation of both "Religious Influences" and "Absolute Thou" comprises the "Thou-half" of the I-Thou relation.
BUBER AND THE DIALOGICAL PRINCIPLE

Martin Buber's view of the human person is completely subsumed under his dialogic principle which in turn is placed within the context of his own uniquely conceived anthropology. All of the elements of his anthropology are connected to the dialogic principle: I-Thou concept of person, the relation, distance, freedom and choice, relation with the Eternal Thou, and the between. This study will reflect upon these elements and will eventually apply those that help us to portray the Annunciation scene of the New Testament as the archetype of the dialogical principle. To understand the human person is to understand the dialogic principle. Person and principle are inseparable, since person flows from the dialogic principle. Following this, there will be an investigation of von Balthasar's work and how it also ultimately relates to the Annunciation as will be seen in chapter four.

Theological investigation and specifically theological anthropology is the arena of investigation of this paper; there is a need for a brief explanation of where Buber's thought can be situated in this study. Buber preferred the label philosophical anthropology, since it allowed the person to reflect on the subject-object relationship of the terms without engaging in the complications of theological discourse or religious talk which he found less than meaningful. He proposed that the theological element had admittedly determined a great part of his study and writing and was the basis of his

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1 Will Herberg, *The Writings of Martin Buber*, 12.
thought. However he made the distinction between formal theology and his own religious experience. He wished only to speak of the latter. To Buber it is not possible to draw God himself into his explanations as an object of thought. God could only be experienced in an encounter.

Therefore in speaking of Buber’s theological elements of his anthropological philosophy this existential foundation must be kept in mind. Such “philosophy, perceived through experience, communicates a condition in which the name of God is not replaced by a concept. Buber speaks of an encounter as the basis of communication.” This study examines theological anthropology which both von Balthasar and Buber embraced. The context of theological anthropology was accepted by both since neither man could conceptualize man without the presence of God nor conceive of the human person not being in relation to God.

Emil Brunner quoting Karl Heim has said that Buber’s discovery and subsequent analysis of the “I-Thou” and “I-It” relationships “constituted a ‘Copernican revolution’ in the thinking not only of Europe but of the whole of mankind.” In similar fashion Reinhold Niebuhr called the appearance of I and Thou “a great event in the religious life of the West.” Like all great discoveries there is a background to the seeking and finding. Buber’s “discovery” rose from the personal crucible of suffering and confusion.

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3 The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Author Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 690.
4 Arthur A. Cohen, Martin Buber, 10.
5 Lev Shestov, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Great Twentieth Century Jewish Philosophers, 238.
6 Ibid.
Shortly after celebrating his *bar mitzvah*, Buber no longer put on *tefillin* and turned away from Jewish religious practices. For several years he remained in spiritual confusion and as he would later describe, “in versatile fullness of spirit, but without Judaism, without humanity, and without the presence of the divine.”\(^7\) Out of the war years, came thinkers whose thoughts had been molded by those events when man fought man. In search of answers, Martin Buber fell upon “buried treasure,” i.e., the dialogical principle of understanding human existence. He gladly shared this buried treasure with a world shaken to its foundation, in search of relationship with others but still feeling alienated and estranged from man,\(^8\) nature and God. How to begin again? How to heal a world that lay in ruins? The dialogic principle presented in the dramatic and at times lyrical style of Buber in the description of the “I-Thou” relationship was balm for an injured world. Mankind- bereft of relationship, distrustful, and isolated- took Buber’s discovery with eager hands and applied it to philosophy, theology, education and politics.\(^9\) Kohn and Friedman cite Buber’s thinking and “contribution to an incredibly large number of disciplines.”\(^10\) He pointed the way back to authentic human existence by stating that the encounter, the meeting of person to person, of I to Thou, would be the source of new life. As countries lay in shambles and deep segments of the male population had been destroyed, the cry was, “What have we done?” and “Who are we?” For Buber the answer

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\(^7\) Ibid., 241.

\(^8\) In both the writings of Buber and von Balthasar the term “man” is used in referring to all individuals, male and female. Their language will be retained as reflective of their usage in their era.

\(^9\) Ronald Smith in his introduction to *I and Thou* cites Buber’s influence on the theological thinking of Karl Heim, Friedrich Gogarten, Eberhard Grisebach, Paul Tillich, and Karl Barth. In the Anglo-Saxon world the following have explicitly acknowledged Buber’s influence: J.H. Oldham, M. Channing-Pearce, Reinhold Niebuhr and Sir Herbert Read. The field of psychiatry has shown a marked interest as demonstrated in Dr. Leslie Farber, Chairman of the Faculty of the Washington School of Psychiatry, inviting Buber to deliver the Alanson White lectures.
life. As countries lay in shambles and deep segments of the male population had been destroyed, the cry was, "What have we done?" and "Who are we?" For Buber the answer was to turn to your fellow man. "All real living is meeting." Mankind had become sick by alienation; wellness would occur in the sphere between man and man. Because the dialogic view was based on the concrete everydayness of life, others understood that authentic self-hood would be gained by entering into a confirming relationship with each other. Buber became convinced that only by living in a dialogical exchange of I-Thou could humanity be saved. By turning from a dualistic objectification, an individual would renounce forms of manipulation and power and embrace another in true presence and love. By such living, man was redeemable.

If a loving relationship between man and man had been lost, so had man's relationship with God during those years. The dialogic principle spoke to God as the "Eternal Thou" who was present in all true dialogical encounters, making all encounters possible and fulfilling them. We can only meet God in our encounters with others. The living God cannot be described or defined, but only encountered in the dialogical process.

"God cannot be inferred in anything - in nature, say, as its author, or in history as its master, or in the subject as the self that is thought in it. Something else is not 'given' and God then elicited from it; but God is the Being that is directly, most nearly, and lastingly, over against us, that may properly only be addressed, not expressed."  

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12 Ibid., 75.
13 Ibid., 80-81.
When the peoples of earth were asking “Does a God exist who could permit the Nazi death camp?,” Buber spoke in words carved out of the heart of Judaism but enlivened by his insights and poetic phrasing. He stood in the face of the “death of God philosophers and theologians” and endured them, but at the same time moved “existentially toward a new happening... in which the word between heaven and earth will again be heard.”

Such a word was heard not in churches, on “holy” days but in a religion lived day-by-day in a life of dialogue.

“Of course God is the ‘wholly Other’; but He is also the wholly Same, the wholly Present. Of course He is the Mysterium Tremendum that appears and overthrows; but He is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than my I.”

Putting aside the obvious paradox regarding God’s transcendence and immanence in the above quote, Buber demonstrates who God is for him as he meets him in the relationship. Buber, of course, would deny formulating a philosophy of religion. From his roots in Hasidism flows his “philosophy of dialogue.” He points out the road on which we may meet God. Every person must find God for himself and this is possible only in “relation.” We do not discover God, he is no object of our thought; we can only respond to him. Through our relation with people, God enters the world. “Meet the world with the fullness of your being and you shall meet Him.”

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15 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 79.
16 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber and the Eternal, 23.
17 Ibid., 16.
equals mutual contact for Buber. But in this mutual contact we cannot possess God. Revelation yields no cognitive knowledge of God. Even the term "Eternal Thou," when referring to God, reflects not a description of God but only our experience with Him.

The concept of the dialogue was not an *eureka* experience, but more a gradual development of a process that took place in him without his realizing it. Viewing the warring nations who could no longer be in dialogue, Buber discovered that dialogue was the central question, at the heart of mankind's fate. As a matter of fact, Buber wrote his first draft of *I and Thou* in 1916. Facing the devastation of the world war caused Buber to focus his attention on solutions which allowed him a clearer vision: "When I drafted the first sketch of this book (more than forty years ago), I was impelled by an inward necessity. A vision which had come to me again, had now reached a firm clarity. This clarity was so manifestly suprapersonal in its nature that I at once knew I had to witness to it."18 As mentioned the concept of dialogue was a gradual growth of an idea. Quite possibly those early years of contact with the Hasidic community provided the seminal ideas for Buber's contribution to philosophical, anthropological and theological thought.

After the war, between the years of 1919 and 1922 he rewrote the book in its final form. At the time of his writing *I and Thou*, he knew of no related writing or teaching from his own era with regard to the dialogical principle.19 In the years before writing the final draft he encountered the writings of F. Ebner (*The Word and the Spiritual Realities*...
[1921], and F. Rosenzweig (Star of Redemption [1921]) but he asserted that they did not, "...affect my own thought"\textsuperscript{20} regarding the dialogic principle in I and Thou.

I - THOU
AND I-IT

With this background of the writing of I and Thou, Buber began to explain being in his reflections on the anthropological view of man. His interest lies in the human person’s twofold way of relating to being. He shied away from systematizing, since system meant a monologue (thus his I and Thou would remain a single volume instead of the originally planned first of five volumes).\textsuperscript{21} Man stood at the center of his philosophical endeavor, hence his arena was, for the most part, anthropology. De-emphasizing any organized anthropology, however, he said, "I have no teaching, but I carry on conversation."\textsuperscript{22} In the same vein, Buber stated, "I demonstrate reality, ....I demonstrate something in reality that is no longer seen, or seen too little. I take my listener by the hand and lead him to the window. I push open the window and point outward. I have no doctrine. I conduct a conversation."\textsuperscript{23}

It is not through a system but only through the I-Thou relationship that the individual becomes a person. Besides Hasidism’s influence on Buber’s development of the I-Thou

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, 324.
\textsuperscript{22} Maurice Friedman, Encounter on the Narrow Ridge, 129.
\textsuperscript{23} The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 693.
relationship, the relationship with his wife, Paula, may be the most decisive influence. Like the Biblical Ruth, Paula left family, home, and her faith and country to follow her husband. Much of Buber’s dialogical thinking grew out of this marital relationship. This marriage provided an ongoing healing experience to the “mismeeting” of the four year old wounded boy who was now renewed and made whole by meeting. Paula was his Thou and provided the meeting in which his wounded trust resulting from his broken relationship with his mother could flourish. The love which he poetically describes in I and Thou was found with Paula.

The selection of the words I and Thou joined forever by Buber’s hyphen reflects his understanding that all life, all experience is found in the relationship of I to Thou. It is a relation of presence placing demands on the partner on each side of the hyphen. Human understanding recognizes that one being is over against another being. In the encounter, noticing the space between, the person grasps as an object of thought the other who is now in relation. Before he can examine it or classify it, the other is present, subject to subject. Being, at first, shows itself in terms of its very self. Only then can it enter the structure of knowledge. Then as an It, it enters into categories of description and analysis. What are now very popular categories of understanding relationship, I-Thou

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24 Although German Idealism influenced Buber’s thinking when he moved to Berlin in the winter of 1900 for further study under Georg Simmel, the noted German philosopher and sociologist, and the philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey, known for his development of an emphatic understanding of history and life, he states that they had no influence to his knowledge on his I-Thou philosophy. Cf. Pamela Vermes, Buber, 5-6.
25 “From letters published in Briefwechsel it is obvious that Buber depended on her in those days, and perhaps always, in more ways than one. Writing to her in a fit of depression, he told her: ‘Your letters are the only thing. Besides them perhaps the thought that there is a mother in you, the belief that there is...I have always and always looked for my mother.’” Cf. Pamela Vermes, Buber, 7.
26 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 40.
and I-It, stem from Buber's work. The philosophical poem of I and Thou has so popularized the categories that we take them for granted. These primary words (I-Thou, I-It) as Dr. Buber referred to them, reflect man's twofold way of being.

Man experiences the world in a twofold fashion. This statement follows from Buber's view that man is twofold in his attitude. Such attitude is based on the twofold nature of the primary words that he speaks. "I-Thou" and "I-It" are the primary words but the I is not the same in both terms. The I of the primary "I-It" appears as individuality and objectifies itself thereby becoming conscious of itself. In this "attitude" the I perceives beings as objects of reflection and knowledge and information. This "attitude leads to being differentiated from other individualities." Such differentiation leads the I of the I-It to experience and to use as the I appropriates to itself what surrounds it. It merely becomes conscious of itself as "being such-and-such and nothing else." Buber sees this individual who differentiates itself from others as being "remote from true being." The I of individuality (I-It) does not share in reality. The process of appropriating, differentiating self from others, and using objects locks this I into the world of unreality. The I-It is non-mutual and only one directional from the I to It only. The world of philosophy belongs out of necessity to the I-It relation. Buber points out that only It can

27 Ibid., 3.
28 Ibid., 62.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 62-63.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 64.
33 Arthur A. Cohen, Martin Buber, 27.
be arranged in order. As things move from being our Thou to our It, can they be coordinated. The Thou knows no system of coordination.\textsuperscript{34}

An incorrect reading of Buber would say that the I-Thou relationship is always to be sought and lived in. What Buber meant by the I-It relationship was that our attitude toward reality states that we encounter reality as objects that are to be controlled, manipulated and examined. He states there is nothing wrong with such an attitude. This is a necessary response given to man to live successfully in this world. The “I-It” world comprises perception, imagination, the will and the intellect. It is through these categories, and our feelings that accompany them, that man can live in the essential demands of daily existence.

Moving away from objects, that second manner of relating to reality is person to person or subject to subject. Part of the difficulty in understanding the use of Thou is that, in the English language, it has religious overtones or at least the suggestion of distance or superiority.\textsuperscript{35} Putting aside the grammatical arguments, we turn to the more important ideas of reciprocity and mutuality revealed in the I-Thou relationship. This is the vehicle by which an individual becomes a person. The I-Thou relationship reveals the distinct nature and uniqueness of each person in the relationship. The uniqueness occurs in each

\textsuperscript{34} Martin Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 30-31.

\textsuperscript{35} “The German word \textit{du} implies an intimacy and familiarity admittedly not contained in you, but \textit{thou} in English is now addressed almost exclusively to the Deity. The impression is therefore given that the book is about man and God, which is quite misleading, though it is ‘also’ about man and God.” Cf. Pamela Vermes, \textit{Buber}, 40.
single encounter, for by so doing the person is unique, never to be repeated even in a new encounter. This is part of the unrepeatability of life and its meaning. Buber stated, "Through a ‘Thou’ a man becomes ‘I.’" It is only through the I-You relationship that one’s distinctive selfhood is born and lives. In his oft quoted, "All real living is meeting," Buber means that outside of meeting there is no real living. He did not mean that meeting is only one particular form or expression of living. One cannot stand alone and be a person, or be unique or be a self. Even these ideas or concepts are pale shadows of their true reality found not only in meeting but specifically in a meeting that arises from a dialogic communion. This I of the I-Thou is not the same I of the I-It. This I is spoken and seen when one stands forth with the entirety of one’s being over against another being and steps into essential relation with him. These primary words do not signify things but refer to relations. Both primary words are spoken from the being but only the I-Thou can be spoken with the whole being, whereas the primary word I-It can never be spoken with the whole being.

The I of the I-Thou primary word becomes conscious of itself in subjectivity and makes its appearance as person. Only by entering a relation with other persons does the person make its appearance as person. The I of I-Thou is real as it shares in reality. This I contacts the Thou and is stirred with the breath of the Thou (God). The person, the I of

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36 This phrase is also translated “All real life is encounter.” Cf. Pamela Vermes, *Buber*, 43.
38 Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J., *God As Person in the Writings of Martin Buber*, 22.
the I-Thou, knows "thyself to have being."\textsuperscript{40} The speaking of the "Thou" does not have something as object. Instead, the speaking of "Thou" establishes an immediate connection.\textsuperscript{41} This connection or relation is the goal of becoming. It is "the relation for whose sake man exists."\textsuperscript{42} From such an I-Thou relationship personality emerges although Buber never describes the elements or development of personality.

Nor, says Buber, is life comprised of purely "I-Thou" or "I-It" situations. It is this mixture of the two that makes life exciting and unpredictable. The known "it-ness" of you as a person with certain background experiences, likes and dislikes, your shared past experiences with me allows me to know you as object which you bring to every I-Thou encounter with me. The uniqueness of who you are can only be encountered each time you are a "Thou" for my "I." In that encounter we are present to each other in a time not to be used for description or analysis, that will follow later when we fall out of "I-Thouness" back into "I-Itness." The unchanging qualities and underpinnings of your self are brought to each new "I-Thou" encounter which encounter will soon be seen and examined by the "I-It" relationship. The known melts into the unknown in the "I-Thou" encounter, thereby enriching both members as each becomes more the person they are meant to be. Buber is not interested in discovering just when man becomes man, but only what makes up the uniqueness of man once he is man. And of course this uniqueness only comes from relationship. The entire world becomes what it is through the dialogue

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{41} Martin Buber, 27.
\textsuperscript{42} The Writings of Martin Buber, "The Question of the Single One," 72 - 73.
of generations. The becoming of the world takes place through us. Existing beings in meeting brings the world into existence. The world exists because it is an independent structure over against living being.

The primary word “I-Thou” is spoken with the whole being while the “I-It” can never be so spoken. Although a mystery, the “existence of I and the speaking of I are one and the same thing.”  

Because primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, it is only when they are spoken that brings about existence, “There is no I taken in itself.”  

When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object since Thou has no bounds. The speaker stands in relation. Whereas in addressing “It” the speaker utilizes transitive verbs to describe perceiving, feeling, thinking something which has bounds. The world of experience is found in I-It relations and the world of relation is found in the primary word I-Thou.  

Buber sees the primary word having a certain sanctity as one stands in relation to another. Staying in relation closes out the world of things. There is not even the experiencing of the other when relating is occurring. Only when one steps out of the relation, does that individual experience the other (back to the world of I-It). The I of this relationship must withhold nothing of himself. Then you behold the other as it exists in the present. The I and Thou each affect the other in a truly real relation.

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44 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 10.
During the brief discussion of Thou, Buber makes some interesting observations and conclusions that influence contemporary thought. “The Thou meets me through grace - it is not found by seeking.” Although not meaning grace in the usual Christian sense, Buber accurately describes here the entrance of God into the relationship. His own development of the encounter and the dialogic process is that the very speaking of the primary word to any Thou, including God, is an act of being, indeed “the act” of being itself. There is a reciprocity here as Thou comes to meet me and I simultaneously step forth into direct relation with the Thou.

Using poetic language in contra-distinction to philosophical and theological language, Buber states that this primary word I-Thou, that can be spoken only with the whole being, can never be achieved through one’s own agency nor can it take place without the I’s cooperation. But the “I” becomes through the relation with the “Thou.” As “I” becomes all that it should be as “I,” the “I” can say “Thou.”

Buber’s summation of these intriguing ideas follow: “All real living is meeting.” Such living occurs only in the present where present arises only where the “Thou” is present. “True beings are lived in the present, the life of objects in the past.” The description of “I-Thou” is not about two personal existences or even how they are relating, since that might fall back into I-It relations. Nor can a psychological description suffice. The important event is happening between the two persons, the between of Buber. What is

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47 Ibid., 11.
48 Ibid., 13.
specific to man can only be discovered in the living relation. The I exists only in relation to the Thou. Man with man is the only accurate way of viewing and understanding man. Individuals exist. Individual human beings exist in isolation but persons cannot exist in isolation. Gorillas can exist in isolation. But if a gorilla is raised in complete isolation all of its life, never seeing another gorilla, can you say that it is truly a gorilla just because it looks and acts for the most part and behaves like every other gorilla?

In summary, Buber, in I and Thou explores the role of man as an individual within his environment, as a social being and as an earth-bound creature trying to communicate with a superior power. The inter-relationship of man and his surroundings, of man and man, and man and God is so strong, says Buber, that every life includes these three elements: the I and the objective world, the I and the other man, and the I and God. The I as such does not exist. The I exists only in dual principles expressed in the terms that Buber calls the primary entities of I-Thou seen in the relationship of I and man, and I and God, and in I-It which is the I within the world of the I and objects.

The I is twofold because the basic word I-Thou is different from I-It. "There are not two kinds of man, but two poles of humanity." Every man lives then in this twofold I, between these two poles, being at one time a person and at another time an individual. Buber points out, "No man is pure person and no man individuality."  

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49 Ibid., 65.
50 Ibid.
His thinking must be understood on his terms and from his singular viewpoint, "without any dependency upon theories or doctrines of previous thinkers."\(^{52}\)

The two primary words or terms I-Thou and I-It cannot be objectivized by Buber in \textit{I and Thou}. There is no explanation of what is gained in each I-Thou encounter or how each member is enriched by each encounter. The giving and receiving that occurs in each true encounter likewise is not explicated nor could it be according to Buber’s thought regarding the inexpressibility of the encounter’s content. The spiritual substances of the I-Thou encounter, that are revealed either in speech or in a speechless manner are not described. He certainly does not delineate any content of the terms, I-Thou or I-It. Therefore, except for his “conversational framework,” there is no description of what the human being brings to this relation or what he takes away. The partners are present to each other and communication takes place even without words. The encounter brings meaning and direction which will be seen in later sections. Herein lies the theoretical groundwork upon which will be built man’s dialogic essence through relation, his relationship with God, his uniqueness, direction (task), potentiality and freedom.

\(^{51}\) Arthur Cohen, \textit{Martin Buber}, 27.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 24.
What follows are three main features of Buber's dialogical principle -- uniqueness, direction, and freedom.

Martin Buber seems to have primarily relied on two main sources (Hasidism and Nicolas of Cusa) in developing his highly personalized belief in uniqueness. Hasidism taught that it was not necessary for the individual to do great or extraordinary feats in order to redeem the Divine sparks. The Jew need not be someone special or unusual as was seen in the Hasidic tale of Zusya going to heaven and being asked why he had not become Zusya (as opposed to becoming Moses). To be oneself was enough. Every human being is special because each person is unique. The uniqueness is made manifest in each person's life as each one displays different combinations of "human qualities and traits."\(^1\)

During his work on his doctoral dissertation, Buber was exposed to Cusa's ideas on uniqueness. He would express some of these same ideas in his works on Hasidism.\(^2\) Buber would write that "uniqueness is the essential wealth of the human being and it is his task to unfold it."\(^3\) Buber would call "created uniqueness"\(^4\) the special way that God creates each person with unique qualities. Each person's uniqueness is an entrusting from

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God and therefore a mystery. No two selves are the same yet each of them is made in “His image.”5 Nothing is repeatable, not a flower, or star and definitely not a human being. To Buber every act of creation is a “onetime miracle” (a thought that he developed in his dissertation).6 In writing an article for *Israel and the World*,7 Buber would expound on a Hasidic and Cusan theme: the Biblical idea of made in the image of God is equivalent to the “unfolding” of that which is one’s most essential self. It is one’s very essence, stamped with the image of God, that makes a person unique. God is able to pour himself out by pouring His nature into diverse individuals but, at the same time, makes each one in His image. Buber requires that each man perfect his nature that God has stamped upon him. Each person then, in Buber’s words, “makes perfect his likeness to God, his *yehida*, his soul, his ‘only one,’ his uniqueness as God’s image.”8

Throughout the Middle Ages the idea of fundamental distinctiveness was neglected. Cusa, as part of the European Renaissance, revived the idea of the individual in his uniqueness. Buber, in studying the significance of individual differentiation, discovered Cusa’s thinking that “God himself is the most perfect artist.”9 The purpose of creation was to employ the Divine energy in multifarious forms of differentiation. Creation reveals God in his infinite variety and beauty. Buber saw this obvious diversity as an intrinsic feature of beauty: “Infinite beauty can shine forth only in infinite

5 *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 89.
6 Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *Martin Buber’s Formative Years, From German Culture to Jewish Renewal, 1897-1909*, 106.
7 *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 89.
8 Ibid. A citation from *Imitatio Dei, Israel and the World*, 73.
9 Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *Martin Buber’s Formative Years, From German Culture to Jewish Renewal, 1897-1909*, 37.
manifoldness.” A person’s potential is realized through the manifestation of their qualities and traits. Uniqueness is preserved by each individual’s personal life and activity. Buber would write in his dissertation, “All things progress toward completion individually.” Given the choice between exploring universality or uniqueness, Buber, of course, chose uniqueness. He was most interested in the absolute value of the individual in his particularity. The individual was an absolute center in itself and of value just as it was, in distinction to its usefulness to others.

Maurice Friedman sees this concept of uniqueness as a first step to Buber’s philosophy of dialogue, the I-Thou relationship. A second idea taken directly from Cusa was the coincidentia oppositorum which gave Buber the framework for allowing the two partners, although different, to have the ability to communicate while, at the same time, not diminishing their oppositeness. God works, reveals, and perfects himself through the differences of all things. For Buber, the individual is the “centerpoint of an infinite world process.”

This individual, the more special she or he is, can then contribute more to others. This development of Buber’s thoughts on uniqueness brings us into his pantheistic beliefs. The unique person redeems the Divine sparks as long as he remembers that he is no

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Maurice Friedman, Encounter on the Narrow Ridge, A Life of Martin Buber, 47.
13 Ibid.
14 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Early Years, 1878-1923, 80.
15 These beliefs are based on the pantheism of Hasidism and the Neo-Platonism of Cusa. Cf. Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Formative Years, From German Culture to Jewish Renewal, 1897-1909, 107.
island but a part of the whole."\textsuperscript{16} Buber states, "the purer and more perfect he is, the better he knows that he is a part..."\textsuperscript{17} This type of person not only redeems the world but redeems God.\textsuperscript{18} Gilya Schmidt sees, in Buber's reflections on uniqueness and the redemption of man and God, ideas reminiscent of Buber's Bar Mitzvah address and a 1901 essay on community.\textsuperscript{19} The Hasidic stories liken man to God, since both create.\textsuperscript{20} According to Cusa, God reveals Himself in individual things so that He is fully present in each. However, he is present in "different degrees of realization and potential of consciousness and unconsciousness."\textsuperscript{21} This led Buber to muse how does the world evolve from eternity? "If the purpose of Divine self-revelation is realized most completely in fundamental differentiation then the distinction between beings cannot be of a basic, qualitative nature because everything is contained in everything."\textsuperscript{22} He reached the conclusion that the function of such beings must be that they complement each other. If all share in the divinity and have their very selves in common with Divinity, then what would make beings distinct or unique? Cusa's complementarity, the coincidence of the opposites, would provide the answer. Buber elaborated on this idea in the philosophy of the dialogue in which the I and Thou complement one another through the relation. Each one's uniqueness is honored and accepted. If all beings share in the Divinity made in the image of God, their uniqueness is established in what they do with their individual qualities.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
Cusa’s *enfolding* and *unfolding* would be salient features to Buber’s hypothesizing. The soul was the unifying principle of the individual, named enfolding, and the body was the diversifying principle, named unfolding.\(^2^3\) For both men, the soul has the same relationship to the body that God has to the world. That is why Buber always spoke of the person having a unity of soul before being able to fully enter the I-Thou relation. That unity of soul must then go out to the other in order to become a true person. As a young man, Buber struggled with the idea of infinity but found his solution in Cusa, who saw God as transcending the universe and also being simultaneously immanent in it.\(^2^4\) Buber would write in *Geschichte des Individuationsproblems*, page 8, “every created thing is...a finite Infinity, it is God created.”\(^2^5\) Cardinal Cusa in his progressive philosophical/theological thinking had entered the realm of pantheism and Buber followed. The God, known mostly during the ages in negative theology (a theology that spoke of what God was not) is now known as the world’s essence. His nature is the world. Cusa’s thinking allowed Buber to erase the dualism of philosophy; now all is one in God. All creation shares his essence, for all creation reflects God’s essence. Earlier in this paper it was stated that Buber sees God wrapping the world about him. Now we see that the world is the body of God.\(^2^6\) If all share this “finite infinity,” what are the distinguishing characteristics of uniqueness? Hasidism provided the first answer -- to be

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23 Ibid., 38.
24 Ibid.
25 Cited in Gilya Gerda Schmidt, *Martin Buber’s Formative Years, From German Culture to Jewish Renewal, 1897-1909*, 38.
26 Ibid.
who you are as fully as you can be, to create each day as God creates, to immerse yourself in the everyday life knowing that you find God on all the paths of life. All of these activities contribute equally to the world’s redemption.\textsuperscript{27}

Buber himself provided the second answer regarding the distinguishing characteristics of uniqueness. Each person’s uniqueness is the basis upon which the person grows through relationship. In the history of the human spirit, the solitary man experiences the aloneness of an alien in a strange land. Even though this person grows and develops because of its particular uniqueness, he seeks a form of being not included in this world.\textsuperscript{28} He seeks a divine form of being with whom he can communicate and he stretches out his hands “beyond the world” to meet this form.\textsuperscript{29} Buber remarks that eventually man turns from this reaching out beyond the world and seeks an intimate communion with himself. This dilemma brings one to Heidegger’s philosophical solution for human existence and its relation to its own being. Buber likens Heidegger’s solution to reaching out to one’s image in a mirror, but one is not able to touch one’s real self. Heidegger’s thought is too abstracted and not valid, “for human life itself and its anthropological understanding, however valuable its suggestions for this subject.”\textsuperscript{30} As Augustine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard before him, Buber looks for a divine being with whom, in his solitary state, he can communicate. Heidegger’s choice resembles other philosophers who withdraw

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{28} Martin Buber, \textit{Between Man and Man}, 167.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
into oneself to communicate with self who becomes legislator, judge, the seat of wisdom, and initiator of all authority.

Buber's contribution to anthropology proposed that man becomes whole in relation to another self, not in virtue of a relation to himself. Whereas Heidegger's "existence" is monological, Buber's would be forever dialogical. Heidegger's man of "self-being" is not the man who lives with others, but communicates only with himself. In Heidegger's system there is no Thou, spoken from being to being, spoken with one's own being. Buber moves beyond Heidegger's co-existence with others\(^{31}\) to say that relation is primal, ontological and not merely psychic. Not only is the other person experienced, but as these two members of the dialogical process encounter each other they can experience the unlimited and unconditioned.\(^{32}\)

In Buber's exposition of uniqueness, it is through relation that direction and fulfillment proceed. Wholeness cannot be achieved in solitariness, but only in relation to the other. As will be pointed out in the section on "Distance and Between," one's uniqueness can only grow, be recognized, and confirmed in relationship. As the person reaches a unity, it begins to sense direction and begins the life journey to follow this call. It is Buber's contribution to equate uniqueness with direction and task. Through the dialogic process, the person is accepted, regardless of emotional, mental, and intellectual contrasts that

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 168.
may exist; this unconditional acceptance confirms the uniqueness.\textsuperscript{33} Man exists for the sake of this relation through which he becomes a unique person.\textsuperscript{34} Even when a man becomes a “Single One” a la Kierkegaard, even “if we limit ourselves to immanence,” man is there “for something.”\textsuperscript{35} Buber explains that “the something” is the perfect realization of the Thou. Man’s uniqueness is fulfilled in his achieving the task, completing the mission, and living up to his potentiality. “...Each soul should purify itself, not for terrestrial happiness or for heavenly bliss, but for the sake of the work that everyone is to do in God’s world.”\textsuperscript{36} This is accomplished not by Heideggerian self-being, enclosed and narcissistic, but by the “Single One” whose aloneness means not only self-containment but a reaching out.

“I call a great character one who by his actions and attitudes satisfies the claim of situations out of deep readiness to respond with his whole life, and in such a way that the sum of his actions and attitudes expresses at the same time the unity of his being in its willingness to accept responsibility.”\textsuperscript{37}

As the soul achieves unification, it becomes more aware of “direction” for which it is made to search and pursue. “This awareness of direction is ultimately identical with the awareness of one’s created uniqueness, the special way to God is realized in one’s relation with the world and men.”\textsuperscript{38} In his \textit{Images of Good and Evil}\textsuperscript{39} Buber explains how each person realizes the rightness of his being created in a certain way with these particular qualities that make him unique and which gives him purpose in creation. The

\textsuperscript{33} Werner Manheim, \textit{Martin Buber}, 42.
\textsuperscript{34} Will Herberg, \textit{The Writings of Martin Buber}, 72-73.
\textsuperscript{35} Werner Manheim, \textit{Martin Buber}, 175.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{37} Martin Buber, \textit{Between Man and Man}, 114.
\textsuperscript{38} Maurice Friedman, \textit{Martin Buber, The Life of Dialogue}, 95.
\textsuperscript{39} Cf. \textit{Good and Evil}, 112, 127.
person then decides to pursue that direction which fulfills who he is. By so deciding, he encounters the divine mystery of his created uniqueness and the mystery that awaits him. The person’s direction refers both to immediate situations and to the whole being of God. This direction or task cannot be derived from within the world, but only through an inner awareness of what one is meant to be.

Everything that occurs in one’s life participates in and affects the person’s direction. This direction is entrusted to each human being as a designed or pre-formed entity. Direction is both a prerequisite of dialogue and a product of the dialogue, since awareness of “direction comes into being only in the dialogue itself.” The direction does not reside in the I or Thou, but in the dialogue, therefore with each new meeting, direction changes. Each new moment’s direction is the direction if the person is truly meeting reality in lived concreteness. In a letter Buber would write, “The purpose of my uniqueness may be felt more or less dimly, it cannot be sensed.”

Buber introduces the Biblical concept of emunah, trust, as a help in understanding direction. Man is to trust God who gives to each man qualities needed for personal fulfillment. It is through this emunah that man can ultimately realize the goal which is

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40 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber, The Life of Dialogue, 95.
41 Martin Buber, Good and Evil, 126.
42 Ibid., 96.
43 Ibid., 96.
45 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber, The Life of Dialogue, 96.
placed before him. But this trust in the “hidden but self-revealing guidance of God” does not relieve man from directing his own steps.

Buber does not present any rationale for God’s gifting each person differently, or any ultimate purpose for doing so. God’s diversity spills out into creation and each is to become what it is, fulfilling its qualities. The goal is not self-realization which is but a by-product of the relation, the goal is the becoming; and the real mission of each is to hallow this life and meet the living God. He does not speak of a specific plan in a person’s life. Direction is an inner awareness but cannot even be sensed! “It is the primal awareness of our unique way to God that lies at the very centre of our awareness of ourself as I.”

Direction is just as mysterious as uniqueness and freedom, which are closely related to it. Whereas in von Balthasar’s writing direction, task, mission and call come directly from God in a unilateral fashion as He is the one who first chooses us, in Buber’s writing, direction and uniqueness might best be described, as he often chose to do, in a Hasidic legend.

“The simple man whom the Hasidic legend praises has no dram of self-satisfaction. He would imagine himself mocked if anyone said to him that he was chosen. He too does not need to decide, but just because he lives his life simply and directly without brooding, accepts the world as it is. Wherever the opportunity offers itself to him he accomplishes with unperturbed soul the good that is entrusted to him in such a manner as if he had known it from all eternity.”

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Each man lives his life in a unique way through the lived concreteness of everyday and through the dialogical character of reality.\textsuperscript{50}

Buber’s recounting of the tale reveals one final aspect of the relations between uniqueness and direction -- freedom. It is only the sense of awareness of direction that comes into being in the dialogue. The person then has the freedom to choose or not to choose to follow the direction that is revealed in the relation. One must have emunah (trust), believing that each moment’s new direction is the direction leading to God. This trust allows the possibility of saying “yes” or “no” to the direction.\textsuperscript{51}

Maurice Friedman, the well respected translator and interpreter of Buber, states that Buber thinks that we are not called to fulfill an unavoidable destiny but we are called to fulfill the goal of creation by freely responding.\textsuperscript{52} Buber calls man to exercise this freedom by recovering the “creative freedom which he once falsely ascribed to God.”\textsuperscript{53} It is a freedom to choose, not a destiny that must be embraced. The earlier writing in \textit{I and Thou} speaks of the indissolubly real pair of the primal relation -- God and man. From God to man the relation is termed mission and command.\textsuperscript{54} Other than this allusion to mission (which he does not describe in any greater detail), Buber does not return to the subject of mission or call. This allusion to mission seems to contradict his later thinking

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{51} Martin Buber, \textit{Between Man and Man}, 78 ff.
\textsuperscript{52} Maurice Friedman, \textit{Martin Buber, The Life of Dialogue}, 96.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Eclipse of God}, 67.
\textsuperscript{54} Martin Buber, \textit{Land Thou}, 85.
regarding mission or direction. However, it is difficult to make a definitive judgment, since there is no explication of this passage. In *I and Thou*, Buber says that the Word of revelation is *I am that I am* which reveals that which is and nothing more.\(^{55}\) This can be interpreted to mean that there is but a presence to God and one would not expect a call or message regarding direction or life's goal. Even though he says "all revelation is summons and sending," he does not mean that the meeting with God would make a man concern himself with God.\(^{56}\) This interest in God or attempting to figure out a plan or destiny for one's life would place the person in the realm of I-It. So he cannot directly concern himself with God or his plans, but he can converse with Him.\(^{57}\) In reflection (I-It) the individual turns away from the primal source (God); just as the apparent turning away of the man fulfilling his mission is actually in a movement towards the primal source.\(^{58}\) This is a philosophical explanation of the above cited Hasidic tale regarding the simple man living out direction in his life.

In the relation, each member of the encounter is affirmed and confirmed by the other, and by doing so each promotes the full realization of the other as a fully human person. Just as in the encounter there is no compulsion or imposition, so it is with God concerning the task or destiny.\(^{59}\) Again there is a seeming contradiction about the term destiny. In *I and Thou*, Buber writes, "The world is not divine sport, it is divine destiny."\(^{60}\) Here he is

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\(^{55}\) Ibid., 112.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 115.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 116.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.


\(^{60}\) Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 82.
most likely referring that there is divine meaning in the lives of human being, but it is not imposed. We are free to pursue and embrace without compulsion. In the pure relation of I and Thou, the individual is free to act; it is not a feeling of freedom, which would be a limitation. God desires our free choice and as Buber says, “God needs you”\(^{61}\) because we take part in creation and reach out to Him as “helpers and companions.”\(^{62}\) People know that they are free and that “destiny goes hand in hand with freedom.”\(^{63}\) Freedom inspires creativity and both are present only in the relation, as often as it is repeated. The freedom in the relation allows the person to have no purposes or self-will, but only to become aware of destiny in the meeting and presentness of the encounter.\(^{64}\) The man who is not free is full of self-will and not the “grand will.” He speaks of sacrifice, but it is only a word without actions.\(^{65}\) Whereas, the man who is truly free, realizes that life is characterized by the essential paradox that everything is entirely out of his hands and yet depends on him. The paradox must be lived. As the free individual stands before God, “necessity and freedom are seen to be one.”\(^{66}\)

This personal choice completes creation and hastens redemption, which is entirely wrought by man. The Jewish conception of redemption entails the free response to revelation. For Buber this is further concretized in the personal mission advancing redemption. The fine line of thinking in Buber is as follows: there is no division of essential being (pantheistic thinking), there is multiplicity but not duality so therefore it is

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\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) Pamela Vermes, *Buber* 50.

\(^{64}\) Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 61.
not a calling from without, but a sense of mission that wells up from the encounter between the I and Thou. A man is most free who is inwardly bound to the world, to the lived concrete of everyday existence, for this man allows that which is most inward to rule.\(^{67}\) If God’s essence is the world, Buber encourages us to bind ourselves to this world where we find God. Somehow, in some inexplicable manner the free man listens to the way of Being in the world so that he might actualize the world in the manner which it needs him and wants to be actualized by him.\(^{68}\) Here we see that God assumes a face which is a pantheistic view of the world. It is the Creator who addresses man in every aspect of creation through which He shines forth. To Buber revelation was not objective truth nor inspiration, but the voice that speaks to man out of creation. Therefore he could say “all revelation is summons and sending” but mean this in a very narrow idiosyncratic definition. The content of revelation and the I-Thou relationship are the same in nature. Man is free to listen and respond to the voice speaking to him within. He responds not to knowledge or truth but to an unheard, not even conscious summons and sending.\(^{69}\) When Buber considers necessity and freedom, he knows that he is given over for disposal and at the same time that it all depends on him. He is then compelled to take both to himself, to live them out, and by so doing they become one.\(^{70}\) This is Buber’s way of working out the relationship between destiny and freedom, and necessity and freedom. Freedom and responsibility therefore are also inseparable in Buber. Man’s rights are his duties. Man is

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\(^{65}\) Ibid., 60.

\(^{66}\) Cf. Citation Martin Buber, I and Thou, 95 as quoted in a different translation Pamela Vermes, Buber, 54.

\(^{67}\) Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Early Years, 1878-1923, 83.


\(^{69}\) Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Early Years, 1878-1923, 369.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 370.
fully free to accept or reject the way presented to him by God; he is also fully
responsible.\textsuperscript{71} Man does not have to recover freedom, for it is already a part of human
existence, which means "being sent and being commissioned."\textsuperscript{72} When the Eternal Thou
speaks in the I-Thou reciprocal relationship he wishes to have the true meaning of
reciprocity exercised, i.e., not "to impose itself but to be freely apprehended."\textsuperscript{73} Buber
sees the Eternal Thou handing everything over to the creature -- freedom to choose,
responsibility, and redemption. Freedom is given so that man can redeem the world and
fulfill its needs.\textsuperscript{74}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{71} Lowell D. Streiker, \textit{The Promise of Buber}, 71.
\textsuperscript{72} Martin Buber, \textit{Eclipse of God}, 69.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{74} Maurice Friedman, \textit{Martin Buber's Life and Work, The Early Years, 1878-1923}, 106.
\end{footnotes}
Although his original articulation of the dialogical event, the *I-Thou* relationship, was cast in a popular and somewhat poetic style, his later exposition of these ideas utilized philosophical language to capture and expound more fully on his exact meaning. His later works and comments of philosophers helped to clarify the earlier intended meaning. The following discussion of these Buberian “ontological” elements hopefully will shed light upon his philosophical anthropology and especially upon the dialogue which is the centerpiece of that anthropology. This brief section is a further articulation of the elements that comprise this dialogical event. It is brief because Buber does not describe these parts of his “system” in detail. They are merely tools or a reification of his philosophical insights. It is the intention of this author to reify them even further in order to situate these elements as they might appear in a chart (specifically a flow chart). Hopefully such a presentation might advance an understanding of concepts that are difficult to comprehend.

Buber states in *I and Thou*⁴ that “to man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude” (referring to I-Thou, I-It), he later attests to a twofold principle of

⁴ Cf. 31.
human life consisting of two basic movements. He names the first movement, 'the primal setting at a distance' and the second, 'entering into relation.' The first movement, distance, precedes the second and is a pre-supposition of the second. This idea of relating to another being is based on the premise that one can only enter into such a relation with a being that has been set at a distance, as an independent opposite. It is in this distancing that man can become aware of the "other"; for man alone there is otherness. This basic otherness is a result, then, of the process of distancing which for Buber is preconscious, "transcendental," and not empirical. He writes, "that man's nature (Sein) is such that he is able to see his 'present being' (das Seiende) as detached (abgeruckt) from himself and thus to recognize it for what it is and to set over against it a general structure of being (Seinszusammenhang)." This previous sentence is a further development of the concept of distancing by which man can not only distance himself from other beings, but can achieve a distance (non-spatial) from his very self. It is through this distancing that man knows that an independent world exists for him. Man's knowledge of himself, of who he is, is based on the a priori process of distancing. Distance makes room for relation. The idea of distance involves both the I-Thou- and I-It relationship. Thus "distance becomes the pre-supposition for both I-Thou and I-It." Distance is not an act, but a state of being. Before moving on to between which appears next in the chart, let us turn to Buber's concept of relation which will be viewed simultaneously with that of distance.

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2 Martin Buber, The Knowledge of Man, 21.
3 Ibid.
4 The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 83.
5 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber, The Life of Dialogue, 83.
6 Ibid.
A quick perusal of this chart raises the question, "What happened to Buber's statement in I and Thou, 'In the beginning is relation?" First it must be remembered that Buber wrote I and Thou in the years 1917-1922, whereas the ideas of distance possibly present seminally in earlier works were not published until 1951. Second, when Buber speaks of I and Thou he is referring to the primitive genesis of relations, whereas in his essay "Distance and Relation" he is speaking ontologically of what constitutes a human being qua human being. Distancing provides the foundation of dialogue, since it allows for the separation and distinction of I and Thou. The independence of each of the partners is, neither blurred nor observed, but assured.

Distance is the vehicle used by Buber for ontological validity of the relationship. The I-Thou relation that will follow is not psychological but ontological. In speaking of distance we deal with an interval in which "the act of being is being acted." Within this concept of distance lies the possibility of conceiving the human being as bridging the gulf between others in order to become in the meeting an actualized being. Without distance there can be no union.

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7 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 18.
9 Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, "Buber and Theory of Knowledge," The Philosophy of Martin Buber, 140.
As “distance provides the human situation, relation provides man’s becoming in that situation.”¹⁰ The act of entering into relation with the world, Buber called “synthesizing apperception”¹¹ which allows a being to be whole and to experience unity. This epistemological premise undergirds Buber’s understanding of relationship. By viewing the world as separate from an individual’s being, man can grasp being as a wholeness and unity. As distance provides for universality, relation affords the being the personal. The personal is revealed in the real relation of the dialogue. Real dialogue exists only between genuine persons. Buber “accentuates the idea that a real relation begins when the solitude imposed by distance is broken and the barriers of the individual being are, as it were, breached so that one life opens to another, each becoming present to the other and experiencing the mystery of the other in the mystery of one’s own [being].”¹² The other becomes present to me as I am present to him. Relation entails a renunciation of incorporating the other into my being. Then the other in relation can become a Thou for me. Such metaphysical thinking is applied to the human being’s relation with God. Thus God, as actual, is known in the encounter as Being over against being. God for Buber is absolutely relative. He is to be known only in relation. God, like the self, is not a substance but a relation.¹³ At the heart of Buber’s entire “system” of thought, a “system” of concrete situation, is the relation. “We enter into a relation which is more than unbreakable between myself and another reality which is this very relation, just as I myself am nothing but this relation and am nothing except in this relation -- whether the

¹⁰ Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber, The Life of Dialogue, 80.
¹¹ Ibid.
¹² Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J., God as Person in the Writings of Martin Buber, 147, a citation from Between Man and Man, 170.
term of our relation be another person or the absolute Thou, God.”14 Buber sees this relation as a meeting.15 In order to enter fully into relation a person must first be “with” itself.16 There must be no distance between the being and itself. Buber however did not describe this isolation and limitations of the I in the I-Thou relation.

“The I-Thou relation is nothing but a realization of the meeting.”17 Relation occurs only in the presence of the I to a Thou. There is no structure, preconceived ideas, or expectations to such a relation since any of these conditions would lead to I-It. “For to step into pure relation is not to disregard everything but to see everything in the Thou, not to renounce the world but to establish it on its true basis. To look away from the world or to stare at it, does not help a man to reach God but he who sees the world in him stands in his presence.”18 The usual attempts of capturing or delineating God in the phrases, “Here world, there God” or “God in the world” are found in the world of It. Complete and full relation can only be obtained when we include the whole world in the Thou, leaving nothing behind, including God in everything.

One of the great difficulties with such philosophical explanations is the lack of describable content that occurs in the relation, both with man and God. Only in the inner

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13 The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 136-137.
15 Ibid., Wahl quoting Buber’s Nachwort
16 Ibid., 489.
18 Will Herberg, The Writings of Martin Buber, 57.
recesses of the partner in dialogue can the meaning be received, but only there in the singleness of his being. It cannot be documented, articulated, or shared in anyway. No prescription can lead us to the encounter and none leads from it. This quandary is summarized in Buber’s own words which for him are words of enlightenment and not a commentary on confusion. “As only acceptance of the Presence is necessary for the approach to the meeting, so in a new sense is it so when we emerge from it. As we reach the meeting with the simple Thou on our lips, so with Thou on our lips we leave it and return to the world.” We come nearer to God but no nearer to solving being, nor can we approach others, says Buber, with what we have received. We cannot even say “you must know this” or “do this.” For Buber what occurs is the eternal revelation, I am that I am.

The “mechanism” by which the distance element yields to the relation element is the between. There is a flow between distance, the setting apart, and relation, the coming together. Buber concentrates on the relation of the I to Thou in his famous book, I and Thou. The partners and how they related in dialogue comprised most of that book. Later he would address the topic of the between (Zwiesprache) which unites the two worlds of I-Thou. In some fashion the between emanates from each partner even when no conversation is occurring. The between is, it does not happen. The importance of the between becomes notable when one considers that Buber says man’s thought is

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19 Ibid., 61.
20 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 111.
21 Werner Manheim, Martin Buber, 38.
monologic and unexamined until he engages in the concreteness of the *between* of I and Thou. "Man's role in life can be evaluated only in contact with others." However, this evaluation can only take place (after the encounter or meeting) in the world of I-It, which, Buber states time and again, is the proper and necessary dimension to evaluate the unspeakable content or the prompted or realized direction that arises from the encounter and occurs between the partners, not just in one of them exclusively. By being totally open to each other and totally present in an non-reflective, non-judgmental manner, true encounter occurs. It is not a reflective act, but a primal act in which man moves from distance to the establishment of relationship. Anything less makes him a spectator.

When the monological man is not truly aware of the "otherness" of the other, he often tries to incorporate the other into himself. This is one alternative whereas the other is the egotistical turning back on oneself. Either condition escapes the need for a dialogic relation.

The *between* is an important idea in Buber's dialogic principle. Like the term, lived-concrete, the *between* is a Buberian creation, a tool for understanding his thought "system." It is a sphere beyond the fixed and determined boundary of each partner. In his introduction to Buber's *Between Man and Man*, Maurice Friedman places great emphasis on the ontological reality of the *between* and on the possibility of experiencing in some fashion, the other side of the relationship. Buber acknowledges the work of

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22 Ibid., 41.
23 Ibid., 11.
Feuerbach who was one of the first to speak of the definition of man not as an individual but man with man, the joining of I and Thou. Buber, since Feuerbach never developed this concept, is credited with the development, and at times the discovery, of the concept of Thou.

The *between* is not a spatial entity of definite composition and structure, nor is it verifiable. It is a given of his system, bearing no exact dimensions, but always present when man encounters man or God as Thou. What occurs between individuals occurs exactly between them and not in them. It is not a mystical experience. It is like a spark between two persons. There comes a knowledge, a new knowing, bringing also a new dimension beyond that of subject and object relationship.

To say the least, Buber was a “fluid thinker” not upset by intellectual tensions or ambiguities. Buber refers to the narrow ridge on which he stood saying that it is located “between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge.” Pointing to the security and unambiguous answers of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Hegel, Buber points out that such is not the case today when, “the question about man’s being faces us as never before in all its grandeur and terror -- no longer in philosophical attire, but in the nakedness of existence.” His I-Thou relation is comprised of both distance and relation in togetherness. The concept of communication falls under the same rubric, since

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25 Ibid., 148.
26 *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, Marvin Fox’s “Some Problems in Buber’s Moral Philosophy,” 151.
27 Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 145,
sameness would have nothing to share but identity; and complete otherness would have no basis or means of sharing or communicating. Therefore, formal logic was not Buber’s realm. He chose anthropology, where distancing and relating were easily accepted givens. Knowledge would come as a result of the meeting, but it was not sought nor could it be communicated, for it was ineffable. Knowledge of God likewise would result from the meeting -- from the between. Metaphysics was not revealed or spoken of during the meeting. Nor was it a time to examine one’s true self. Knowing resulted from, in the presence of, or over against the “Eternal Thou” whom one addressed but about whom one did not speak.

The between does refer to the natural realm of human communication. Buber likens the between to Plato’s thought in the seventh epistle which speaks of togetherness as light kindled from leaping fire which reminds Buber that the happenings in the between are ontological. The relation itself is not a subjective event, nor a representation, but a real event, a meeting. Nor is the meeting intra-psychic but occurs in reality, in the realm of being. Neither the I nor Thou interpret or apprehend the meeting intellectually. The “place,” the between is the point where being is realized. The between is a dimension that the I and Thou enter. Even though Buber did not always like the use of philosophical terms he had to use them in order to make himself partially understood. Levinas, a noted modern philosopher, helps to situate Buber’s ontological considerations alongside some epistemological concerns. He sees Buber’s between as inseparable from the adventure in

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28 Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J., *God as Person in the Writings of Martin Buber*, 69.
which the individuals participate and more objective than all other types of objectivity because of the personal nature. Because man comes away from each true meeting changed, man is the “locus where the act of being is being acted.”

Man becomes the articulation of the meeting due to what has occurred in him in the *between*. He is not a subject constituting reality, but has now become the product and result of the meeting -- changed by knowledge, truth, and direction. As said previously the concept of distancing allows for man to enter relations and, at the same time, to distance himself. Levinas sees this dual movement of distancing and relation as the centering of man in being and thereby philosophy becomes identifiable with anthropology. “Man can become whole not by virtue of a relation to himself but only by virtue of a relation to another self.” Levinas has certainly grasped Buber’s intent when he sees this *between* or interval as he names it, as the locus in which “the act of being is being created and which the individual at once creates and bridges, compels us to abandon the notion of a being-content, an already actualized being, or a being as theme of discourse.” It is in the *between* that all of this occurs. Buber, however, does not explain how these occurrences of the *between* affect each partner, or yield knowledge, or give the needed or sought for direction to life.

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30 *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 139.
31 Ibid., 140.
32 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Returning to the "flow chart" the next element is spirit. In a relation of mutuality, support, and openness there is a peaceful flow between distancing and relation. There can follow a reciprocal interaction between the partners of the I-Thou relation. It is in the place *between* that Buber's concept of spirit dwells. Spirit does not dwell within a person but *between* persons. If this were not so, Buber felt that man would become preoccupied with himself, trying to know himself in order to further perfect himself, instead of performing his life's task. This is another of Buber's major contributions: the genuine person is interested in transforming the world by allowing himself to be transformed. It is in the *between* in the realm of the spirit that this personal unity of the soul occurs that in turn leads to the transformation of each person. By spirit Buber does not mean any of the conventional understandings of spirit. As a matter of fact, Buber denigrates the usual connotations of spirit and spiritual life. In *I and Thou* he states that "spiritual life" is for the most part an obstacle to a life lived in the spirit. For him the ability to live the life of the spirit is directly related to man's power to enter into relation and negatively related to the ability of experiencing and using found in the I-It world. This would mean analyzing, categorizing, and turning spirit into a form, a property of religion, a "fall of spirit into spirituality." Just as revelation is not a content, but encounter, so spirit is not a person, but an event that occurs in the *between* that allows the partner of the dialogue to change and be transformed. "Spirit in its manifestation is a response of man to his Thou." Buber continues by saying that spirit is the word, the response of every I to its

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36 *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 49.
Thou. "Spirit is not in the I but between I and Thou." He likens it to the air in which you breathe, not like the blood that circulates in you. Man can only live in the spirit when he enters into relation. He must enter into relation with his whole being. In silence before the Thou the spirit dwells, even though not manifest. The relation itself is fulfilled not in the soul but between I and Thou.

Martin Buber's description of the dialogue and the between is ontological. It points to the really real ("All real living is meeting.") The between flows from his thinking about distancing and relation. Spirit, in turn, flows from his concept of relation.

These ontological elements are inter-related. The chart's purpose is to demonstrate both the inter-relatedness and the sense of one element flowing from another. The potentiality element is present in every creature as each "holds" within itself its essence. As the creature develops, it becomes more of itself and what it was made to be. This holds particularly true for the human being. It is in the case of the potentiality of the human being that the element of confirmation becomes important. It is in the encounter, the relation, that the individual becomes something new. With each encounter he becomes someone. This growth or developing of inherent potentiality is the result of the mutual openness to each other in the dialogic process of the I-Thou encounter. Confirmation and

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 81.
40 Ibid., 11.
41 Lowell D. Streiker, The Promise of Buber, 58.
affirmation promotes the inmost self-becoming of the other\textsuperscript{42} and mutual confirmation leads to growth as persons. The person confirms the other in personal qualities and in their capacities or potentiality.\textsuperscript{43} M. Friedman quotes Buber:

"The basis of man's life with man is twofold, and it is one -- the wish of everyman to be confirmed as what he is, even as what he can become, by men; and the innate capacity in man to confirm his fellowmen in this way."

This confirmation occurs in the I-Thou relation when each person makes himself present to the other. Animals need no confirmation for they are what they are in themselves, but man needs to be in the presence of the other and to be accepted, "...secretly and bashfully he watches for a yes which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one human person to another."\textsuperscript{45} Man hungers for the confirming of his very essence. The synthesizing apperception occurs by entering into relation thereby perceiving one's being as a whole and as a unity.\textsuperscript{46} It is through this interhuman (being to being) relation that men confirm each other and become a self with the other. Through relation, mutual affirmation, acceptance and being made present to one another, each person reaches self-realization. This concept of personal making present is the basis of confirmation "through which we are enabled to become what we are to become."\textsuperscript{47} Buber reinforces this previous idea, "I not only accept the other as he is, but I confirm him, in myself, and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[42] Martin Buber, \textit{The Knowledge of Man}, 71.
\item[44] Ibid.
\item[46] Martin Buber, \textit{The Knowledge of Man}, 21.
\item[47] Ibid., 28.
\end{footnotes}
then in him, in relation to his potentiality that is meant by him and it can now be
developed, it can evolve, it can answer the reality of life..."\textsuperscript{48}

In summary, this \textit{making present} allows the person to experience the “other side,” the
other person, by understanding and feeling, without melting into them or absorbing them.
Mutual confirmation of the other’s potentiality aids in becoming the self we are meant to
become. It is through the relation that each person realizes his or her uniqueness by
facing the other as distant and set apart.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
ESSENCE OF MAN - DIALOGIC RELATION

We have seen that Buber's understanding of man is always situated in the dialogic relation. However, it is permitted to discuss the essence of man as part of the I-It world. Indeed it is necessary to do so to fully grasp the essence of man as he exists in both the I-Thou and I-It world. Buber was always intrigued by the question “What is man?” He turned to philosophy for the language to help describe the essence of man.

Buber defined philosophical anthropology as the “study of the ‘wholeness of man.’”¹

The major elements in studying the problem of man are listed, by Buber, in a chapter in *Between Man and Man*:

“Man’s special place in the cosmos, his connexion with destiny, his relation to the world of things, his understanding of his fellowmen, his existence as a being that knows it must die, his attitude in the ordinary and extra-ordinary encounters with the mystery with which his life is shot through.”²

As always, Buber shied away from over-systematizing, since no philosophy could adequately reflect on the wholeness of man. Any so-called philosophical system would merely de-humanize man through its objectification. His philosophical anthropology sought to discover, in the flux of individuals and cultures, the essence of man. Interestingly enough, this Jewish existentialist sought the essence of man through the existential characteristics of man’s life in order to reach and address the wholeness of man.³

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¹ Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber. The Life and Dialogue*, 78.
³ Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber. The Life and Dialogue*, 79.
At the center of man lies a characteristic which many agree distinguishes man as a human
reason. Buber, however, rejects this essential ingredient as the center of a human being.
He states that a man is not human solely because of his reason.

“The depth of the anthropological question is first touched when we also recognize as specifically human that which is not reason...He can be understood only when one knows on the one hand, that there is something in all that is human including thought, which belongs to the general nature of living creatures, and is to be grasped from this nature, while knowing, on the one hand, that there is no human quality which belongs fully to the general nature of living creatures and is to be grasped exclusively from it. Even man’s hunger is not animal’s hunger. Human reason is to be understood only in connexion with human non-reason. The problem of philosophical anthropology is the problem of specific totality and of its specific structure.”

Everything about man is distinctly different from all other creatures. Only man has
potentiality in Buber’s view. The direction of this potentiality is not predictable. As
man meets with man, a fellow existing being, the becoming of the world takes place.
However, the meeting is not of our doing, for it is unknown to us as the existing being is
unknowable to us in its own nature. This world is a composite work of a thousand human
generations. Given this world view, Buber always returns to the fundamental fact of his
anthropology — man with man. The unfolding of the sphere between the two partners is
called the *dialogical*. His anthropology defines the dialogical as what occurs in the
interchange not in either of them or in both taken together. Returning to the concept of
the “wholeness of man,” we find the concept inseparable (in Buber’s philosophical

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4 Ibid., 160.
5 Ibid.
anthropology) and not able to exist apart from a real relationship with other human beings. Wholeness and relation become inseparable thoughts in Buber’s thinking. Man cannot find a fellow being that is whole in itself. His unique contribution is that you cannot consider the human person as a single entity, but only in its wholeness with all of its essential relations. The other is just as limited and conditioned as he.

As seen throughout this paper, Buber’s thought is highly idiosyncratic and usually does not approximate traditional ideas or systems of thought. In like manner, his philosophical anthropology is unique. His anthropology is steeped in Jewish thought. By Jewish thought is meant the Biblical and Hasidic Judaism. For this reason his anthropology that deals with man to man also includes man’s relation to the Biblical God. Revelation, as a part of man’s relation with God, as defined as a dynamic event between God and man, is always viewed within the dialogic encounter. Man can only be understood in this dialogic relationship of man to man and man to God. Buber was once asked what he would regard as the central portion of his lifework. He responded that the one basic insight that led to his independent philosophy, “that the I-Thou relation to God and the I-Thou relation to one’s fellow man are at the bottom related to each other...” This insight has hopefully been adequately discussed and demonstrated in two sections of this paper (I-Thou/I-It and the Eternal Thou).

8 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber, The Life and Dialogue, 92.
9 Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, 167 ff.
10 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber and the Eternal, 21.
11 Ibid., 27.
12 Ibid., 148.
Von Balthasar’s pursuit will be “Who Am I?,” whereas Buber’s was “What is man?” He answers this by his philosophical anthropology. Man is to be understood as he oscillates between I-Thou and I-It relations. These relations help a person to grow and develop. Buber stressed the importance of both primal ways of relating to reality. Man cannot live without It, “but he who lives with It alone is not a man.”¹³ In a life so lived, through the daily back and forth between Thou-It, the “spiritual substance of the person matures.”¹⁴ In Buber’s philosophical anthropology, the dialogic relation is the underlying reality of all true human existence. This dialogic element explains why Buber would think that viewing man as a working or thinking being in isolation apart from others would nullify what man is. Nor could a man in isolation be considered a man, in Buber’s anthropology. Nor could elements of intellectual manipulation and unreal abstractions, which are typical in philosophical systems find a home here in Buber’s thought. Buber was only interested in the concreteness of life and how man was situated there. Unlike many philosophers who dealt with man in his philosophical substance,¹⁵ Buber is interested in man in relation.¹⁶

Buber makes an interesting remark in his “What Is Man?”: “philosophical anthropology has reached its maturity only in our own time, since it is now recognized and treated as an

¹³ Martin Buber, I and Thou, 34.
¹⁴ Ibid., 63.
¹⁵ Aristotle and Aquinas
¹⁶ The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 69.
independent philosophical problem."^{17} He sees the problem coming to the forefront because in the realm of the sociological order there has been a "decay of the old organic forms of direct life of man with man."^{18} Communities had become too large to afford direct relationship between human beings. A second point that calls attention to the problem is man's tendency to "lag behind his works," by which Buber meant man's increasing inability to master the same world that he himself has brought into existence.

Besides these sociological precipitating causes to the anthropological questions, Buber sees in philosophy itself some root causes now being exposed. The over-emphasis on the rational character of man as a differentiation between himself and all other animals has also cast light on the anthropological question of "What Man Is?". Even though philosophical thought was viewed as a negative influence on the anthropological question, Buber found the same question raised (in Kantian thought), "What is man?".^{19}

Although Kierkegaard would have the greater insight, Kant is credited with sending the inquirer back to the question "What Am I?". Buber did not find the answer in Kant. If anything, Kant's failure along with the work of philosophers of the egoist school (Stirner for example), who saw a person's need for others as in the same order of one's need for food and fresh air, spurred Buber on to his belief that man's need for other persons is "constitutive of man's very essence."^{20} At the human level of being the principle of self-transcendence manifests itself in relationships. The above reflects Buber's philosophical

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17 Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, 157.
18 The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 70.
19 Ibid., 72.
20 Ibid., 76.
anthropology, which is different from most other philosophies that would find interest only in abstract relations as the heart of self-transcendence. Buber always returns to “man to man” as his understanding of “What Man Is.” Such a man “achieves a more focused existence precisely through standing in relationship with others.”

Whereas Kierkegaard held that the only transcendental relationship that really mattered was between himself and God, which may even entail the release of all finite personal relationships, Buber held that only in and through relationships with other finite selves, through having and transcending such relationships that one’s relationship with God could be realized.

God reveals himself to man through his creation and particularly in human embodiments.

Philosophy had now reached the point of seeing God’s importance in philosophical anthropology; Buber would give some credit to Kierkegaard who formulated a theological anthropology. This anthropology, in Buber’s estimation, could reckon with the totality of man’s nature. Just as von Balthasar would not be able to find the right categories among philosophy or social sciences to answer the question, “Who Am I?,” Buber could not find in philosophy any adequate categories to answer the question, “What is Man?” He found that no philosophy exerted a “creative or permanent influence on human life.” It is difficult to establish the time or place in which Buber decided that the one authentic basis for an anthropology of man was religious. The Biblical view of

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21 Ibid., 77.
22 Ibid., 77-78.
23 Martin Buber, Eclipse of God, 149.
24 The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 261.
man was definitely a part of his life from early childhood and was reinforced by Hasidism. In the exposition of the Eternal Thou, Buber demonstrates his belief in the God of Creation. This same God gives existence to creatures so that they might fulfill their unique task. It is easy to see the direct connection between Buber’s anthropology and religion.

The religious relationship is the basis of his philosophical anthropology. The duality of the subject-object, which is the foundation of philosophy, differs from the duality of the I-Thou which is the source of the religious relationship. Buber sees Being turned toward man as man is turned toward Being. Man finds his highest fulfillment in the I-Thou relationship with God, existing in a lived togetherness of the lived concrete. It is a religion that holds fast to God. Of course, Buber says that the personal manifestation of the divine is not decisive for the genuineness of religion which certainly takes away from the previous injunction of holding fast. Still, reality is present for that person who goes out to meet God, to turn to Him and to call to him. Even if this experience cannot be remembered independently of the situation, it will remain the address of the moment and cannot be isolated. Faith means living in relationship to the Being that is “believed in.” In lived concreteness man lives before the face of Being. This life of man is the

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27 Maurice Friedman, *Pointing the Way*, 113.
"unfolding of the existence that is lent to man, the development of the existence of the whole person standing over against eternal Being." ²⁹

Buber's philosophical anthropology casts man into this relation with God but cautions him not to reflect upon it. The lived concrete is to be lived, "Meaning is to be experienced in living action suffering itself, in the unreduced immediacy of the moment. Of course, he who aims at the experiencing of experience will necessarily miss the meaning for he destroys the spontaneity of the mystery." ³⁰ Man, of his philosophical anthropological "system," can only meet God in existence. Here can be seen both the influence of Hasidism (lived concrete) and existentialism (importance of tension of the lived encounter).

Buber encourages us to open ourselves up to the world, to confront it, to learn from it and to expect that it will open itself to us. His philosophy of dialogism colors every aspect of his writings, poems and life. Friedman calls the philosophy of the dialogue "the culmination and crown of his epistemology, his philosophical anthropology, and his ontology." ³¹

²⁹ Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J., God as Person in the Writings of Martin Buber, 36.
³⁰ Martin Buber, Eclipse of God, 35-36.
³¹ Cf. Introduction to Buber's The Knowledge of Man.
His type of philosophy (dialogism) is very different from most other philosophies. Whereas philosophers' tools are analysis and ratiocination, Buber speaks of incomprehensibility, non-rationalizing and non-conceptualizing.

"This is the glorious paradox of the existence that all comprehensibility of the world is only a footstool of its incomprehensibility...What the most learned and ingenious combination of concepts denies, the humble faithful beholding, grasping, knowing of any situation bestows...He who truly experiences a thing so that it springs up to meet him and embraces him of itself has in that thing known the world."

Within this philosophy lies the answer to knowing (his epistemological answer to knowing reality), the dialogue. The dialogue also holds the key to his anthropology, since it deals with all relationships of man to man. "A great relation exists only between real persons. It can be strong as death, because it is stronger than solitude, because it...throws a bridge from self-being to self-being across the abyss of dread of the universe."

Such thinking and his bold exposition of it has caused him not to be considered as either a philosopher or theologian by many. Buber is not afraid to include at the very foundation of his philosophical anthropology not only God's meaning in the world for man but God's being and how that relates to man. Man in Buber's anthropology participates and communicates in an I-Thou relationship with both God and his fellowman.

32 Maurice Friedman, Pointing the Way, 27.
33 Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, 116 ff.
34 The Philosophy of Martin Buber, Edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 469.
We conclude this section by returning to the opening sentence reflecting upon Buber’s definition of philosophical anthropology. The wholeness of man, his place in the world and his existence as a being are all to be understood in light of the dialogic principle. “The I-Thou relation allows for the actualization of man and brings him closer to his own perfection,” wrote Buber.35 “God himself advances creation toward realization of its potential.”36 Thus the wholeness of man in Buber’s philosophical anthropology is attained through the dialogic relation both with man and the God of Abraham.

35 Gilya Gerda Schmidt, Martin Buber’s Formative Years. From German Culture to Jewish Renewal, 1897-1909. 38.
36 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

One of the intents of this study is to seek the truth about the human person. It does not seek an absolute truth that would claim absolute adherence. Instead the process has been to explore the writings of Martin Buber, in this section, to verify those elements of his dialogical principle that bear truth in the context of philosophical, theological and anthropological reasoning. It is a search for truth in his postulations. Throughout these sub-divisions of this section of the paper there has been a progression of his thinking regarding all the elements of the dialogue. Hopefully the paper’s citation and exploration of these elements has already made an impression on the reader as to coherence and comprehensibility of Buber’s dialogic principle. There is a further hope that the light of truth shines forth in the reality of both his thinking and the presentation of that thinking.

This conclusion, which comes after a lengthy presentation of Buber’s “system,” attempts to be brief in collating the most salient features of his system that would support the first two hypotheses stated in chapter one. This task is made easier since a good deal of what Buber espoused in his book, I and Thou, in the 1920’s has become “common knowledge,” accepted by the majority of people whose vocabulary reflects this acceptance and absorption of his ideas. Although the “person on the street” could not use ontological or metaphysical terms to account for these unexamined beliefs, they do believe that: 1) a person is a person only in relation to other persons, 2) each person is uniquely different from every other person, 3) persons become more “human” as they
interact with each other, becoming more of who they are meant to be, 4) each person should try to reach their full potential as human beings, and that this potential can be reached not in isolation but only through interpersonal relations. The more sophisticated individual (psychologically and theologically) would state that: 1) the I-Thou relationship is the vehicle of becoming a person, 2) our relationship with God can be viewed as an I-Thou relationship, and 3) each person completes a mission in this life by living up to their potential. This is not to suggest that Buber’s book is totally responsible for these commonly accepted beliefs. The tide of thinking of that era, which would include the philosophy of personalism and existentialism, sociology and psychology’s contribution of ego centered and interpersonal relationships, and a theology oriented toward hermeneutics of subjectivity, certainly carried forth the ideas developed by Buber. The popularity of the notions proposed by Buber were embraced, to some degree, as truthfully reflecting reality as it unfolds in each culture and historical era.

These conclusions regarding hypotheses one and two might be viewed under the same headings found in chapter one and will be used in chapter three: 1) relationship with God, 2) I-Thou dialogue, 3) uniqueness and mission, and 4) freedom.

1) Relationship with God

Buber as a Jew, accepts without question the existence of God and sees no reason to prove or defend God’s existence. God’s creation and revelation through the world is a given. Man is made who he is by being in relationship to God. Man is related to God
through immersing himself in living, thus hallowing his own life and the world. Man is related to God by directing every aspect of life “into relation” with God. Since he believed that God sought relation, it is man’s duty to relate to God. This is man’s destiny: to relate to God. Our knowledge of God is the clearest illustration of existential truth for it cannot be proved. Therefore an individual becomes a person as he enters into relation with God. Buber would not say theological person, since such naming does not fit into his dialogic vocabulary. Man relates to God through the relationship with other human beings. The Eternal thou of relationship who is infinite calls to the finite for an answer.

Buber’s contribution on this topic is that we only know and meet God through relationship. God can only be known in the encounter, the dialogic relation of being present to man in whatever way God chooses. Meeting the Absolute or Eternal Thou leads subjects to become persons which directly addresses the stated hypothesis. His idea of the “inborn Thou” is reminiscent of Augustine’s “our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” No matter how hard he tries, Buber cannot escape the mystical side of this relationship with God. His explanations touch this topic and contribute to our understanding of relationship with God and how an individual becomes a “theological” person or a person in relationship with God. As God’s personhood unfolds in relationship, so does the human being’s, supporting the idea proposed in hypothesis two about fulfillment.
2) I-Thou dialogue

Buber would contend that not only does dialogue aid in the comprehension of the concept of person but indeed, outside of the dialogic framework person does not exist. Only through the I-Thou relationship does an individual become a person. His view is extreme when he states that reality only exists in the meeting, outside of it is merely thinking about or conjecturing about reality. Some major figures of modern psychology have certainly embraced Buber’s view that an individual becomes conscious of itself only in relation to another and makes its appearance as a person as a result of this encounter. Again supporting the hypotheses, Buber says emphatically that man exists for the sake of relation. Regarding fulfillment, Buber states that in each I-Thou encounter both members are enriched and become more of the person they are meant to be. Man can only be understood in relation to another man. Man then can only be fulfilled in relation to another.

3) Uniqueness and mission

One entire sub-division deals with this topic. In Buber’s thinking, uniqueness is inseparable from task (what will be referred to in von Balthasar as mission). “Uniqueness is the essential wealth of the human being and it is his task to unfold it.” Only through the dialogue can this uniqueness be recognized and confirmed which allows the person to fulfill its purpose. Wholeness comes only through the other self which makes relation the

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vehicle of ontological existence. This uniqueness is equivalent to relation and direction. We are gifted by God to accomplish the task. Only in relation can this uniqueness be confirmed by unconditional acceptance. Supporting hypothesis two, Buber states that man’s uniqueness is fulfilled in achieving the task and living up to his potentiality. This direction that fulfills the person can only come through dialogue.

An interesting aspect of Buberian thought, in this matter, is that every person’s goal is the “becoming” as opposed to self-realization. This accents the dynamic not the static, the interpersonal and not a solipsistic arriving within oneself as a self-accomplishment. This idea emphasizes growth in personhood, not a one time achievement of being a person.²

4) Freedom

This topic is also addressed in the sub-division of “Self-fulfillment Through Dialogue.” Uniqueness, direction and freedom are closely related. Buber firmly believes in freedom as a given and in comparison to his other well-documented ideas spends little time on it. His freedom calls for great trust as the individual decides as a result of each dialogic encounter to either pursue an inner prompting or not. Unlike the typical Christian view, his understanding is that man has freedom but God does not. He stresses a free responding to inner voices, not a response to an outside call or to a particular destiny. This inner prompting is elicited by the dialogic relation which is connected to one’s unique potential. Even in relation to God, Buber hears not a call or mission but senses

² This idea will be pursued in the following chapter.
only God's presence. In his book *Knowledge of Man* there is no mention of compulsion or imposition of the task by God, only complete freedom. Supporting hypothesis one then are these ideas on freedom that result from the dialogic encounter.

Hypothesis two is addressed by another intriguing idea that will be pursued in chapter four – freedom in the relation allows the person to have no purposes or self-will. Fulfillment of task is not based on personal desire or preference but on the direction discovered in the dialogic relation. “Necessity and freedom are seen to be one.” Therefore freedom and responsibility are inseparable. The dialogic relation provides the opportunity for true reciprocity between the I and Thou that in turn allows for fulfillment of the person as the Absolute Thou wishes not “to impose itself but to be freely apprehended.”

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3 Cf. 285.
4 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 64.
5 Ibid., 65.
In the second part of his trilogy\(^1\) entitled Theo-Drama, von Balthasar attempts to present a theology of the “good,” as it reveals itself in an analogous way, showing God’s goodness as one of the divine transcendental properties. He names it Theo-Drama, because he has discovered in drama elements that develop and explicate a theology which makes sense to him. His aim was to show how theology could be an organizing principle that relates to drama and, particularly, that many of the elements of the drama can be rendered fruitful for theological investigation. These elements bear a symbolic value because most peoples develop a theatre and universal understanding of terms such as director, actor, role, theme, etc. Most societies have produced plays incorporating such items and have engaged in the portrayal of life upon a stage. The model of the theatre was for von Balthasar an ideal vehicle because of his wide knowledge, in several languages, of world drama and his knowledge of the history of drama because of the discovered truths regarding transcendence, the human person, divine vs. human freedom, that drama presents. These truths, as presented in drama, will be modified so as to be most useable in his development of theology.

The "theological drama" flowed naturally from his seven volumes on "Aesthetics,"\(^2\) since when one catches sight of the glory it is natural to be involved, caught up and transported, and challenged by such glory; dramatic existence is the response to glory. The true drama of the world, the entrance, life, dying and rising of Jesus Christ draws us into itself and we become players on the stage. Only when we realize that God chooses each one of us to play a unique part and each of us plays the part with absolute commitment, then we see the theological "universal validity" established by God and revealed through the already cited elements of drama.\(^3\) It is the drama that presents existence and allows the spectator to gaze and muse upon life. The stage makes the drama of existence explicit, not limited to this world but raises existence to a higher level between the human being and God.

God takes up the drama of the world and existence and again raises it to another level in which, as sovereign God, he decides to play on our stage. Our play now "plays" in his play. Even though drama and theology share common features and at times can appear equal in presentation, von Balthasar, for all of his reliance on drama, states,

"Thus it is already clear that, while the conceptual categories of secular drama provide us with preliminary understanding, they cannot offer anything like a complete grasp. They remain at the level of image and metaphor, as is clear from their ultimate ambiguity; here too the greater dissimilarity in the analogy prevents us from using any terms univocally."\(^4\)

\(^2\) These seven volumes are entitled The Glory of the Lord, Ignatius Press, San Francisco.
\(^4\) Ibid., 18.
That does not mean that God does not walk upon the world stage. Such entrance into the play reveals that God’s action and the world drama have an ontological ground. There is a link between the two dramas. God’s goodness, beauty, and truth spill over into the world drama. He works through others to bring about his ends. And ultimately he appears as a human being. There is no escaping playing a part in God’s play whether we do so willingly or knowingly. The fortunate person does realize that he is playing a role in the play and is the better for it. Theatre, of course, relies on the premise that in the very act of playing a role one would hope that the player can discern the meaning of the role and can thereby transcend oneself. One must keep in mind that God is always the director of the play and remains so even when he plays a role in salvation history. Likewise, playing upon the stage of life does not make God a co-equal player. Theatre’s contribution to fundamental theology is that it continues to put forth questions about the meaning of life, life’s roles and God’s role. Again Balthasar sees drama mirrored in life when he states “…that the divine dramatic answer has already taken place in the form of the human dramatic question.”

Von Balthasar finishes his introduction-orientations by saying that there is a basic Christian requirement that existence present itself dramatically. Contemplation must be joined to action. For all religion would become sterile if it only prayed and contemplated. All those who wave their palms, singing Hosanna’s, must be the same who wish to perform the will of the Father. “Neither faith, contemplation, nor kerygma can dispense

5 Ibid., 21.
This action, or what von Balthasar calls “what-is-going forward,” is the concern of dramatic theory. Such action is a response to God as God and director. God is the initiator, as he was in the Old and New Covenants, when he unexpectedly approaches. The response of man in this divine involvement is part of God’s action. Although in “Aesthetics” there may be a boundary between object and onlooker, and in “Dramatik” a blurring between life and stage, there is nothing distancing or ambiguous regarding what God does on man’s behalf: goodness.

Theo-drama shows forth what God has done in the work of salvation by reconciling the world to himself in Christ (2Cor. 5:19). Love is at the heart of the theo-drama. As the “Aesthetics” uncovered the glory of God’s action in his Covenant, it likewise revealed the “goodness” of God’s totally free love. It is here that theology is not well served by drama, where God’s goodness can only be explained within itself and will not permit itself to be drawn into the obscurities or ambiguities of the “world theatre.” However, God allows his goodness and action to be affected by the world’s ambiguity and remains a hidden good; the price of revelation. He performs good acts only on the world stage, the place where every person’s life unfolds. Here enters role, freedom, response to mission, love and obedience. Finally von Balthasar calls upon the herald to fashion his own life into a dramatic word of testimony. Both in Buber and von Balthasar’s life there is ample evidence that they were heralds of deep faith delivered in “dramatic words of testimony.”

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6 Ibid., 22.
7 Ibid., 18.
In the first volume of Theo-drama, von Balthasar cites the principle of dialogue as providing “one of the most fruitful new approaches to Christian life and thought...”\(^8\) He finds in the Biblical event of Covenant all the important issues of the dialogic principle - relation between God and man, the freedom that God gives to man created as an independent being, a realm or space where he can freely hear, answer and “ultimately cooperate responsibly with God.”\(^9\) There is a definite stress here, in von Balthasar’s work, on saying “yes” from one’s innermost freedom. Many seekers of God and truth could assent to these just mentioned elements that comprise the dialogic principle. Von Balthasar, because he is a Christian and Catholic, goes beyond these elements. For him the “genuine dialogue” occurs with the appearance of God’s Son, so the dialogue is between Father and Son, God in heaven and God as a human being on earth. Now freedom, love and obedience can be understood in an entirely different light. With the Son’s appearance, the dialogue, ever present in God, is revealed.

This dialogue is now prolonged in time through Theo-drama. Theo-drama provides the continuity that human beings need to make connections between significant encounters. Through theo-drama history becomes important for it provides a record of the past involvement with God - the Thou, and sheds light upon the present drama which in turn provides hope for the future unfolding. This continuity through history and dialogue gives significance to life. There is a totality present that is observable and trustworthy. Dialogue is a connecting element to all aspects of life. The interconnectedness of these

\(^{8}\) Ibid., 34.
events brings about action and accomplishment which for von Balthasar are the fruits of the dialogic event. Theo-drama and its utilization of the dramatic dialogue is one of von Balthasar's contributions to theology. The paper will now address the I of the dialogue.

9 Ibid.
“WHO AM I?”

Convinced of the power of the dramatic elements (dialogue, actor, director) to elucidate the theological understanding of life, von Balthasar turns to the dramatic dialogue as reflective of God’s Trinitarian manner in relating to human beings. He then addresses drama and literature and in turn moves onto psychology, philosophy and sociology, pursuing one half of the content of the dialogic encounter, the “I.” It is essential, before one posits a working theory of the dialogic principle as fundamental to how human beings inter-relate and how they relate to God and He to them, that both sides of the hyphenated expression, (I-Thou) be fully understood or at least their interaction be understood. This section pursues the “I” of “I-Thou.”

Throughout Volume I of Theodrama, von Balthasar “stays in character” utilizing excerpts and examples from world literature to demonstrate theological concepts and, as he said, to erect a theological apparatus so that gymnasts may eventually exercise upon it.¹

Von Balthasar certainly was familiar with aspects of the body of American drama. Wilder’s play, “Our Town,” written in 1939, provides one of the most touching scenes from American theatre. The deceased Emily returns to earth to relive one day of her choosing and is almost crushed by the beauty of life that was all about her, but which she

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, Theodrama, Volume I, 9.
had missed on that once already lived twelfth birthday. She realizes that nothing was lived out. "Things go too fast. We don't even have time to take a look at ourselves." The very thing closest to us, ourself, we do not have time to ponder. Wilder reminds us of the sheer beauty of the uniqueness of everyday and moment. The unrepeatability is also obvious and is the essence of drama. Wilder's presentation, in particular, reflects drama, in general, which often portrays life as either supremely tragic or sublimely comic. The mundane, although for some not considered or counted for much, is viewed by drama as the sublime essence of comedy and tragedy. Much of what has been written portrays the subject clinging to non-existence or embracing the non-self. Most of literature and drama gives poor response to the perennial, "Who Am I?". Even as he builds "his apparatus" in this entire volume, Von Balthasar can only cite the gulf between an individual's role and what someone is in reality. Between the subject and itself there is an abyss. Le Senne compared the character with the piano on which the "I" played, while the music played would be equivalent to the person. This takes one back to the prosopon origination of the term person in Greek plays. The persona (Latin) was a mask through which the actor spoke. A character soon came to be identified from the mask which he or she wore. The role he played depended on the mask worn.

Still von Balthasar must turn to drama and the theatre of this world to attempt to shed light upon how the "I" is to be understood. Drama highlights or mirrors the consternation that follows the question of "Who Am I?". If the world stage is to be viewed as a symbol

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2 Ibid., 376.
3 Ibid., 481.
filled with illusion, the “I” at best can only fulfill a role in that play. Or the “I” can insert itself entirely into the role and be itself. In either case the actor must interpret the role to be played if it is to be a genuine “I.” Such ambiguity that arises from the previous two choices leads to great confusion of who the “I” really is in this world as understood only in a secular sense. Masks or persona don’t work well. Von Balthasar makes the observation that the secular view leads to a conclusion of ambiguity even when the person identifies completely with the role. Drama has no conclusion or finality and is at times absurd.

Looking to playwrights and philosophers who are important characters on the stage of life, von Balthasar seeks the content of the “I,” the person. The absoluteness of the “I” guarantees man’s freedom. The existence of this non-noumenal “I” points to a postulated God, who cannot be deduced from reason. An examination of Hofmannsthal’s encounter with Calderon leads one to examine the “I” once again, now in light of one that steps forth from the totality of living things. Hofmannsthal pursued the explanation of the “I” but along confusing pathways. He dipped into psychoanalysis to search for the infinity of life as the foundation for the “I.” Introversion, surrendering of self sacrifice, and rebirth were all topics which he pursued, but none are a clear explanation of the “I-ness” of a person and all are based on an anthropocentric rationalism.

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4 Ibid., 180.
5 Ibid., 216.
One might ask then why pursue the subject of drama? In answer, von Balthasar has said, "...we chose the 'theatre of the world' because it contains, concentratedly and most abundantly - both widely scattered and in precise detail - the elements which, drawn from the dramatic process itself, facilitate a religious and ultimately theological interpretation of existence." These important elements are: 1) the distinction between the finitude of the performed play and its nonfinite meaning which deals with the ineluctably finitude of human existence, the unavoidable ambiguity of the stage play’s illusion and determinism vs. freedom, 2) the distinction between the "I" and the allotted role which deals with the relation of earthly role to heavenly existence, distinction between identity vs. distinction and distance, and the difference between the interconnectedness of roles and the incommunicability of roles, 3) the distinction between the actor’s responsibility for his performance and his responsibility to a director which deals with the actor’s freedom in his distinguishing his roles, the active involvement of the director of the play, and the questions relating to partial and genuine freedom, 4) the three distinctions that give rise to dramatic tension which deals with the content of the play that portrays man caught between his "I" and his role, the recognition of the Divine will among the network of roles, and how man is viewed in his roles, especially in the lowly roles.

There is always a tension in the characters of the play that reflects the real characters of life. As relationships arise on both the stage and world drama, the actors ask whether

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6 Ibid., 249.
7 Ibid., 249-57.
they possess this role or are this role? "Do you really know who you are?..."8 From whence comes existence? What constitutes the real “I”? For some, the drama of the stage has been a pleasant and comforting refuge from the life drama as played in the world. Von Balthasar sees a change in the traditional view that assumed that God was the ultimate director who assigned the roles, and that events in the world were viewed in light of the divine dramatist. The change reveals a difference in who the real director truly is along with viewing the dramatic stage in an unrealistic or farcical way. The “I” is caught in an unreal play, an unreal world drama which allows him no place or role.

It is one of the feats of von Balthasar upon his own theological apparatus that he can move back and forth between the ambivalence of the “theatre of the world” and life of the stage drama. The following reflections upon history and philosophy are von Balthasar’s. At times the elements of the drama provide rich resources for theological discussion and insight, but at other times the events, because they are a symbol of the world, offer a reflection of reality that confuses. Von Balthasar cannot adumbrate the theatre for the reactions that it evokes in the audience. The “theatre of the world” is a symbol of the dramatic dimension of existence as it is found in a metaphysico-religious self-interpretation.9 From early Greek times there arose self-reflective religious ideas. Von Balthasar found great truth and richness in the philosophy of Plato and Plotinus. In Platonic thought, the “I” makes a free prior choice of its role before it ever enters the world. Calderon raises questions that still persist, “what is the relationship of the role

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8 Ibid., 247.
9 Ibid., 250.
played on earth to a heavenly reward?"; "what do such roles achieve?". It was understood in Greek theatre that there was always a distance between the role and the actor playing the role. In order to maintain one’s true identity, distance between self and role must be preserved. At the same time one learns that the “I” does not remain untouched by the role it plays. The “I” is shaped by the role it plays. In Plato the choice of role is made in pre-existence. For the Christian, role selection is a saying “yes” to an assigned role, the playing of which is a purification, a preparation. Again the Christian view involves the Last Judgment that directly rewards the person who played his part well. The rendering of the part is closely connected to the person’s true identity. It is to the credit of the actor that he freely chooses the role and by such choosing wholeheartedly embraces the role. There was to be no struggle between the free choice of role and destiny’s assigning the role. Although there would be refinements to these dramatic elements and metaphysical thoughts, the tension between “I” and role would remain.

The “I” in its uniqueness enters into the social context and freely embraces the arena and role for which it was made. There is no compulsion with God in distinction to the director of a drama. As the pursuit of the play continues, the next question is where in the network of these roles can one ascertain the Divine Will? Man is always the “I” in a role which is designed by God in his Divine Will. The true discovery of the “I” is not to be found but merely touched upon throughout the history of drama. Von Balthasar in his splendid search finds a schizophrenia and confusion, a full blown illusion when it comes to discovering who the “I” is.
For von Balthasar neither philosophy nor science can provide an adequate answer of "Who Am I?". He returns to theatre, naked souls, and roles. For him the answer will lie in the "who." Plato said, "No one who does not wonder about himself can be considered to lead a human life."\(^{10}\) Each individual must ask the question and each must listen for its own answer. It is each one's individual secret. These are the stirrings to realize not what I am but who I am. Von Balthasar cited this moving passage from Dickens which profoundly states part of what is being said:

"A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds and thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this...My friend is dead, my neighbour is dead, my love, the darling of my soul, is dead; it is the inexorable consolidation and perpetuation of the secret that was always in that individuality, and which I shall carry in mine to my life's end. In any of the burial places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me, or than I am to them?"\(^{11}\)

Such writing suggests the depth of the question, "Who Am I?". Part of whom a person is can be illuminated by others, but each holds a uniqueness within itself not to be fully explained by another. The person who asks does not constitute itself. Even when a member of the human species asks the question "Who Am I?" it receives no answer or solace from fellow members of the species, for all persons ask the same question. There

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\(^{10}\) Ibid., 483.  
\(^{11}\) Ibid., 484.
is a shared uniqueness among them as members of the human species but no distinct uniqueness.

Realizing that he is unlike other creatures, since he can reflect and distance himself from situations, the individual concludes possibly that he is spirit with philosophical or theological rationale. Where before, a person was either caught between supra-events and himself or between a dualism within, now he is moved from an inner-worldly dilemma to a "divine" reality. He must wrestle with divine elements in his quest for knowing self. To the Greeks "knowing thyself" was of great importance and they resorted to the gods and goddesses for solutions. For some, it was the absolute that showed each person his place, finitude and mortality. 12 The Greeks could go no further. The stoics and Neoplatonists both arrive at the "I" carrying its own uniqueness but they too could go no further.

Modern psychology as the study of the soul fairs little better, since its quest is for commonalities instead of particularities. The term role is often used in psychology and is naturally related to the "I" that is the topic of all personality theorists but no Thou is mentioned. Freud contended that "...the person bears the character traits required by his fictitious goal, just as the character mask - the persona - of the actor in ancient tragedy had to be appropriate to the tragedy's finale." 13 Jung’s theory remained mired in the depths of the psyche. Neither God nor the self escaped the inner depths of that psyche.

12 Ibid., 489.
13 Ibid., 528.
Neither Jung nor Adler’s theory could account for a God who could grant uniqueness to individuals. For them there is no call of a fellow man that awakens you to an awareness of self and world. Freedom of one person does not awaken freedom of another. There was no I-Thou relation. But this time the dualism lies within. There is the inner person dualism of “I” as surface and “I” as depth - two different parts of an individual. St. Thomas Aquinas defends the individual and, as a result of his writing and dependence on Avicenna, the human person becomes an individual _ratione materiae_. This lead to the entity being more intelligible as it was abstracted farther from matter and generalized.\(^\text{14}\)

As these ideas paled, more daring ones followed for example, Eckhart saw man as the cause of himself and all things! He returns to the same trend of previous thinking--nature and essence are more interior than the personal “I.” For Eckhart, “Ego, the word ‘I,’ truly belongs to no one but God alone in his unity.”\(^\text{15}\) Other idealists eventually lost the individual as a person.

In the short history of the development of the concept of person, Fichte is a prominent contributor. To the often asked “Who am I?,” he responds: “From the moment I have attained consciousness I am the person I freely make myself to be; I am this person because I make myself such.--At each moment of my existence, my being is what it is as a result of freedom, not insofar as it is conditioned, but with regard to its ‘ultimate’ character.”\(^\text{16}\) What a person becomes depends on the person alone; all starts with the “I.”

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\(^{14}\) Ibid., 551.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 556.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 559.
This thinking eventually devolves into idealism where "...the person needs to be sacrificed to the idea, and that...the individual shall not exist, being of no importance, but shall perish."\textsuperscript{17} The individual person is replaced by the ideal of humanity which is described as "The one, external, powerful, living and self-dependent life of God."\textsuperscript{18} The person is to forget himself in the species. The individual person is replaced by the idea descending in a new form in a particular human being. The result of Fichte's thinking was religious pantheism.

Von Balthasar discusses these philosophers' understanding of person not only in a historical sense, but as part of a theoretical legacy that he himself will partially use or discard in his own concept of person. During what Balthasar names the middle period of his work (1802-1812), he refers to Schelling who will contribute to theodramatic theory, depicting a pantheistic God from whom finite things have their origin by a "fall from the Absolute." Creation was not a positive coming forth from the Absolute but a fall from it. "This means 'that no finite thing can arise directly out of the Absolute and be brought back to it.'"\textsuperscript{19} To think that the soul discards the body at death and continues to exist as an individual is incorrect. Von Balthasar certainly appreciated Schelling's stress on independence and freedom. "The fact that things are dependent 'does not eliminate independence, or even freedom.' Otherwise it would be impossible for a son to be free and independent of his father."\textsuperscript{20} And again, another quote of Schelling that will acquire

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 560.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 561.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 570.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 571.
new life in von Balthasar’s work: “God can be manifest only in what is like him, that is, in free, independently acting beings.”\textsuperscript{21} But can Schelling’s thinking incorporate the idea of a free person who is not God himself? The answer of Schelling to the question, “Who am I” remains much the same as Fichte’s, “I am who I make myself to be.”\textsuperscript{22} A person is of eternal origin who subordinates his own will to the devouring divine will. What is divine in man is the nonpersonal element. The personal is placed aside by the creature in favor of a vision of impersonality in the divine. To act impersonally and not to allow your personality to interfere with the soul’s influences upon you is the goal. The soul is “what I myself have always been from the beginning.” Soul is the unifying element of body and spirit. At death the soul goes to the beyond, taking with it its spiritual body, where there is no tension between being and that which has being. As persons, we choose to be individual, distinct from all else and to reinforce a selfish substratum. But this substratum, although not able to be eliminated, can be transformed - made luminous. The substratum does not exist for its own sake; its uniqueness depends upon its ability to bear the higher light. Even when we are in God there is still a part of us that is not God. For Schelling, our nature is taken up into the eternal. Thus the essence is extracted without the being of the individual being annihilated. Such thinking, of course, portrays nothing about a true, personal, loving God. Even the term “person” holds a negative connotation full of self-will. Schelling does, however, look upon Christianity as a religion that contains more “than is to be found in reason.”

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 574.
Hegel too takes up the Delphic Oracle's command, "Know Thyself," which has been a thread woven throughout the first volume of Theo-Drama. The God who gives such a command is not the Delphic Apollo but the absolute law of his own spirit. All knowledge rests upon the spirit recognizing itself in all things, heavenly and earthly. Hegel's understanding of self-knowledge meant that the individual was integrated into the totality of his spirit. An individual becomes a person when reason becomes spirit. The spirit can become conscious of itself as its own world, and in turn, the world as itself. Hegel, Plato and Schelling all tend to agree on the question of the genius or a selfish 'other', standing opposite the individual on the one hand, but on the other hand the genius uniting with the individual to form a unity as inseparable as that of the psyche. There is no true uniqueness of the individual because of the previous absolute universal that is always simultaneously present whenever an "I" makes an individual statement. The "I" can only discover itself as a "we" by surrendering its individuality. The "I's" achievement lies only in what individuals do in surrendering their individuality and doing the general activity. "Thus it is characteristic of Hegel that he begins to discuss what we call the I-Thou relationship only when he has reached this stage."23 For Hegel the way that two self-subsistents acknowledge each other is by each affirming itself in the ultimate struggle that ends in death. "The individual who has not risked his life, while he may indeed be recognized as a person, has not attained to the truth of his being recognized as a self-subsistent self-consciousness."24 Death alone becomes the criterion of truth. To Hegel the individual is nothing. The elevated individual is pure freedom.

23 Ibid., 582.
24 Ibid., 583.
who demonstrates this through the ability to die whereby the subject is above all compulsion.

In summary of Hegel: “The word of reconciliation is the existent spirit [der daseiende Geist] who beholds the pure knowledge of himself as a ‘universal’ being in his opposite, in the pure knowledge of himself as absolute, self-existent ‘individual’; --This reciprocal recognition is ‘absolute spirit’; it is the reconciling Yes in which both ‘I’s relinquish their opposed existences.”25

This is the beginning of some von Balthasar’s I-Thou formulation. Hegel’s spirit is “onesidedly universalizing,” for no personal vocation is imparted to the individual; whereas personal vocation and the uniqueness of the individual that makes him a person will be a central idea in von Balthasar’s theology. Instead of upholding individuality, Hegel negates it and shatters it by asserting, that sacrificing oneself for the nation is what we should always have in mind as the highest call. The “I” eventually disappears and loses all significance.

Still pursuing the question “Who am I?,” von Balthasar turns to Georg Simmel whom he considers a post-Christian thinker. The human person’s uniqueness flows from the personal uniqueness of the Creator who creates in his own image. Not only is Simmel interested in the uniqueness of the human person, but joins this interest to the idea of call,

25 Ibid., 588.
which will be von Balthasar’s central theme i.e., uniqueness related to mission or call. Von Balthasar quotes Simmel on uniqueness: “The special quality of existence that no one else can do, of standing on a spot that has been waiting for us, so to speak” and “that everyone make profit with ‘his’ particular pound.” Simmel’s later writing in which he considers all individuality as illusory, cannot vitiate the grandeur of truth once espoused and just quoted. Simmel writes about man’s yearning to find the meaning of life and to be involved in the world plan which suggests the idea of mission, but he sees an opposition between man’s will and the divine will. One is left with an abstractness that does not allow for an interpersonal expression. There is no attention paid to a “Thou” when the subject is totally occupied with self transcendence and its own perfection.

Based upon his investigation, von Balthasar can conclude that the answer to “Who Am I?” can only be given by Christ in the tradition which rests on the vertical axis of Biblical revelation. Rosenzweig, Ebner, and the later Buber (veiled in the early Buber) all attest to the individual becoming distinct from every other human being by the name by which God addresses him. “...Only thus is he no longer simply an individual of a species, but a unique person.” After an extensive search von Balthasar can now state: “Neither pre-Christian thought nor mysticism and idealism; neither psychology nor sociology were equipped, or even authorized, to give this answer.” Neither science nor philosophy have the correct tools to accomplish the task. Philosophical dialogism cannot give an

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26 Ibid., 606.
27 Ibid., 628.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
answer to how the “I” becomes a person through the “Thou.” Encounter between two individuals, no matter what the attending circumstances of destiny, love, exclusivity, may be they cannot give adequate answer. Nothing of this world can give the complete answer; nothing in this world can continue the dialogue, for every earthly relationship is bound to disappoint. All earthly relationships are ephemeral. Von Balthasar cites Buber (who grasped the finitude of such relationships) as he points to the eternal Thou who does not allow communication to be broken off between I and Thou, an idea which certainly supports von Balthasar’s contention that it is only on the vertical axis upon which we meet Christ that the question can finally be answered.

However, von Balthasar then passes over Buber as not being able to suitably answer the question, since I and Thou lacks the very category that he is searching for, that is, man’s being “directly addressed, summoned, called and sent by God.” To von Balthasar this is the only satisfying reply to the question, “Who am I in my particularity?” We will return to von Balthasar’s assessment of Buber on this point.

Again pursuing von Balthasar’s historical sketch of the dialogic principle (which is not a comparison or critique of Buber’s work per se), we come to Ludwig Binswanger who used Buber’s thoughts from I and Thou to theorize. Binswanger utilizes Buber’s “between,” placing it prior to the relation and sees it as the soaring above the world.30

30 Ibid., 631.
The accent is on the “we-ness” prior to the coming together. He quotes this passage from Buber:

“I see a symbol in those human beings who are so transported, in the passion of fulfilled eros, by the miracle of their embrace, that their awareness of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ dissolves in the feeling of a oneness that does not, and cannot exist. What the ecstatic calls “union” is the transporting dynamism of the relationship; it is not a unity that has come to be at this particular moment of the world time, dissolving ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ but the dynamism of the relationship itself... What we have here is a peripheral heightening of the act of relationship; the relationship itself, its vivid unity, is felt so strongly that its members seem (!) to pale in its presence; their life causes them to forget the ‘I’ and the “Thou” between which it has been created.” 31

Since a comparison will be made between Buber and von Balthasar’s dialogic principle, only brief mention of Buber will be made here in this historical sketch. 32 Von Balthasar points out that Buber’s concern with God is only in the I-Thou encounter. Although aware of categories of “the caller” and “the one called,” Buber, to von Balthasar’s dismay, gives little stress to such important topics. In the last pages of I and Thou, 33 Buber states, “all revelation is vocation and mission.” There is not a full development of the categories of addressing, summoning, calling and sending that are so essential to von Balthasar’s dialogical principle.

Returning to the productive field of drama, von Balthasar sees only ambiguities and inconsistencies among the playwrights themselves. Only in God as director apportioning roles and the true identity between the actor and the role can any consistent and clear

31 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 87.
32 Von Balthasar was at times critical of Buber’s thinking, whereas Buber never did criticize von Balthasar in print.
33 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 115.
sense be made out of the purely dramatic elements of life. Von Balthasar uses the concept of role as a transition to mission. As he moves from "Who Am I?" to the concept of mission that distinguishes one human person from another, von Balthasar employs the dramatic ingredient of role. The role concept, however, is an important aspect of von Balthasar's theorizing and not just a stepping stone to mission even though the answer lies in mission. Role is not arbitrary but genuinely needed in the realm of life's drama. The "I" cannot become itself except through the role which it plays.
ROLE

Von Balthasar developed the idea of role (a familiar concept and element of drama) as an integral part of mission. It is important to establish if our answer to God is just a role that we play, a way of gathering information about life, or is it something more? Can the concept of role provide the answer? Can role yield the distinctive characteristics of the concept of theological person?

Turning to theatre again, von Balthasar explores role and function. The individual is assigned a role and to be oneself there is a need to play the role. However, if one identifies completely with the role, there is fear that the individual becomes identical with the role, thereby missing the opportunity to play other roles. That leaves the question, should the person have a distance between himself and the role? The functionalist would answer that we find our identity by slipping into the role that society casts all *dramatis personae*. Such role playing is related to the person being-in-relation. In pursuing this line of thought, von Balthasar points out that there is a tension between the finite and infinite which makes over-identification a mistake. The essence of identification presupposes non-identity. He likens the question of what role can really show me myself, to the layers of an onion. As the searcher or peeler of the onion, in this instance, moves deeper into the questions of role and identity more difficult questions arise. What

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happens to that person who completely identifies with his role only to be “refunctioned” by a societal change? More than just the topic of role is being alluded to. This discussion involves function. Anyone can perform the function even as roles change. Von Balthasar returns to the question that will persist throughout all facets of his view of the dialogic principle - “Who am I?” The individual performing a function while playing a role would ask such a question as technological changes erase the function.

Jesus, the Redeemer, knew that he was the one sent to reveal the Father. This was his role and mission. The question is raised in what way and how far in the Christian life can a deep and Christian seriousness be embraced in the context of the “play” dimension? The elements of the play are aptly descriptive here as our life decisions insert us into the “play” with its rules and required portrayals. This reflects a structure that finds itself in “man's enfleshed situation” reflected in the social and religious sphere. Von Balthasar takes this role playing seriously, quoting Kant:

“As a whole, the more civilized men are, the more they are actors: They adopt the appearance of inclination and respect toward others, of good manners, of unselfishness; nor do others find this oppressive - aware as they are that it does not in fact come from the heart - since it is an attitude with which they concur. Indeed, it is very good that things are so in the world. For, by playing this role, people are gradually aroused to a full exercise of the virtues whose externals they have cultivated for a space; and they acquire the disposition itself.”

Then he goes beyond this quote in stating, “It is more; it is a question of affirming a ‘role’ given to us in a religious context and of schooling ourselves to become existentially identified with in...” Unlike Plato’s view of the soul’s choice, von Balthasar clearly

35 Ibid., 54.
36 Ibid.
sees God proffering the role; Christian reality shines through the transparency of the
“theatre of the world.” The following quote from a play by Quevedo\textsuperscript{37} reflects von
Balthasar’s thinking:

“Life’s a comedy, the world’s a stage, men are actors, God is the author. His
responsibility is to allot the parts; man’s is to act well. Remember that life is only
a play. / The entire world is nothing but the stage for a comedy / In which the
scenery keeps changing. / We are all simply actors upon it. / Remember that in
this play it is God / Who is the author and originator / And that what the play is
about is beyond our ken. / If a man has been given a short part, / Let him play it as
prescribed. / But he who is given a long part, / Can only play it properly if his
deeds are good. / If God requires you to act the part / Of a poor man or a slave, / A
prince or a cripple, / Play whatever he has given you to play. / Only one thing
matters for you: / To play your part perfectly / In all you think or do or speak. / But as for the part of allotting good fortune / And as for the length or shortness of
your appearance on stage, / That is God’s concern alone.”\textsuperscript{38}

In his reading these classics (plays and novels), von Balthasar’s own idea and conviction
regarding mission formed. What counts is not what role one plays but how one plays it.
In Calderon we see God’s free will that apportions the roles and gives people their
“fundamental uniqueness.”\textsuperscript{39} In Calderon’s play it is clear to von Balthasar that the
assigned individual mission given by God personalizes the individual for his life in the
world. Using the dramatic as a model, in discussing the persons in the “theatre of the
world,” the I is not absorbed into the role, but the actor accepts and carries out the role in
complete freedom. Such thoughts come from the source of being “...in carrying out the
role, we never surrender the freedom to shape it...”\textsuperscript{40} The tension remains between role

\textsuperscript{37} Epicteto y Fociledes en espanol con consonantes (Madrid 1635)
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 166.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 253.
and existence. The actor himself is the place in which the needed synthesis must occur. He needs to realize that he is the “center of the encounter between two spheres of existence and truth.” He moves in two realms simultaneously: he fulfills his role as he presents himself to his audience in reality, while in the realm of “ideality” he likewise fulfills the drama’s goal as written and directed by the author.

This moving in two realms, fulfilling both roles suggests to the actor a strange division between the core of his being (which is not immediately accessible to him) and the role he plays for himself and society. It reflects a struggle between what is perceived and not perceived, reality vs. “ideality,” role vs. the phenomenal “I.” Again there is the intertwining of role, person and mission.

Because the individual is a particular person with a particular manner of personal manifestation, he must play a particular role. He may feel put upon or alienated in such a role, he may question whether he has embraced or been strapped with this particular role. God leaves it to each person to struggle with such questions. The human person usually works through a list of questions and pursues several blind alleys before reaching a solution and peace. Not sure in the beginning about the appropriateness of the role, he questions if it is a mistake forced upon him by the circumstances of life. If he decides yes then great efforts follow to produce out of oneself the role. This does not work. Finally with time comes the consideration that there is not just the outward playing of a role with

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41 Ibid., 261.
little or no internal involvement. Greater integration follows and the gap between role and "I" lessens. With such knowledge arises the acknowledgment of the joy of having to play a certain role for the pleasure of the audience, while knowing that one has the power to change the role or the phenomenal "I." The actor's mask represents, in a way, this ability to go back and forth in different roles that reflects the features of "having to" and "being able to."

Von Balthasar sees in these concepts of the drama the reflection of how God works in assigning unique roles or personal mission to each creature. The meaning of the actor's role as implanted by the author shows forth in God's actions. As the actor enjoys exploring the role on the stage, so the human person on the world stage can enjoy the same pleasure and exhilaration as he realizes the freedom given to him to exercise and fulfill the role in a personal and distinct fashion.

No matter how closely, von Balthasar follows and employs the elements of the dramatic, there comes a point when he finds the play and dramatic inadequate. The play of genius still cannot substitute the concrete realities of life that the person must face and deal with. This does not exclude the viewer's pleasure in watching a play, delighting to being privileged to share in existence. As the spectator looks upon the actors, he sees what Gabriel Marcel called "the selflessness of actors [presenting] a challenge to metaphysical and religious reflection," and further states "I think we must discover in it something like
that *initium caritatis* of which theologians speak.42 Marcel sees in the actor’s life a transparency “showing the mission and existence of Christ.”43 Jesus fulfilled perfectly the role assigned to Him. All others attempt to approximate the carrying out of the role chosen for them. It calls for a great humility even when each person is granted an inner freedom of vocation. In Christ, the Father has addressed His creatures and given them tasks, missions. This inner freedom comes from Christ himself and through His Spirit. If the concept of role seems too confining and imposed from without, the idea of mission stresses the great freedom and loving acceptance on the part of the creature. It is only in accepting mission that uniqueness can be found.

In von Balthasar’s lengthy search for the “I,” no aspect of life can provide an adequate answer in this world. No other human person can fully give the answer. All attempts to do so rely upon the horizontal dimension whereas the only fully sufficient explanation comes from a vertical dimension. Ultimately the real identity of the “I” is given by God in his revealing to the person, in the form of a personal addressing, what is the person’s mission. Such mission entails a calling and sending forth.

In summary, von Balthasar has moved his discussion from role to mission, while at the same time answering the question posed throughout history: “Who am I?” Utilizing the backdrop of drama he has succeeded in demonstrating that his selection of theo-drama proved a worthy instrument to elucidate God’s action in the world and the individual

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42 Ibid., 294.
43 Ibid.
subject's response as an "I" to the "Thou." Unlike the effete answer of philosophy, psychology, sociology and mysticism, Biblical revelation provided the answer to the individuality of the person bestowed by God in his naming of the subject. In Buber's I and Thou, von Balthasar glimpses, "The world-fullness of the man who has been signed with a name."44 In Biblical revelation, Jesus is the model of personhood.

And so it is impossible to separate the concept of person from that of mission in von Balthasar. This will be a very important consideration when discussing Mary's role, person and mission in the Annunciation scene. In like fashion, it is impossible to separate the dialogue from the concept of person which might shed new light on the Annunciation scene. In St. Thomas, von Balthasar sees Christ as the Father's partner in dialogue and, at the same time, the one sent. What remains a perennial problem in philosophy is forever solved in the person of Christ. In Christ person and mission are one. He is the epitome of doing the will of the Father, not by playing a role but by completing the mission in his very being.

44 Ibid., 645.
ELEMENTS OF THEO-DRAMA

We have progressed through von Balthasar’s lengthy and rather detailed search through theater, philosophy and psychology in pursuit of the I of the I-Thou relationship. This section will examine those elements of theodrama that are related to the Thou. The previous discussion of role serves as a bridge between the I-Thou discussion, since the role is a type of the “I’s” interaction with “Thou” (God) who apportions the roles.

Theodrama is one of the organizing principles of von Balthasar’s theology. Unlike Buber, whose I-Thou dialogic principle constituted the heart of his theological anthropology, von Balthasar will utilize the dialogic event as a vital part of theodrama but not as the most central concept.

1. WORD AND DIALOGUE

Von Balthasar always places these essential elements of dialogic process (role, mission, relation, freedom) within the context of theodrama, the “acting area.”¹ All of the brothers and sisters of Christ stand about Him as He plays the central role on stage. Although one can find images and models of what human beings were to become by reflecting on the divine Logos, Maximus the Confessor demonstrates that the relationship only becomes concrete when we find the authentic model and archetype for earthly

existence in the “incarnate, crucified and risen Son, who mediates all creation.” Christ’s normative role with its archetypal quality determines his role in the theo-drama. As the Son he makes present the triune God and provides the access to God that only he can provide. This is a divine role. As the acting Person, he is the anthropological model. All human conscious subjects are allotted personalizing roles or missions in Christ.

“Where there is dialogue, however, there must be word.” For von Balthasar man is created dialogically, made for speech and conversation. Such belief is based on his Trinitarian belief of the dialogue among persons of the Godhead. Man, made in God’s image, participates in the “I”-“Thou” dialogue; Christ, the Word, issues forth from the Trinitarian conversation. For the Christian, the dialogue is carried on in Christ and in the name of Christ. He is the Other. God is Thou for man. Whereas in Buber’s thought, the dialogue was first experienced with fellow human beings and then in like manner with the Absolute Thou (God), von Balthasar begins with God as man’s first Thou. His model for the dialogue begins in the Trinity, is extended to man through the coming of Christ, and then is applied to our fellow beings. The God who cannot be explained or fully understood makes Himself known in Christ and with Him man may carry on the conversation. In Christ man can now carry on the conversation with God in relation. From the beginning there was the Word affording mankind the opportunity for dialogue.

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3 Ibid.
5 Raymond Gawronski, S.J., Word and Silence, 88.
and relation. Always a Thou preceding all else. The covenantal love of God for the chosen people gave specificity to the love and relationship. This love, now presented to each person, was that same love once reserved for a people: Abraham and his descendants.

The body of von Balthasar’s theology known as theodrama has as its heart, dialogue -- the meeting of I with Thou. In the previous section that provided a historical sketch of “Who Am I?” the question of Thou usually did not arise in philosophy, sociology or psychology. Interpersonal relations, although alluded to, were not seriously studied. As a matter of fact, the interpersonal was seen as a tool for greater enhancement of the individual.

It is only the vertical dimension that can provide the I-Thou relation that makes the “I” truly personal and unique. Only God can call man “Thou” who then becomes “I” in response to God’s love. God precedes man in time. He always approaches and addresses man first. It was the Word of God that models the I-Thou relation in the world. As the Father communicates with the Son, so all human creatures communicate with one another. However, it is only in Christ that we have a model of how to communicate with God. It is Christ, the Word, the communication with us from the Father, from whom mankind learns of the love of the I-Thou relationship.\(^6\) Salvation history proceeds from the covenantal specific love of God, but not yet personalized to the love shown forth in

\(^6\) Ibid., 83.
Christ. Prior to Christ, the I-Thou relation referred to a relation with the people of Israel. The conversations with Abraham and Moses reflected God speaking with his people. The salient aspect of the Christian I-Thou relation is the individual call. Christ as God’s Word is a personal invitation to each man to become a person in Christ. As Christ received his mission from his relationship with His Father, so each human being becomes a person through Christ in the dialogic process. “God wants us, in Christ, to be persons who express God’s unique idea of us.”

In the New Testament the Word is spoken and given to all. The Father bids us to listen to His Son. It is said that God has spoken three times: Creation, Scripture and in the Incarnation. “Christ is the Word that gathers all the words of Scripture and all the words of Creation and humanity together in one Person.” In the person of Christ each person encounters God’s word in the concrete situation of daily life. This encounter is a dialogue with a living person, not an abstract concept or idea that would lead to a solipsistic monologue. There are two separate and distinct ends to this dialogic process. His “otherness,” however, is not so far away that we cannot approach it. Nor is he so ineffable that we cannot come to learn who He is and to describe Him to others. The “otherness” of God does not separate us but presents us with his inexhaustible riches and the wealth of his communications. God remains the Other, ineffable and infinite, always divine with no diminution. This same divine God has revealed Himself in the man Jesus

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 154.
and everything about Jesus is a window to the "Other."  Man as "Other" is addressed by the Word who is always open to dialogue, always willing to communicate with the creature, and always present.

This Word of God is not the ethereal, cerebral, philosophical idea of the Greek philosophers. Jesus Christ is the unique person who enters human history. He comes with a historical past into a present culture bearing in his person gesture and speech that marks him as this particular human being. It is in and through his flesh that he speaks to us. As one cannot divorce the relationship of Son to Father nor can one separate his humanity from the Word. He is the Word incarnate.

For von Balthasar the entire Christian life itself is a dialogue in which God is the initiator and the Holy Spirit prompts the listening and responding. Part of today's problems in searching for God, especially among the myriad techniques and the teachings of Eastern religions is the lack of true dialogue. Silence is sought. On the threshold of this silence, von Balthasar states that the person often discovers an empty self, produced by his own thinking that leads to a deeper self, but not to the self that God has in mind for him.

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9 Ibid.
2. JESUS CHRIST AND THE DIALOGIC PRINCIPLE

The importance of Jesus cannot be over exaggerated now as the person who changes the theo-drama and stage of life. All that was investigated historically in world drama and philosophy and alluded to throughout the first two volumes of Theo-Drama gives way to the person of Jesus. He is an actor, but also the “very condition” that allows the play to exist. He creates the stage, giving it concreteness and space. Von Balthasar sees no “natural” relation between the Absolute, who needs nothing, and the relative. He sees no basis or ground of interaction. Philosophical speculation cannot provide this ground or reason. Only biblical testimony can show the reality of Jesus Christ. The real Jesus Christ cannot be invented by men for He is a given. Revelation exposes the always present acting arena between God and man. God’s interaction did not begin with Adam and Eve but goes back to creation, to God’s original plan of salvation, which always included the person of Jesus Christ and his role as Savior. Therefore God’s involvement as Creator in this world has always been present though Jesus Christ his Son. There has never been a time in the history of the world when the theodramatic stage was empty and without purpose. Jesus - actor and stage - and God as director have given the theodramatic stage to every man as the means to finding his self-fulfillment in God by the exercise of his God-given freedom. This self-fulfillment is found in Christ. It is always through Christ that men are elected for life in God. He is the way to the Father. He shows, as the Word, how to speak and listen to the Father.
An essential aspect of the dialogue is hearing. “We can hear God’s Word ‘because we are in God’s Word [Who]...takes us up in Himself and gives us Himself as our form of existence.’” All words are spoken through Christ and received through Christ the Word. It is God’s will that his Word take root in our hearts and be effective in us. Mary will be seen as that person who heard the Word and let it take root. The dialogue implies not only hearing but believing the Word spoken. Adrienne von Speyr will speak of man’s ability to hear and to respond generously as the basis of prayer.

Jesus is God’s revelation as Word. Just as any word addressed to another expects an answer, so does God’s Word expect an answer. As Jesus was servant in response, so his followers must be. As he received and said “yes” in response, so must Jesus’ followers say “yes” to the proffered mission.

For von Balthasar, it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to listen to the Word. He leads us into the depths of God himself beyond human words to the Word himself. Although the Holy Spirit prays in the heart of each Christian, each Christian must pray and respond to this Word. In Das Betrachtende Gebet, von Balthasar describes man as “that being that is created as hearer of the Word and that comes to his own dignity in his answer to the Word.” Hence there exists the continual dialogue, for the Word is always present and

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11 Raymond Gawronski, S.J., Word and Silence, 150.
all beings have been made through Him. He is the center of all dialogue and, as von Balthasar describes, all the dispersed *logoi spermatikoi*\textsuperscript{12} are drawn as a magnet to Christ.

We are to listen with our whole attention to God’s word. Whole attention refers to every part of our corporeal nature. Since God has decided to make himself present to man in a corporeal way, it is indeed only fitting that the creature respond in a corporeal way.\textsuperscript{13} This response comes from the depths of his being, for he is the creature before his Creator. He is anxious to hear that he might respond. As it says in the psalm, the servant’s eyes watch the hands of the master for any small gesture of command. If such is the way of men, how much more so should the creature watch and listen to a gesture or word from God.

It is this community of persons that reaches out to man and names him “thou.” This meeting of the I and Thou is at the heart of von Balthasar’s theology and anthropology because it is a reflection of the divine encounter and at the center of what it means to be human. The Triune God is a living relation of persons. It is only in God and specifically in Christ that a human being discovers who he is. “I do not know who ‘I’ am on the basis of a general *gnothi seauton* and *noverim me*, but precisely as something that rebounds from the deed of Christ...”\textsuperscript{14} It is in the passion and death of God-man that man realizes how valuable he is to God. When a person realizes that he has always been an “I” for

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 151.
God's "Thou" because God wished to make himself my "Thou," then he knows the true source of who he is.

The long search outlined in the "Who Am I" section of this paper can only be answered in Christ. That is the reason for these separate divisions of Word and Dialogue, and Jesus Christ and the Dialogic Principle. In Christ man is first awakened to becoming a person. Man is the "Thou" whom God has eternally loved. Philosophical anthropology could not come to such a conclusion, says von Balthasar. The transitory "Thou" of another cannot provide the answer to my personhood and true identity. It could not enter the mind of man that an infinite God out of eternal love for a creature would become man and die for a "Thou."

We have proceeded from being created through Christ as Savior and Lord, who is pre-existent to all creation, to Jesus Christ addressing each human being. Each mission received through the dialogue between I-Thou allows the person to participate in the mission of Jesus. The key to hearing the mission, accepting it, identifying with it and thereby becoming a theological person in the Balthasarian sense, is the dialogue. "So essential is dialogue to being a human being that it is the sphere in which we are placed: outside of dialogue, there is only monologue which is the sphere of sin."

15 Ibid., 311.
16 Ibid., 312.
The Word of God is real and concrete and appears as a historical being. The drama of human existence is shared by God incarnate. The listening human person is caught up in the mysterious drama of life that unfolds before him. Regarding salvation history, von Balthasar sees the person inserted into the divine mysteries, as a person in a drama playing a role. God’s promises are always true and He keeps his covenantal love with every person whom he addresses. Therefore once addressed by God the human being can never step out of the God-human situation. He remains in a dialogic relationship.

To him it is always word and answer.\textsuperscript{19} In \textit{Glory of the Lord}, von Balthasar envisions this dialogue as covenantal love in terms of a prayer relationship composed of Being and Becoming. Of necessity these partners in the dialogical principle are not equal. Even in most “man to man” or “woman to woman” dialogue there is an inherent inequality given background, intelligence, goodness, etc.

Another important element of the dialogic principle is Jesus’ presence and communication in the Eucharist. It is the Eucharist that reveals the divine sphere. In Eucharist the believer can believe that God the Father has sent Jesus so that freedom may be created. Jesus is the principle by which freedom is created, since as the man, Jesus, he himself opens the divine sphere from “above.” Von Balthasar calls it a divine sphere in Jesus himself. This concept and short development of the Eucharist forwards the concept of dialogic process. The dialogue is a joining of earth and heaven, of the Divine “I” to

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 155.
the human “thou,” of the human “I” to the divine “Thou.” The Eucharist, of course, does this in a perfect way. It is the perfect dialogue in which finite and infinite freedom meet and the setting in which we each become a true brother and sister to the Lord in receiving the Body and Blood.

In the Eucharist the Church presents Jesus under both aspects of inclusion, human and divine. He retains his uniqueness and his eternal mission. This is part of the mystery of the Eucharist. In reflecting upon this mystery von Balthasar captures part of the mission of Jesus:

“Two things interpenetrate in this mystery: his unlimited, divine and human readiness for all that the Father desires of him, which culminates in his identifying himself with the world’s individual and collective sin; and the power of the Father to raise him up in the strength of the Holy Spirit, whereby he who is entirely at the Father’s disposal is endowed with the latter’s full power and authority.”

3. THE HUMAN PERSON IN THE DIALOGIC EVENT

Another interesting aspect of the von Balthasar’s dialogical process is the notion that God’s word [Wort] not only always involves dialogue but also in some way creates a kind of hearing faculty in the dialogue partner. This partner already contains an answer [Antwort] within it. True, the word within the partner may be a negative or a stubborn “no.” No matter what the answer, it attests to having heard. The more adequate the answer the more it itself becomes a (dialogic) word.

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Von Balthasar goes further in saying not only is man made to engage in this ongoing-dialogue, but “man is created ready to hear the word of God: he is a ‘tabernacle’ for the Word...”21 The import of such a theological statement means that on the anthropological level, man has within himself that space to meet God. Immanence and transcendence meet and kiss here. Turning within, man finds God and then turning out he meets his highest Thou again. It is the God of the saints, and particularly of Augustine, who knew God more interiorly to him than he was to himself. Von Balthasar attests to this and goes on to state that this deepest self is foremost the other “Thou.”22 Since our Thou is so accessible within and without, there is not much need of any special techniques, beyond those of normal Christian meditation, to reach or speak to God.

During this encounter God reveals to the Christian who he is, his true self. Only the Word of God can truly reveal to the human person who he is. Christ, through whom all is made, holds within himself the pattern of each person. Only through Christ and the dialogue with Him does each person come to know who they are in Christ for God.

The Scriptures are the important word and response par excellence. It is a net that holds treasures but does not bear the entire treasure. The Scriptures leave things open so that the incarnate Word of God might attest to himself in and through the Scripture.23 He

21 Raymond Gawronski, S.J., Word and Silence, 156.
22 Ibid.
does so in all of the New Testament. He always is inviting his followers to follow in complete freedom which reveals his purpose for making the world and coming to redeem it. It will be part of the on-going Theo-drama what answer will man give - an "Amen" (2 Cor. 1:20) or a "No" (2 Cor. 1:19). This is high drama that Scripture holds in its hands.

It is the Unique one himself, Jesus the Lord, who demonstrates his presence in the unfolding of salvation history. He “than whom nothing greater can be thought” can in his sovereignty create the drama of God and man, which relation itself can be “than which nothing greater can be thought.”

This drama set in motion by God’s total freedom calls forth the free response of man. This will be discussed later in this paper.

Only in Jesus, where seeming and being meet, can form step out in expression and make Himself known. God has created us as free individuals to respond to his initial call. There is a built-in readiness to accept the message imparted by the form as expressed in all forms, but especially in the form as seen in the “genuineness of the ground’s expression.” “Being reveals itself, in its transcendentals, as the Beautiful, the True and the Good...” This revelation is the language of God, hence the expression, God has spoken in Creation, Scripture and the Incarnation. Creation itself speaks to us in a language more eloquent than words can describe it. Beauty speaks in a word that is whole and in a language totally concrete. For many, such “creation language” was enough and brought forth a response. At times no response was possible because it was a

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24 Ibid., 118.
25 Ibid., 25.
language for which mankind had no key. But when the Word himself came unto His own, many still had no response. This is now the height of the drama, the moment that awaits the exchange of persons in the dialogic event. The question posed by von Balthasar is, will God’s creatures recognize, receive and respond to Him? Will man reflect the Trinitarian dialogue in his response to God? There is a definite connection here with the problem of the “One and the Many.” Particular beings are expressions of the self-revealing Ground of Being. Man on the natural level expresses himself in imitation of the divine creative activity. He recognizes in the many expressions the Ground of Being that imparts form and its imprint upon all creatures. On the supernatural level the Cross of Christ is the key to the language that allows the creature to decipher the Trinitarian love that becomes visible in the Word. The Cross serves as a symbol to all believers of God’s ultimate intent -- His wish to be in dialogue with His creatures, at whatever cost. Through the Incarnation and the Cross, Christ is forever inserted into the dramatic existence of dialogic life. It is a perfect symbol revealing both the vertical dimension of God-man relationship and the horizontal dimension of man-man relationship. It is the symbol of dialogue. This Cross can never be totally placed to the side, but creation and the language of the Word-made-flesh still speaks to us.

To von Balthasar this dialogue is a communing of lives found vertically in the relation with the Word who grants the freedom to see and respond in the power of the Holy Spirit.26 Such a dialogue bears a greater responsibility in that, greater freedom brings one

deeper into the dialogic encounter found in the Word. No great harm is done for those individuals with no aesthetic sense who miss the beauty of creation, however, for those who ignore or pass-by the Word of God and his call to each, a tragedy can ensue. It is a tragedy in the most poignant use of the dramatic term for “God desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4) and it is indeed tragic when even one soul is lost. For Christ came to save all nations and every individual. The dialogue concerns listening and responding, acting on the word by being doers of the word. This concept is of vital importance to von Balthasar. Just as in Christ (the Word), there is no separation between his person and his mission, so in human beings there should be no separation between the spoken word, (the “yes”) and action, (the carrying out of the word). Father Gawronski states, “...we have seen that Word and Deed are identical for Balthasar” as they reflect Christ’s person and mission. This attempted unity between person and mission that is to be undertaken by every creature will be evident in Mary’s “yes” that manifested her availability, which in turn, led immediately to action.

Dialogue is shared speech, a conversation. God himself engages in this conversation and expects an interaction, somewhat like an interaction between two parties. The etymology of *dia-logos* is speaking through and each person is affected through the dialogue. To a creature incapable of formulating speech fit to exchange with God, God’s Spirit equips the person to speak the “unutterable word” that the “wondrous exchange” might take place. The thing of wonder is that such a God, who is complete in himself, allows

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27 Ibid., 169.
himself to be so deeply affected by his creature, who is so unfit for speech, let alone to act. Such theological puzzlement leads one deeper into the heart of the dialogical dimension.

Again von Balthasar asks how can God who is Absolute, Perfect, and All-knowing allow himself to be affected by some other standpoint? The great theological insight of von Balthasar is that this Jesus who is dependent, like other human beings, interacts with other men and enters into conversation, is at the same time the Father’s Word. “Through Jesus’ human capacity for dialogue, the Father reveals his divine capacity for dialogue.”

BEGIN in the Old Testament with powerful words of dialogue and far reaching compassion, the speeches of prophets, Wisdom writings, and the Psalms bear witness to this dialogic covenantal love. Quoting the beginning of John’s Gospel in the New Testament, von Balthasar sees in these words, “in the beginning,” “in the bosom of the father” the source of dialogue in the Absolute himself, existing before all time. Turning then to all three persons of the Trinity, von Balthasar is convinced that the dialogic process is rooted in God. For him there can be no outpouring of silent love without utterance from the Father. The Father loves and utters through the Word.

This is reflected in man, made in the image and likeness of God. “Man is created in the Word.” He engages in the dialogic process because the word - dimension is part of man’s being in the interpersonal sense, but also must answer to the Word who was in the

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29 Ibid.
beginning. Standing at one end of the dialogic pole, man can try to avoid the conversation intentionally or be so immersed in sin and guilt that he cannot hear. He might even try to consciously close himself off in a stubborn fashion, but ultimately he must give ear to the spiritual sounds that address only him. As part of his being, this sound exists within and without him. “The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart” (Deut. 30:14, Romans 10:8). With the sending of the Holy Spirit who helps us and frees us to return an empowered word, we are more able to engage in the dialogue than those who preceded us in the faith, especially those who came before Jesus. It is this Holy Spirit who emboldened the Apostles, shed great love and compassion, but especially loosened the tongues of those in the Upper Room; thus allowing a dialogue with the ever more personal Jesus and the Father. Now life is a sublime drama, where not only is discourse occurring between God and man, but God’s action can be viewed on the stage of life. His action as recorded in Scripture cannot be held still as in a camera shot; for Scripture cannot be tied down or contained by man. It can only be studied and reflected upon.

“That which occurs in the human realm mirrors the reality of the inner-Trinitarian relations...”31 It is also possible to work in the opposite direction, i.e., the Trinitarian dialogic model is reflected in the God-human dialogue. This demonstrates that it is the same God in a community of three persons who also interacts in a dialogic manner with man. As man is in community with others in a relational and personal way, so God is

31 Raymond Gawronski, S.J., Word and Silence, 80.
reflected in the community in a similar fashion. Creation reflects the creator who is communal.

Von Balthasar looks to the dialogue as the encompassing explanation and divine setting for the dramatic. In a chapter on “Theodramatic Hermeneutics,” he writes a sentence or two that aptly summarizes the potency of dialogue in his theological scheme:

“Theological proof cannot produce its own ideal of communio and then try to build enthusiastic syntheses on it. The model of union is established by God and carried out in detail by him; the task of theology is to follow, step by step, going through all the stages of the divine path, all the aspects of the divine model, and - on the basis of the given unity and with a view to the ultimate unity - reflecting upon it. The unity is God’s trinitarian, salvific decision, which manifests itself as the ‘mystery’ of the Son in the unifying power of the Spirit, and always in such a way that it addresses man’s freedom and solicits the latter’s most distinctive commitment. Here, therefore, the whole intramundane dialogue of standpoints, world views and perspectives is overtaken by an ultimate dramatic dialogue, which, while it lets God have the first and last word in all things, acknowledges that this same God has determined to send his Word into the world and leave it there.”

Since this Word is left in the world not only is the person compelled to listen, but to respond. In language of the play, the world is asked to step from the wings and act.

God’s presence on the stage of the world will not go away. He elicits a reaction from man. Man is an answer. He is created to be an answer and challenged by God to answer.

It is the very essence of man to answer. If the person is free, he recognizes the many convergences that bring him to recognize God. God is the center and all the “pointers” converge on him, on his majesty and infinite love. Man may refuse to see or recognize.

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Or he may be compelled to admit the obvious which will elicit a reaction from his “innermost freedom.”

FREEDOM

The *Gnothi Sauton*, the call to self knowledge, involves the aspects of role, masks, and the basic question of who I am. Panaitios lists four masks or persons that need to be integrated into finding of self: human nature (ethical worth), particular nature (personal physical constitution), chance and external circumstances (environment), and fourth, what we make of ourselves by our decisions. Our will decides what role we are to play in life. Thus enters the topic of freedom for ancient Stoics and modern philosophers and theologians alike. The person uses his reasoning freedom to make something out of the material given to him. Such freedom is a participation in the divine as he reflects upon himself and his ability to create. “Everyone must possess ‘the meaning of his own personality [*idion prosopon]*’ and thus decide what value he sets on himself...”

Von Balthasar asks, “Is the kernel of human freedom personal and unique or is it only a composition scored by the divine freedom under the given material limitations?” Part of the answer is found in Epictetus when he states a belief held by most Christians today: I am God’s friend and obey Him out of my own wishes as an adopted son obeys his

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33 Ibid., 135.
35 Ibid., 495.
36 Ibid., 496.
father. Obeying God and doing his will (mission) is the “only true use of human freedom.”

Even in ancient times among the great souls, e.g., Socrates, there was a sense of God allotting roles which allowed Socrates to say, “I would rather die a thousand times than desert it.” From freedom, to mission, to call - here are easily seen steps. The person who knows that he has been entrusted with a task learns to will everything as it takes place. He waits upon God. The Ignatian indifference teaches how to be impartial to everything except God’s instructions. Socrates’ sentiments precede Ignatius by more than 1500 years, but are similar to the Ignatian understanding as regards God’s offered roles, and freedom of choice and submission to Him.

Although the Stoics pursued God, they did not know the Christ and the Christian features peculiar to Christianity. The personal unique Christian God created the unique in his image, the human person: “The special quality of existence, the feeling of having been called to do something that no one else can do, of standing on a spot that has been waiting for us, so the speak,” “the demand” “that everyone make profit with his particular pound...” Uniqueness creates uniqueness asking in return that created freedom choose what has been given it to do. Absolute freedom asks for the return of freedom in a responsible fashion. The creature’s task is to willingly integrate itself into the divine plan. In modern times J. Maritain has recognized that what has taken place in Jesus

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 606.
(identity of his person and role) must take place in the Church. It is the way to growth
and the fullness of being.

The (pure) Church is the only one on earth who carries out the role she presents (le rôle
de son personnage), because, in her, both role and person come from God. The world, by
contrast, is a stage on which the roles and what they embody (rôles et personnages) are
rarely in harmony. Therefore it makes ultimate sense that the members of the Church
called saints would be those persons in whom role and identity become one. They played
their part quintessentially because they knew and embraced their identity. Von Balthasar
calls the saints “the authentic interpreters of Theo-drama.” Their knowledge which was
lived out in dramatic existence is a model for others whose life dramas are yet to be
embraced in freedom. They are the epitome of saying “yes” to God whoever they were,
their physical constitution, their environmental factors and whatever the task that was
theirs. As Jesus who was obedient to his Father, accepting his dramatic role, became the
norm for all those who walk upon the world stage, so each saint models his/her life on
his.

In the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius which von Balthasar knew well, since he had
translated them and preached them through Ignatian retreats, the concept of mission is
uppermost. The exercitant is to freely follow the gentle Lamb, Jesus, under the military
standard freely embraced, in order to hasten the coming of the Kingdom by always doing

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the *magis* or greater for the King Jesus. The Exercises are designed to bring the retreatant to that point of making a choice, of saying "yes" to what he/she has already been called to. The Exercises help the exercitants discern and discover that specific mission that God has in mind for them in His Divine Plan.

For Buber every topic or area of interest in his system of thought was touched or influenced by the I-Thou relation. As said previously, for von Balthasar the concept of mission carries the same import and influence as Buber's I-Thou relation. Person, I and Thou, freedom and responsibility are all seen in the light of von Balthasar's central idea of mission in the dialogical principle.

The God who addresses the Thou in dialogue is the same, who gives the very gift of existence to the creature, as He likewise tells the creature who it is for Him. It is God who gives the entity its reality. "This particular 'I' with its distinctive qualities receives its entire self from the hands of infinite freedom, and the hallmark by which it can recognize that it is a gift is the ontological difference that operates in it."\(^{40}\) It has been admitted to reality, given existence for a reason known to God. The creature comes to learn of the gift - character of existence, the reason for its being made - the call. Lastly it learns to become grateful for its existence and the reason for which it was created by God.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 290.
In this context of accepting being and existence, the subject comes to realize that its self or personal subjectivity is not the same as other subjects. It is a subjectivity that cannot be interchanged with any other. Although this subject can communicate part of itself to others, it is incommunicable, that is, it cannot hand itself over completely to another. Therefore when God addresses each person as “Thou,” such address is to a unique person not to be confused with any other person. In like manner, when the person addresses God as “Thou,” each person knows they speak to a personal God who is not anonymous or a force in the universe. The “Thou” addressed as God is to be worshipped and praised as a living Being. “Since I have been chosen to be a unique person, it follows inevitably that I must address infinite freedom as ‘Thou’...”41 Our response is to be one of gratitude and thanksgiving, rising from minds that realize that this thanksgiving must be shown by presenting ourselves as gift to Him. Von Balthasar sees this as a lifelong task.

In a world that speaks in so many voices the message of “owning oneself” and fulfilling yourself and pleasuring yourself, von Balthasar’s message of “owing oneself” to the Eternal Word seems very foreign to contemporary ears. As finite freedom realizes that it is a gift of infinite freedom, it must set out freely on the road that leads to self-realization which God has in mind for the creature. It must use its freedom to seek absolute freedom. The creature’s way of identifying the Creator is through the exercise of freedom. There is a perfect identity in the Creator between divine freedom and divine

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41 Ibid.

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being. The creature can but exercise limited freedom. This likeness to the Creator can only be seen as finite freedom affirms itself in response to being addressed as “Thou.”

For von Balthasar there is a close connection between freedom and being a person, between being a person and mission, between mission and freedom. A person can only be perfected, “... when it has become ‘Thou’ in God’s sight in its fully divine, absolute manner, when it has become identical with the ‘idea’ reserved for the finite ‘thou’ within the infinite ‘Thou,’ within the eternal Word and Son.” 42 By this he means, as St. Paul stated, that God’s chosen are “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). We are to be fashioned after the image of the creator (Gal. 3:10). The New Testament speaks of this image of the Creator being the reflection of his glory (Heb. 1:3). Von Balthasar sees that the prototype for finite freedom is to be found in the Son, in Christ and it is in Him that we participate in freedom. In this Sonship, made in His image, “there each of us is a unique ‘thou’ in the eternal ‘Thou.’”

The unique “thou” can give proper thanks for its existence by giving an answer in response to God’s addressing it as “thou.” As the response grows more grateful it has the opportunity to be more free and to become all that God wishes it to be. Thus finite freedom grows in the ever present context of infinite freedom. In speaking of this self-realization brought about through finite freedom, von Balthasar puts it succinctly, “... it is the realization by the finite ‘copy’ [Abbildung] of the definitive model [Vorbild] exhibited by

42 Ibid., 291.
the infinite prototype [Urbild]; in this way finite freedom can truly participate in infinite freedom."43

This participation in infinite freedom is possible because infinite freedom is present everywhere, particularly where finite freedom is being exercised. God’s immanence, with his freedom and grace, is present in each person. This is not dictatorial but allows a person to accept or deny God and his aid. Man’s freedom then is genuine and to be exercised in a strictly personalized manner. By choosing well, it exercises its freedom as gift and participates in the Absolute as a “son” of God. This discussion of freedom is at the heart of the pure dialogue -- relationship between man and his Creator.

Man realizes that he is a “task to be performed”44 and that his freedom is directed to embracing necessity. This concept of freedom does not look to infinite possibilities so that man might choose whatever he fancies. As an actor in the drama he must play a role even if he cannot step back out of the action to determine what role he is to play. This role to be played or the assigned mission comes through the dialogue. It is a mystery how this personalizing of the human spiritual subject is related to the mystery of God-who-reveals-himself. In addressing this mystery, von Balthasar can only say that there must be an insertion point where this giving of the name or mission occurs. He likens it to the occurrences of Scripture - “You are my son, today I have begotten you” (Ps. 2:7), -

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me...and sent me” (Is.

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 339.
61:1). What occurs in the creature’s life is a pale reflection of how Jesus received his mission and shared in God’s own life. However, the spiritual subject still shares in God’s own life while remaining a member of the human species. It is only by sharing in this eternal dynamism that the person in the world can carry out the mission.

We have seen that God in his infinite freedom has seen fit to create man with finite freedom. God will not “upstage” man’s freedom, but invite him to fulfill that freedom. A central issue of theo-drama is the interplay between divine and human drama. Man can as son actually share in this infinite freedom, but that still does not make man a partner in the dialogue. God is so different from his creatures that he cannot simply be called the “other.” He is so high above all created things that he could just as easily be called the “non-other.” Because God has stepped onto the world stage and has become the model of freedom, anthropology will forever be seen as a part of Christology. Christ the human being, the mediator between God and men, will be there to rescue man from the entanglements and tragedies of the world drama. He and his Spirit will assist each person to exercise, through grace, their freedom and thereby bring about the accomplishment of each one’s mission.

Whereas Buber’s thought on the dialogical process concentrated on and revolved around the I-Thou relation, von Balthasar’s thought and major contribution to the dialogical process was the concept of uniqueness through mission.
4. MISSION AS CONFIRMATION

Through Christ and the Holy Spirit, the person enters into a faith-obedience relationship. This allows the person to embrace the mission because of the indifference to all other choices. To choose to follow the will of God becomes the acceptance of mission no matter what form that takes. God’s will is accepted and absorbed into the will of the servant and becomes realized by him. God can place his glory in a person, a weak vessel without destroying the vessel. “... Balthasar observes that the more a servant bears his master’s orders, the more he distinguishes himself from the master: so ‘precisely where the servant distinguishes himself more deeply and unmistakably from Christ he becomes more like Him...”45 Even with this identity increasing there always remains the distance as one follows the Lord. God, certainly as sovereign Creator, can relate in any way that he so chooses with his creatures. He is free to reveal Himself in whatever fashion. Many know Him only through faith while some few have an experiential knowledge of God.

Mysticism to von Balthasar meant how God finds man and relates to him. It is more a Biblical term than that usually found in mystical theology. He does not stress the extraordinary events known to so many but instead speaks of the mystic’s willingness to hear and obey. The Ignatian attitude of “indifference” (well known to the Jesuit von Balthasar) best explains the total openness to any of God’s expressed preferences inherent in the concept of obedience. The height of perfection is not mystical experiences of bi-

location, levitation, reading of hearts, but the heroic living out of abandoning oneself freely to God’s will.

The truly indifferent person has no preferences and holds all choices, as it were, in a balance. Von Balthasar saw a definite abuse of the word mysticism. He also witnessed a demand for experiences that was present in the Church which made him particularly wary of techniques. Mysticism or the ecstatic prayer always had a purpose that was to be seen in a “New Testament way” that allowed no person to be mere spectator but a “co-worker of Glory.”46 God’s follower is a “co-worker.” The following is marked by self-renunciation of one’s own will. For von Balthasar the man who desires to serve God finds his delight in the realization of the will of the One who has sent him. This kind of obedience opens the person to accepting the unique mission given by the Father.

For von Balthasar every mission is “subsumed to the form of the life, passion and death of Christ.”47 The Father glorified the Son thereby showing that the fruit of the Son’s mission was based on perfect obedience. The saints are good role models in showing forth a yes to mission. Like the Son who was sent, so the saints are sent on mission. Their sending comes from the Trinity and “overflows” into the world. Person and mission interpenetrate each other becoming, as it were, one. In this sense von Balthasar can state that to receive the mission “coincides precisely with the intelligible ‘I.’”48 The

47 Ibid., 194.
48 Ibid., 202.
person becomes the mission in obedience and in so doing realizes that the path to holiness is obedience. Receiving the mission is a great confirmation of who the person is, how he has been gifted for the task, and that he is pleasing to God his creator by receiving this mission. Mission confirms the past interests and inclinations of the individual. He is confirmed in his choices realizing now that the Holy Spirit had been gently prompting. The person is confirmed in all of his singularity and intelligibility when God confers on him a task or mission. We will see all of these features of Balthasarian thought on mission, obedience and holiness exemplified in the Virgin Mary.

This mission that flows from the dialogue with God has a universal application. The individual, created by God for God, has an absolute relevance in Theo-drama. The horizon of every culture and time has been rolled away by the Father to reveal the Son - Jesus of Nazareth. It is the death and Resurrection of the Son that brings all of history to a transcendent point. It is in his mission that mankind can view absoluteness. The continual interplay throughout history of crime, suffering, joy and self-sacrifice, finds meaning only in God entering the drama. All paradoxes and dilemmas melt away in transcendence. All is transcended, made small, in the action of God. Only through the power of God’s Spirit can we understand the above stated truths of God’s transcendence.
It is the work of the Holy Spirit to universalize the drama of Christ so that from each age, each transposition from one age to the next, nothing will be lost concerning Christ's redeeming act. The response in every age is faith. Even though Jesus was always filled with the Holy Spirit, his disciples still had to await the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them that they too could have the right words to speak.

It was the same Holy Spirit that was active in the Covenant of the Old Testament. At times it was an utterance preceding the historical event, but it was also dialogical in nature. God was always active in history, says von Balthasar, at times in the event or journeying and at times in the reflection of human beings upon the events.

Jesus' willingness to complete the Father's will on earth and to be at the Father's disposal in heaven fully reflect his earthly and heavenly mission. Following in his footsteps, destined for holiness "in Christ," we are to assist in the fulfillment of the universe by accomplishing our own mission. Jesus' role and mission and person were identical, whereas we are to continue to grow into ours, integrating our personhood and mission. The universal call and mission to holiness demands a restoration of all things "in Christ."
Holiness outside of Christ is impossible just as fulfilling your mission outside of Christ is impossible.49

Jesus, as the way, became the way through his blood’s redeeming power, the forgiveness of our sins and the outpouring of his graces. (Eph. 1:7, cf. Col. 1:14.) Man cannot achieve salvation, fulfill any mission or become fulfilled in any sense by his own efforts of body or spirit. This futility of human existence is removed by and in the Cross of Christ. To von Balthasar the New Testament theology sees the cross as the event toward which all earlier salvation history was pressing. He contends that all post-Christian reality comes from the Cross also. “The Cross appears at the center and zenith of the theodramatic action, and so it becomes a symbol of both God’s love and the world’s sin, of both judgment and salvation, of both veiling and the revelation of the Trinitarian God and of the world in his sight; thus it sums up all these things and provides a lasting framework and horizon for the whole dramatic action.”50 Even beyond this, followers of Christ are called to be “con-crucified” (Gal. 2:20) as they live life based on the Cross and in the Cross as they are “in Christ.” Beyond the mission which makes each person unique, there is a generalized call for every Christian: “Come follow Me.” After the Ascension of Jesus, it is the Holy Spirit who continues this summons of Jesus. The call means to walk the path of a suffering servant, to be crucified with Christ, and thereby to live fully in theodramatic life.

50 Ibid., 50.
Another important task of the Spirit is to bear witness to the Son as the unique Son of the Father. Then the Son, as mentioned above, provides the space or area for the entire theodrama based on Jesus' Resurrection. In a Trinitarian interplay, the Son now imparts the Spirit to all the players, "...that they too, in an analogous way, can be seen to be unique."  

Here now is the heart of the uniqueness of each human person. This concept of call or mission is what makes each individual a theological person. Now we see the Spirit, sent by the Son, imparting the mission or call. It will be in this personal address a calling by name, and a mission joined to name, that the theological person receives his uniqueness. Such thinking is embedded in theological understanding. Christ is the actor and outside of his acting area, no one is able to identify himself. How can anyone know with certainty who they are? Will this identity fade away, split open, or does it depend on physical features? Because Christ's Resurrection was universally applied to every creature past, present and future, each individual is "in Christ," and has been given a personal commission which entrusts him with some unique task and with the freedom and power to do it.

The Holy Spirit gives Christ the freedom and power to make himself available. Through the power of the Spirit, Jesus initiates theodrama by opening up the acting area, the stage, the possibility for dialogue, the freedom to carry out role and distributing roles and call. Once the person enters the acting area, each can choose their own theological role.  

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51 Ibid., 51.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 263.
If, however, the person is free enough to choose the mission or call that God offers, he has the best possible opportunity of becoming a person whom God has in mind. The call comes from God, from the outside and can come at any time. When it occurs it is always in the “fullness of time,” just at the right time. Call is highly individualized, unexpected, and unlike the life or career the one-called would have chosen. Even though the divine election preceded the birth of the one selected, God eventually makes known the call in the recipient’s life, e.g., Abraham, Moses, Sara, Elizabeth and Mary. Von Balthasar makes the point that the one chosen by God must have a certainty of being directly elected by God. Although Scripture recounts the heroes of the Bible seized by God’s call and cooperated, there are others, like David, Peter and Jeremiah, who struggled. If such men could struggle with what was a great, direct call, it is quite possible for so many others to turn aside completely from the call.54 “Election’ therefore means, not God’s eternal, gracious choice, but the effect of this call on the freedom of the person called.”55 Even in a life designed by God and endowed with a specific call, there remains the possibility of saying “no.” Von Balthasar sees the consequence of refusing the very things (mission and vocation) that provides theological personhood as a serious damaging of personhood to the point of distortion and unrecognizability.56 There is a true urgency in every vocation or call because it is a call from God himself, it is the way chosen by God for us to become ourselves “in Christ,” and it is a call for us to do and be for others. We become transformed by participating in the divine life. What greater confirmation

54 Ibid., 265.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 266.
can a human person experience than being placed into the life of the Trinity through saying yes to God’s call in his life? To live “in Christ” and in the Holy Spirit means to take on their characteristics especially regarding vocation. Jesus’ call was to die to self and to do the will of the Father.

The Holy Spirit “blows where he wills” always leading others to the Father and Jesus whose Spirit He is. The Holy Spirit is relational making Him a vital part of any dialogic process. The Spirit is always operative in the call and prompts those special persons with extraordinary calls to acquiesce. Peter who was set apart, and Abraham too in a similar fashion, had their names changed to show that they were no longer private persons. The work of the Holy Spirit as love and as the “joiner” of persons in the Trinity does the same work outside the Trinity. In Glory of the Lord von Balthasar describes this mystical prayer that directly involves the dialogic process when he states that it is faith that is the “ecstasy out of the I.” It is only in faith that one touches God “in an ecstasy that consists as we have seen not in intoxication but service.” In Glory of the Lord von Balthasar explains that the foundation of the Christian experience is not mystical but an encounter with the God of the Bible. He specifically points to those individuals with particular “mystical charisms” as gifted for an ecclesial mission.

57 Ibid., 267.
60 Cited in Ibid.
61 Ibid.
Through the ages some saints have voiced their preferences for the ordinary mundane tasks over the mystical experiences. St. Therese of Lisieux said as much, as did St. Ignatius of Loyola who stated that he would “rather work in the mission of Christ until the end of the world even were his own blessedness to remain uncertain because of this.” These saints led lives of heroic virtue of obedience, poverty and chastity, but many never experienced a mystical prayer time. Von Balthasar contends that the individual need not have a flight to God above his own heart, but need only experience the God who dwells in the heart of all Christians. The holy person, the friend of God, remains a social and personal being who experiences God as he is in himself and others.

Their calls, like the Holy Spirit himself, are transcendentally relational and elusive. Quoting Samuel (1 Samuel 25:25), von Balthasar states that a person must use all his strength to shift his personal center so that he might live up to his new name, “for as his name is, so is he.” By changing one’s name, God shows forth both his original creative and now re-creative power. In Semitic thought, God changes the name to bring forth an inner transformation. The new theological name “always implies the social dimension of service on behalf of others.” The new person must forget his own plans and become one with his function so that he might become what is most distinctive and personal to him. The Virgin Mary will be the archetype of call and vocation. “Bound up with this

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62 Ibid., 168.
63 Frances Kelly Nemeck and Marie Theresa Coombs, Called by God, 13.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 52.
commission is his own, inalienable, personal name; here - and only here - role and person coincide.”

This commission is not just an after-thought to creation but is exemplary of the person. Von Balthasar finds this personal commission in the writings of Paul:

“God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:4-10)

Just as there is a mystery regarding how the Holy Spirit at times prompts us to a particular action, while at the same time respecting our free will, so there is a great mystery present here. The Holy Spirit provides each person with a mission and personality to be realized according to a “prepared” plan, but also provides that same person an inner freedom to follow or not follow that plan. Such a concept of freedom is difficult to imagine, since creation is steeped in disobedience and freedom gone astray. God’s plan, on the other hand, is to lovingly awaken men from the strictures of a purely secular world, filled with sin and disobedience (Eph. 1:1-2). God took the first step in freedom and love, and equipped man to act in Christ’s acting area and therefore respond to God’s prior action. This scenario comprises the central theme of Theo-drama.  

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67 Ibid., 51.
68 Ibid., 52.
Our uniqueness comes from Christ, our mission is joined to his, we are fellow players in theodrama, and all that we have, all that is good and all that is grace is bestowed freely upon us by his Resurrection. Buried in him, we rise with him. Our good works rise to heaven that has been opened up to us through the kindness of Christ. There we live in the kingdom of God which resides in Christ. Von Balthasar liked the term “created for good works” as another name for a creature called to mission and service. It is only because we have risen with Christ that we are capable of engaging in the action where the bonum itself is seen as the transcendental. Producing this good that brings glory to God, is the creature’s mission. This good is a reflection of the good Jesus produced and our “yes” reflects his “yes” to the Father’s mission for him.

This performing the good can only take place after the Ascension, which brings Jesus’ finite acting to an end. Then the drama is opened up to all his fellow actors and the stage becomes the place for the action of God’s indwelling in men and men’s indwelling in him. As Jesus’ earthly drama ends, the drama continues with the sending of the Spirit.

The sending of the Spirit opens up a dialogue between heaven and earth and empowers the actors who were apostles to carry out their roles which is known as “mission.” With the coming of God’s Spirit there is a “reciprocal indwelling and interpenetration” on the part of God and man/world. The leaving of Jesus and sending of the Spirit begins a process that prevails through time. Every actor on stage now plays a valuable role for the history of the world. God continually comes to meet the world; Jesus is in the continual
process of returning to the Father. Now finite world drama is forever played on the open
stage of Christ where men appear to play their assigned role with grace and dignity and
then depart. They are endowed with gifts needed to play out their role, be it a tragic or
joyful one. As Jesus is the one sent, so is each creature. As he played his role giving
 glory to the Father, each person in harmony with the theodramatic meaning of life reflects
the Trinitarian aspect of this drama by a life freely given, freely portrayed and freely
returned.

THE UNIQUE MISSION OF JESUS

Von Balthasar has successfully developed in the first three volumes of Theo-Drama the
concepts of role, person, mission, world drama, Christian anthropology, and Christ's
uniqueness in light of his mission. Jesus was to complete his mission on the stage of
human existence in a unique fashion. Of course all Christians would agree with the
preceding sentence. Jesus himself had the sense of his mission being eschatologically
and universally important and unique. But von Balthasar goes further in stating that not
only was his mission unique but as the One sent, Jesus himself was unique.

This dual uniqueness reflects the nature of Christ and his function. It deals with
questions usually asked about Jesus Christ, “Who is Christ?” and “What is his function?”.
It addresses both his person and his work. If we begin by looking at Christ’s function, we
soon are lead to his “covert being.” For von Balthasar the satisfactory way of examining
these uniqueness factors is by a "Christology from above." Such development leads one to be open to an anthropology which is concerned with giftedness from God. Only a Christology from above can provide a bearer of news as a being sent. Only in Christ can the mission and the person coincide, be one in the same. As stated at the end of the first volume of Theo-Drama the role played by Jesus cannot be exchanged for another role precisely, because his role is a "mission" that has been fused with the person and has become identical with him.\textsuperscript{69} We have already examined how the human person, especially the saint, approaches this ideal identity of mission and person fusing into one.

Von Balthasar examines several texts from the New Testament to demonstrate how Jesus' mission is qualitatively different from that of other prophets. His mission supersedes the entire Old Testament order. Jesus, as the One sent, as God's own Son, is superior to all. In Hebrews he is referred to as "the one sent" (apostolos). In John there is the "sending of the Son" in order that "the world might be saved through him" (3:17). "... the prophet's mission with its allotted measure of divine inspiration has given way to a divine mission that knows no measure."\textsuperscript{70}

The idea of mission is at the center of John's Christology, but is also present in the Synoptics. "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (Mt. 10:40). Luke has: "He who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 151.
rejects him who sent me” (Lk. 10:16). This heavenly mission is clear. It is a mission of revealing and of accepting.

Jesus was also quite aware of his earthly mission when he said, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose (Lk. 4:43). In an exclusive fashion, Jesus says to the Canaanite woman, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 15:24). In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, all three Synoptic writers clearly portray the final sending of the son as the sending of Jesus.71

The anthropological connection of this examination of the person and mission of Jesus to all men is, if men are to have a part or a mission in the One who is sent, they must be sent out by his Spirit. As he is apostolos, so must all be apostoloi who follow his Spirit. It was not by chance that his first followers and friends, all of whom would receive specific missions, were called apostoloi. Such sending by God, von Balthasar sees as much more radical than the appointment of a messenger or even choosing of a prophet even when chosen “from the womb.” Because this sending (missio) has its roots in the primordial proceeding (processio) from God, there is an analogous sending of each person in Christ. As Christ proceeded and came forth from God (8:42), so human persons who are “born of God” (1:13) proceed forth. As he proceeded forth in mission, so do all others who proceed forth in Christ.

71 Ibid., 152.
A new element needs to be introduced here. The identity of the person is given along with the assigned mission for each individual. The mission of Jesus given by the One who sent him surpasses all the other missions ever given. Jesus stands at the head of all salvation history; he is the goal and meaning of all salvation history. “Before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 14 ff.), we were chosen and predestined for our mission. Our mission holds the same timelessness that Jesus’ held. We, like Jesus, are given a particular mission to be carried out in a specific time frame. We reflect in our human lives certain of Jesus’ features -- person and mission. Jesus, however, as divine person has within himself a person and mission that are identical. Like Christ, all other persons must in obedience embrace what is expected of them by God for in doing so they discover who they are. Jesus had an unmistakable awareness of his mission. The journey along the road to perfection allows the creature to become more aware of God’s will for him or her. It is in Jesus’ drama, that room is made on the stage of Theodrama for the acting area that all created persons might engage in this drama.

Not only can the creature imitate Jesus in his personal mission, he can participate in his drama. The Christian’s identification with his Christian mission, which has been chosen before the foundation of the world, is related analogously to the identity that characterizes Jesus. Jesus was given his eternal definition -- “You are my beloved Son.” God the Father gave Him a unique, universal mission. His personal uniqueness coincides with its universal significance. Because of this mission, this telling by God who Jesus is for him;
Jesus is a person. He is the epitome of the dialogic principle in that his person is his mission. All other human beings can only approach the archetype. God addresses each individual as a conscious subject, tells him who he is and what he means to God, and shows him the purpose of his existence -- that is, gives him a distinct and divinely authorized mission. It is because all are created through Jesus, the God-man, the archetype for all persons, that all become persons in virtue of a relationship with him and dependence on him. We all share the same identity with him. All share in part his universal mission. All play a role in theo-drama. As God allows room for the dialogic principle to occur, so he leaves room in theo-dramatic existence for creatures to have analogous, unique, personal missions. God knows me through my mission and person in the "new name" by which he addresses me. A transformation occurs as a result of the dialogic principle resulting in participation in theo-drama. "...Mission makes him a person."

Von Balthasar explored how a person became a person and called him a person-in-dialogue. And for him, only God can define who the subject is and why he is there and it is God who sets forth the meaning, the task, the vocation.

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72 Ibid., 207.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 208.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 211.
77 Ibid., 220.
This investigation is not solely a Christological one. The examination of Jesus' person, mission, consciousness of mission is to provide a model for anthropological considerations. What happened in Jesus provides an analog for studying man in his theological structure. For von Balthasar, there is posited the *a priori* belief that there is a formal identity between person and mission ("my existence is one with my universal mission.") Recalling Mascall's dictum, "It is both ridiculous and irreverent to ask what it must have been like to be God incarnate," we must remember that human beings cannot fully comprehend or realize the God-man and his mission in existential terms. We can only surmise what it means that Jesus Christ dedicated his entire self to his mission and especially that he is entirely one with it. He is the "one sent."

Since saints John and Paul were aware of the universality of the mission, it follows that the One Sent was aware of its universality. Von Balthasar attempts to put into words Jesus' intuition concerning his identity: "I am the one through whom the kingdom of God must and will come"; "I am the one who must accomplish this task." Unlike all others who preceded and who followed, Jesus is identical with his mission because it was not placed upon him from the outside. His mission had always been present in his consciousness "as being sent" (as mission). Nor did he take it upon himself, before all time he is the task and his mind, free will, and intelligence are oriented to it. Von Balthasar's entire thought on Christology cannot be presented here, only those elements

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78 Ibid., 165.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 166.
regarding mission and its anthropological implications. Von Balthasar devotes two hundred pages to the “outline of Christology” in his third volume of the *Theodrama*.

**Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ.** Beginning with the “problem of method” alluding to the basic ingredient of the inner eye of faith needed to see the object of apostolic testimony, he moves on to examine the Christologies of others and finishes with his own thorough examination of Christ as totally identified in mission and person.

**PRAYER**

Not knowing the inner workings of the Trinity, one can only say it is as if the Father’s loving freedom points to the mission’s necessity and as if the Son’s freedom is oriented to the mission. The Garden of Olives’ scene demonstrates that Jesus knows that he is the “One sent” and that he “comes forth” from the Father. Mission cannot be separated from the one who sends him; “The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing... The Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing.” (Jn. 5: 19 f.) The more the Son unites himself to the Ground from which his person and mission simultaneously arose, the better he understands the mission and himself. Prayer and mission are connected as seen in Scripture and especially in the Garden of Olives. Prayer is part of the mission - its exercise and activity. Since the mission is not open to the gaze of the Christian or even of Jesus, one’s prayer to the

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81 Ibid., 164.
82 Ibid., 169.
83 Ibid.
Father, who sends, and the Holy Spirit, who teaches, is absolutely necessary. Jesus, as do all his followers, must go step by step in a “faith” in the discovery of the mission. Even though Jesus was conscious of his identity of his person and his mission and that this identification of the person certainly satisfied the theodramatic requirement, it does not mean that he was completely aware of the universalizing of his mission by the Father. However, it is in prayer that he learns more of the scope of the universality of the mission. This does not preclude his knowing his uniqueness and the uniqueness of the mission. As the One Sent he was adequately aware of its universality. Von Balthasar reminds us of the closeness of Father and Son. “I am” and “Abba” both belong to the context of Jesus’ prayer. Even though the “I” of Jesus radiates the “I” of the Father with which it is united, there is no separation between prayer and the exercise of the mission. Quoting Luke 22:32; and Jn. 11:41, von Balthasar repeats, that “prayer is a part of the activity of mission.” Even when Jesus’ prayer is one of thanksgiving (Mt. 11:25 ff.), the Father is addressed in the context of mission. The Son is always mindful of why he has been sent. Again Jesus is the perfect exemplar -- prayer is an essential element to the One who is sent. Since the mission is to be carried out step by step according to the Father’s instructions and through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is seen as a person who does not have power to see the mission in its entirety.

84 Ibid., 164.
85 Ibid., 169.
86 Ibid., 170.
We, like Him, must walk in faith with prayer to the Father on our lips and in our hearts. Although we participate in Jesus’ prayer analogously, it must be remembered that his faith and his accomplishing of the mission is far different than ours. We receive our mission on the basis of our coming to faith, but Jesus always had and is his mission. For every other person, their identity is related to being given a mission. The identity of Christ is his mission. It is the Spirit of God that allows the followers of Jesus to narrow the gulf between person and mission in their lives. The Spirit prompts the person to pray, to seek God’s will, to embrace the mission, and gives the grace to persevere. This Holy Spirit stimulates action on the vertical and horizontal axes of the person’s existence. By such action, a person is who he is through God’s naming and sending. His identity continues to unfold. He must continue to approximate Jesus in mission. He has already abandoned himself to the Father, while we continue to grow in trust and self-abandonment. As Jesus prayed, so do we. We, however, pray for this trust, for total abandonment, and for the certainty that the mission before us has been placed there by God. Jesus did not have to pray for such qualities. Our similarity in prayer is rooted in the “I-Thou” or dialogical principle. In his relationship with his Father, Jesus spoke about the *missio* (the economic form of *processio*)\(^7\) which demonstrated that Jesus’ consciousness of the mission was directly related to the Father and His Will. In the Trinity, the persons are in conversation and so must creatures be in conversation with God. This conversation is called prayer. In prayer, the Spirit propels us by his breath in the direction of fulfilling the mission.\(^8\) As mentioned in the previous influences upon

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\(^7\) Ibid., 173.

von Balthasar, Ignatius of Loyola and his teachings made a deep contribution to von Balthasar’s prayer. At the conclusion of Creator Spirit, he cites Ignatius’ Suscipe:

“The religion and longing of all peoples finally comes to this, to get beyond one’s own longings. And yet we do not want to say that this longing, this thirst for the Absolute, is nothing, for it has been implanted in us by You. Only You in Your Triune love can bring us the solution: we ourselves must surrender, in order to be confirmed by you in Your love. From the very beginning we were a gift, that You have made to us; we give everything back to You, dispose of it according to Your will alone; give us only Your love and grace, for that is what surpasses all our longings, and thus it is enough.”89

God, who implanted this longing, has also produced a solution. Man has direct access to God because God has become man in Christ. All religions speak of the ineffability of God but the Christian can state that God has expressed Himself: the “ineffable God is Himself Word.”90 Gawronski citing von Balthasar’s Das Betrachtende Gebet states prayer is “walking this open way through the heart...It is based on the knowledge that one speaks into the open, hearing ear of God.”91 The referred to heart is Christ himself. There are no limits upon God to speak to his children directly. Jesus always remains as the “ontological” presence, the “door” through which every divine-human encounter occurs.

Prayer as a conversation shares another aspect of dialogue -- the inequality of the partners. If this occurs in the typical I-Thou relationship, how more so will this inequality be evident in prayer. Since God initiates the dialogue, we can only stand

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89 This quote is from Raymond Gawronski, S.J., Word and Silence, 148.
90 Ibid., 149.
91 Ibid.
attentive ready to hear. Because the Word of God is incarnate in Jesus, who Himself is the “praying Word,” man must listen. Secondly, because Jesus experienced in his human nature how a man relates to God, he now becomes as God-man the way that leads into Christian prayer. The Father has given us His Word and instructed us, “This is My beloved Son, you should listen to him” (Mt. 17:5). This praying, listening, obeying is made possible through the Holy Spirit. The total human existence of Jesus on earth is mission and existence in the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus. It is the same Spirit that carries on the wishes and mission of the heavenly Jesus in all the listening and obeying persons who are “in Christ.” Joined to this is the responsible part that needs to be played by every actor in the drama - Jesus and all Christians.

It is the prayer, which is our intimate part of the dialogic principle, that unites the I and Thou. Prayer is connected with mission because through the openness of the person in prayer to God’s will whatever it is and whatever form that it takes, God’s will is presented in various ways. The prayerful person learns to see God’s hand, his will, moving in each life. As was seen in the progression of the ontological elements of Buber’s thinking on the aspects of the dialogical principle, so with von Balthasar the theological elements show a progression and great inter-dependence. This is readily seen in the relationship of prayer and mission. This is one relationship not typically found in Buber, however.

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92 Explorations in Theology, Creator Spirit, Volume III, 119.
Von Balthasar places the central component of his theodrama - the dialogic principle - within this concept of mission. Jesus allows himself to be affected by others. “Jesus’ I-Thou relationship with his fellow man is rooted in his mission insofar as the latter’s I-Thou relationship is rooted in his (even if he is not aware of it), and all human missions and vocations have their origin in that of the Son.”93 Jesus is the “Thou” for all, each person is accepted by Jesus and already becomes purified from his or her sinfulness by such meetings, for his mission is to take upon himself the sins of the world. He does so in perfect obedience with an inner freedom that is willing to carry out the task at any cost. He remains a model for his followers regarding obedience and prayerful encounter with his Father.

We pursue a path deeper into Balthasarian Christology only to understand the anthropological analogy. He believes that Jesus knew his identity as the Son of God “from the start” - as his unique relationship to his “Abba, Father” shows. At the same time, von Balthasar acknowledges that the awareness of this identity only came to him through his mission which was communicated by the Spirit.94 Care must be taken not to employ the usual temporal terms of “before” and “after” in speaking about the Trinitarian plan of salvation and Jesus’ embracing of mission. Von Balthasar likens the mission of Jesus to a slumbering within him like a child in its mother’s womb. For him

94 Von Balthasar explains that this would exclude the “beatific vision” of God for some periods of time.
the mission is not ready-made, an accomplished fact in some pre-existence. Jesus accepts the mission and fashions it. It did not exist in some eternal time prior to being affirmed and grasped. It did not come pre-assembled but needs to be fashioned out of himself in freedom and responsibility. He even “has to invent it.”\textsuperscript{95} Von Balthasar stresses in this passage the freedom of Jesus to choose and create. The mission enters the world “out of the womb of his most personal freedom.”\textsuperscript{96} The same understanding of mission is to be seen in the dialogic principle. God invites man to personhood through the accepting of the task or mission. As Jesus was perfectly free in his finiteness, so the theological person is free to carry out the mission in a variety of ways. God awaits the person’s obedient “yes” and allows the Spirit to send the mission. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the person has great latitude to “invent” his mission or vocation.

The work of the Spirit becomes obvious here with the Spirit driving him into the wilderness (Lk. 4:1) and back to Galilee (4:14). The Letter to the Romans refers to the relationship of freedom - being driven by the Spirit. This underlines the content of Volume II in which von Balthasar demonstrated that abstract relationship between finite freedom and infinite freedom is made concrete in mission. Finite freedom owes its being to Another. The “finite freedom” is so deeply rooted in his infinite freedom that it continually transcends itself toward infinity - not in order to rest there, however, but to receive his mission. God’s glory shines forth in this accomplishing of the mission as the final glory of created freedom.

\textsuperscript{95} Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Theo-Drama}, Volume III, 198.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
Delving deeper into the mystery of Christology and mission ultimately for its implications for anthropology, we come to von Balthasar’s theory of Jesus of Nazareth in his earthly life being in dialogue with his Father and not the Trinity. This exploration looks at the relation of Jesus with the Father and Holy Spirit from the view of the economic Trinity and not from an intra-Trinitarian dialogue. Von Balthasar, citing St. Thomas, says that the Son’s *missio* is the economic form of his eternal *processio* from the Father. Jesus receives his mission from the Father through the Holy Spirit. There is no time that Jesus had not said yes to his mission and gave himself over to it. Scripture does not show two different “yeses” first as God in eternity, and second as man in time. Added to this is the thought that it is in the Holy Spirit that the Son takes up the Father’s mission. Again breaking further Trinitarian ground, von Balthasar states that the Incarnate Son in his freedom (which is now a human freedom too) embraces the Father’s will (not his own as God) to which he has consented from the “beginning.” By embracing the Father’s will Jesus discovers his own as the eternal Son.

Now since Jesus does not as a human being see the beatific vision, he must hold onto what is presented by the Spirit as mission that is only partially understood. Jesus as a human must employ his own freedom in carrying out the mission. No partial success can blind him or sway him from the full accomplishment. His obedience is full of merit and in all of this he serves as a model of faith and hope and love.

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97 Ibid., 201.
Not only a model in the theological virtues, he provides the basis for the theodramatic theory. He is a model for all actors, since he achieved the identification of the character in the total performance of the mission. This identification of character and mission turns the world drama into theo-drama. The, "Person has been given a mission, not accidentally, but as a modality of his eternal personal being." He provides the basis for theo-drama not only concerning roles, but in giving meaning to the play. Within himself he embodies mankind's entire dramatic situation. Jesus includes within himself all the persons of the theo-drama. All are defined as they refer to him in the unity of his person and universal mission. All persons strive to have an identity within themselves of their person and mission. Jesus is a person. All others are so in relationship with him and dependent on him. As conscious subjects they are called to share in some aspect of his universal mission. By such participation conscious subjects become persons. In Christ's uniqueness others are not only allowed but invited to play analogous roles in a unique fashion fulfilling personal mission. Even though Jesus' mission was granted a priori, the creature's a posteriori mission is not accidental, but is part of God's plan and it is this mission that makes him a person.

Only in Christ can a conscious subject rise above his natural level to that of a theological and supernatural person. He now shares a likeness to God that can only be granted by God in Christ. "Person is the 'new name' by which God addresses me (Rev. 2:17) and

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98 Ibid.
which comes from the ‘beginning of God’s creation (Rev. 3:14); it always implies a task, namely, to be a ‘pillar in the temple of my God.’” 99

5. EN CHRISTOI

Man and the study of man have been forever changed with the coming of Christ. “A yeast has been put into him, originating in the Absolute; it has dissolved mankind’s bond with nature in its cosmic aspect and given man a freedom and hence a relation to the Absolute that he retains even when cut loose from his origin, Christ...” 100

The study of man will forever have to face the universal and radical nature of Jesus’ claim that he is the center of the cosmos and our salvation. The Gospel continuously points to His sense of mission and Paul shows how the cosmos was created in Christ and indeed all characters of the world play are included in Christ. For von Balthasar, Jesus acted as if he were “the Archimedean point of the religious history of the world.” All are included en Christoi because Jesus is the Word of God and all things are created in him. Every man’s destiny will be judged by his attitude to Jesus (Mk. 8:38). The existence of Jesus as the central factor in world history cannot be ignored. Because of his mission, Jesus is placed at the center of existence and “draws to himself” everything around him (Jn. 12:32). All time is dated in his name. “Salvation history” is a recognized part of

99 Ibid., 208.
100 Ibid., 25.
world history.” The mission and person of Jesus, whether believed in or not, still confronts all mankind. All drama is portrayed “in Christ.” It is the person of Jesus Christ through his life that manifests the inner form of anthropology. For von Balthasar it is only possible to construct a full doctrine of man, a full anthropology within the context of Christology.101

Jesus is the Concretissimum in which all humanity is rooted. Man can discover his uniqueness in the theodrama only in Christ, the model of relatedness. A true understanding of man is possible in Christ through whom all are made and because of whom there exists between God and man a dramatic relationship based on shared freedom.102 It is an anthropology based on Christ who by his coming affords mankind the greatest opportunity to exercise finite and infinite freedom. Christ is what we all wish to become -- a faithful servant of God’s will. As said earlier, when man realizes that life has been granted him as a gift, with no compulsion to behave in a certain way, with freedom to choose, he then is able to hand himself back to his origin. In this instance the origin is Jesus through whom all things were made. He has the privilege of acknowledging his indebtedness to absolute freedom.

Von Balthasar makes a distinction about the inclusion of the dramatic characters being in Christ. First, it is in Christ that God the Father opens up the sphere of freedom within which each person receives his/her mission. “In Christ” (en Christoi) only can the

101 Ibid., 13.
102 Ibid.
interplay between finite and infinite freedom be given and only in Theo-drama can what it means to be in Christ be understood. All men are placed at the heart of Jesus’ universal mission.¹⁰³ In von Balthasar’s system, the sphere of the mission always coincides with the sphere of the personal “I.”¹⁰⁴ The event itself (en Christoi) is achieved by Christ and refers, when speaking about sphere of freedom within each person, to instrumentality or modality.¹⁰⁵ This personal sphere of freedom “in Christ” is a spiritual event steeped in reality, but it does not refer specifically to a location or place “in Christ.” “In Christ” connotes the universal scope of his mission and when applied to individuals it can be interpreted as “Christ in us” that denotes the result of his mission. The direct experiencing of this “in Christ” is open to all since it speaks of freedom and mission of each person. Being “in Christ” then means that Jesus is the pattern and model of each person’s new vocation.¹⁰⁶

It is important to point out that “in Christ” does not refer to a type of mystical absorption by which the individual’s identity is lost. The personhood of Christ endows the individual with personality and mission that when assented to, brings fulfillment and happiness to lives. Every person’s mission and personality are always, through grace, a form of participation in Jesus’ unique universal mission. It has already been pointed out that an individual becomes a person through the realization and acceptance of a unique mission or call. This mission comes through Jesus, the head of mankind, and allows us to

¹⁰³ Ibid., 246.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 248.

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share in his uniqueness, personhood and mission. Von Balthasar goes one step further in saying, “Theologically speaking, it is impossible to become a person except by becoming a brother of the ‘First-born’ (Romans 8:28)...”

To be a brother means to share in his mission as “Suffering Servant.” Mission is Cross but Cross can never be separated from Resurrection. The deed had a purpose as Jesus’ mission had purpose. In dramatic terms the Resurrection is the identification of the principal actor. Only the Holy Spirit can testify and convince us of who Jesus is and what he came to do. The Spirit brings to mind the deep meaning of John 1:14, 17:5 that “Jesus is the glory of the only-begotten of the Father” which he “had before the world was made.” Only the Spirit can reveal and convince human beings that this Jesus is the Son, that he is full of freedom and that he possesses the power to make himself available (entirely present as a being and historically present) from the beginning, on the stage, as an actor, and as source and model of the interplay between God and man. It is only in the dialogue that the Holy Spirit can speak to us in various ways regarding how our part of the drama is related to Jesus’ drama. Only as our Thou can God prompt us to believe that the Theodrama is not a myth but the starkest reality in which the main actor exercises a freedom that is built into each one of us who have been made in His image. The central theme of theo-drama is that God initiates through love and grace enabling man to act authentically in Christ’s acting area and to respond to God’s prior invitation.

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107 Ibid., 249.
108 Ibid., 52.
How can the person hasten the embracing and carrying out the vocation in his life? The answer can be found in Christ for he is the archetype for all things. In order to imitate him who emptied himself of his divinity, the creature could use the same vehicle of kenosis. As always, von Balthasar turns to Trinitarian life for the model of living. The Logos empties itself into the man, Jesus. In a movement from above, “God empties Himself in order to fill man with His loving self-divestment.”耶稣 in turn, empties himself in love. The expected response of the creature in Theo-drama is one of self-giving love. St. Ignatius espoused giving away what was your own to make room for God. Writing in *Theologik*, von Balthasar states it so beautifully,

> “finally the highest affirmation of the self-giving love of God in the Superword (*Uberwort*) of His Son, whom man seeks to answer through a super-word which is given to him. Here ‘negative theology’ becomes in the end the place of perfect encounter, not in a dialogical equality but in the transformation of the whole creature into an *ecce ancilla* for the mystery that fulfills it, the mystery of the incomprehensible love of the God who divests Himself.”

“The Incarnation has no other goal” than the Cross. The Cross is obedience, it is kenosis. Obedience and kenosis are both the fruit of dialogue. Man, in dialogue with God, stands before his Creator open to receiving the divine content in obedience. He stands at a distance, ready to serve, in blind obedience, God who handed himself over in blind obedience into the hands of men. Like Jesus, the Christian attains his true identity by giving himself away. Like Jesus, the Christian’s self-abandonment to the Father’s will

110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
leads to burdens and crosses not even imagined by the Christian. The Christian in total obedience accepts these burdens as God’s will for him.

Again von Balthasar goes deeper into the mystery of what it means to be “in Christ.” Not only does each person live “in Christ” through the exercise of freedom and saying yes to mission, but each shares Christ’s function of revealing God. Jesus desires to deepen the reality of the relationship of man with God as reflected in Scripture found in Romans 8:17, “coheirs with Christ,” and the one who, born of the Father as the only Son (John 1:18) can lead these brothers of his to be born of God too (John 1:13;3:5-8). The follower of Christ has the dual role, in imitation of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, of helping others to obey the Spirit and to communicate with the Spirit. The son or daughter of God takes an active role in imparting the divine life to others! Therefore it can be seen most readily in this context how the saints are the crowning of the dialogical principle. All of them felt themselves to be brothers and sisters of the Lord. They all became themselves to the fullest extent by embracing the mission which lead each of them to drink deeply of the incarnate’s passion, dying and rising. If each child of God is capable of revealing God by living “in Christ,” how much more does the saint reveal the radiating love and compassion of the suffering servant?

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CONCLUSION

The same search for truth has been the driving force in examining the theodramatic contribution that von Balthasar has made to theology. His philosophical work is not to be separated from his theological discourse. As a “New Testament man” his entire development of Theodrama is based on Jesus, the cornerstone of the entire structure of his theology. His overall approach is spiritual and theological, examining the wonderful exchange between heaven and earth wrought in the person of Jesus Christ along the vertical dimension of reality.

His large body of theological writing has gained a broader audience in these years following the Second Vatican Council, as can be seen in the translation and publication of his voluminous works, the continuation of the journal Communio that advances his ideas and the proliferation of theses and dissertations devoted to his thought.

Theodrama ultimately is teleological as it speaks of finality and moves toward a goal. The I-Thou encounter relates to the eschatological dimension of life. This I-Thou dialogic event is a part of Theodrama and it provides for the definition of specific encounters in the course of salvation history. Von Balthasar’s dialogic event is built upon Buber’s thinking and shares the emphasis on response. For von Balthasar, response is the absolutely required element to God’s call in Jesus Christ, and “in Christ” the response is made by the doing of the deed. Dialogue is the vehicle for theological personhood.
This conclusion addresses the same four dialogal elements employed in the conclusion of Buber's work. They are examined in the light of their applicability in supporting the first and second hypotheses of this study.

I. Relationship with God

One of von Balthasar's major contributions to the understanding of God and his interaction with the world is his portrayal of God entering the world and playing on "our" stage. For him, God is the initiator in both the Old and New covenants. He finds the dialogic principle at work in these covenants, and this insight about the God-human relation as a dialogic event casts new light on our relationship with God. From this dialogic encounter man emerges as a person who in relationship with God says yes to mission.

Employing the language of the theater, Theodrama reveals Christians playing their roles gathered around Christ who plays the central role on life's stage. The God-human relation comes through Christ who provides access to God as only he can do, based on the Trinitarian model of conversation. In relation to Christ, in dialogue with the Trinity through Christ, an individual becomes a person. This God-man dialogue supports the first hypothesis as it sheds light on and forms the concept of person.
II. I-Thou Dialogue

The I-Thou dialogue begins with the appearance of God’s son. Theodrama prolongs the dialogue in time, reflecting the original dialogue between the Father and the Son. Von Balthasar posits the dialogue as a connecting element to all aspects of life. This aspect of the dialogue supports the first and second hypotheses because the fruits of dialogue are the fulfillment of the person through action and accomplishment.

His concept of role as a preparation and purification of the “I” who eventually accepts his call or mission, demonstrates the growth into personhood and eventual fulfillment of the person. God offers the role; to be oneself means that we need to play the role.

The role is played by the I who carries on the dialogue with Christ who is the Other. God is always the first Thou. Covenant was the first dialogue which revealed and gave specificity to love and relationship. In covenant and all subsequent dialogues, human beings become persons which directly supports the first hypothesis. Through the dialogue with God, the Christian answers, and through a continuation of the on-going encounter, discovers who they are only in Christ which carries with it the idea of personal fulfillment (hypothesis two). In Christ then, man is first awakened to becoming a person.¹ Once addressed by God the human being can never step out of the God-human relation and through listening accepts and identifies with mission (hypothesis one).

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, Explorations in Theology, Creator Spirit, Volume III, 311
III. Uniqueness and mission

Von Balthasar demonstrates through a historical recounting, that each person holds uniqueness within itself not to be explained by another. His contribution to this all important dialogal element clarifies that shared uniqueness does not mean distinct uniqueness. Although uniqueness flows from the personal uniqueness of the Creator, the human being’s distinct uniqueness derives from the acceptance and carrying-out of God’s freely given call. Accepting the mission is the only way uniqueness can be fully recognized. Fulfillment as a person comes from saying yes to God’s election. As a finite creature, the human person, realizing the gift of infinite freedom, sets out on the road of self-realization (hypothesis two). Again in support of both hypotheses, von Balthasar states that a person can only be perfected through the dialogue, “...when it has become ‘Thou’ in God’s sight in its full divine, absolute manner, when it has become identical with the ‘idea’ reserved for the finite ‘thou’ within the infinite ‘Thou’...”

Building upon Buber’s idea that man is a task to be performed, von Balthasar believes that mission cannot be fulfilled outside of Christ. This concept of mission carries with it the social dimension of service on behalf of others. Through the Holy Spirit the dialogue is opened, thereby empowering persons to fulfill their roles known as mission. The ultimate fulfillment of personhood that was begun with God’s predestined mission is sharing in Christ’s universal salvific mission (hypotheses one and two).

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IV. Freedom

Although God is the director in life's play, there is no compulsion in the “I’s” acceptance of a designed role. God has also designed human beings in his own image to be free, independent acting beings. Freedom comes from him and is not awakened by another human being. Through the dialogue the individual realizes that he has freedom given to him as a gift to be exercised and fulfilled in a role freely embraced which supports hypotheses one and two. Freedom comes from dialogue with the word (hypothesis one) and through the Holy Spirit the person responds in a free response. Uniqueness creates uniqueness, asking in return that created freedom choose what it has been given to do. The creature’s task is to willingly integrate itself into the divine plan fulfilling itself and God’s will (hypothesis two). Fulfillment of the person, attained through dialogue, is reached by doing what is expected by God. Each person participates in infinite freedom by God’s immanence, present in exercised freedom and accepted grace.
This comparison between Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar addresses those dialogical elements that will be applied to the re-reading of the Annunciation. The Annunciation is the leading principle of this study and the dialogical elements are the tools of investigation. The same four dialogical factors (relation to God, I-Thou relation, uniqueness-call, and freedom) discussed in chapter one, will be addressed along with those other factors peculiar to Buber and von Balthasar that have implications for the Annunciation.¹

I. Relationship with God

**Man’s relationship with God** is a vital issue in all theological discourse. Both men’s works address this issue, but from decidedly different viewpoints.² Buber’s development of the Absolute Thou concept (God) is probably one of the most difficult of his concepts to comprehend. His understanding of God, as presented in *I and Thou*, is highly idiosyncratic. We cannot speak about God, we cannot discover him, he has no personality, nevertheless he becomes a person for us. God dwells where man lets him in.

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¹ In the very beginning of this study, a brief sketch of a few significant highlights was offered in an attempt to understand each man and to compare common aspects. Some common features have been alluded to in this chapter. However, both men hide behind their work, i.e., von Balthasar like the artist behind his painting and Buber, as Kurzweil described, like a great wizard who hides behind his story. Cf. Johann G. Roten, “Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Anthropology in Light of His Marian Thinking,” *Communio*. Cf. Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work. The Middle Years, 1923-1945*, 322.

² Although the two topics of relation to God and the I-Thou dialogue are interwoven, an attempt will be made, at the beginning of this comparison, to separate the two for the purpose of evaluation.
God is so transcendent that we cannot know him or reach him. There is little evidence that his understanding of God changed substantially over the years.

Kierkegaard made modern philosophical anthropology possible basing it on theological presuppositions. Those who followed rejected the absolute. It is to Buber's credit that he re-instated the Absolute Thou at the center of his philosophical anthropology. Buber accented the man to man I-Thou relation since it was difficult to form I-Thou relations with the transcendent God. The I-Thou relation is a completely subjective one. What happens between each partner in the relation, whether it be the Absolute Thou or a human person, is not able to be shared or commented on except in the I-It realm. Even the somewhat objective view of the biblical God is handled by Buber in a subjective fashion as found in his existentialist approach. All that we can know about God is that he is present and will be present in the future. Even though Buber states that the Absolute Thou is over against human beings and enters into relation with them, this is usually not addressed in his writings on the dialogical principle. God as the Absolute Thou is usually known and contacted through human beings. His ideas call for mediation between man and God, and he readily finds this mediation in one's fellow man who enters into the I-Thou relation. Buber sees all of these I-Thou relations somehow ending in the relationship with the Absolute Thou, although there is no explanation how this occurs. Although God is mysterious, Buber could still write at 50 that he could not imagine his

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3 This will be an important consideration in examining the Annunciation.
4 Any situation can become a vehicle of the "eternal Thou," Martin Buber, I and Thou, x.
own existence without the existence of God. Where Buber’s dialogic principle is based on the I-Thou relation as seen in man to man relations, von Balthasar’s basis for the dialogic event is God and specifically the Trinity.

Von Balthasar understands God in the framework of orthodox Catholic theology, that is to say, as a Supreme Being, three persons in one God, transcendent and immanent. Von Balthasar’s God is more approachable, and as a matter of fact approaches the individual, thereby initiating the I-Thou dialogue. This new model incorporates the Old Testament covenantal relationship, and the New Testament spousal relationship based on a dialogical Trinitarian model. Unlike Buber, who begins with man, von Balthasar’s entire theo-dramatic system is based on God and his relationship with us. Buber’s presentation of the I-Thou relationship is more balanced than von Balthasar’s as regards to the emphasis on each partner. Von Balthasar spends a great deal of time on the “I” in his lengthy search for the identity of the “I,” but, on the other hand, he stresses God as Thou as the important partner in the dialogue, thereby giving a disproportionate emphasis to God. Man on his journey to find God must ultimately deny that each creature and every part of creation is God. The God who is sought is the source of unity. He is the One distinct from the Many. Buber became mired in the creation as a manifestation of God. It appears that he could not accept the analogy of being as the explanation of how God shares being and how human beings participate in God’s being. Von Balthasar

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5 Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work. The Middle Years, 1923-1945*, 134
6 Although Buber could not accept much of Jewish tradition, he did hold as essential what was expressed more in biblical Judaism than anywhere else -- “the biblical dialogue between man and God.” Cf. Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work. The Middle Years, 1923-1945*, 143
presents Jesus as the most singular of human realities but "a singular in whom the universal meaning of Being is revealed." Jesus is the answer to the particularity and universality with which both Buber and von Balthasar wrestled. He is the solution to the One and the Many. The basis of the dialogue for von Balthasar is the Trinity in whom the otherness of the Son and Holy Spirit accounts for "part" of the ultimate reality of who God is. The Trinity is the model for man being in dialogue with the other. God is always in communion and conversation. This "God who approaches" will be spoken of in connection with the Annunciation, along with how he communicates with his creatures, e.g., Mary, through mediation. There is a marked difference in the pneumatic dimension which in Buber is relatively absent but in von Balthasar is vital and grants the person the ability to act in an informed way in dealing with reality. When Buber does mention spirit it refers to that element of the between that exists in a non-spatial manner that he likens to air that is shared by the two partners in dialogue. It has little or no relation to the Holy Spirit. These issues, i.e., God initiating and mediation, will be addressed in chapters three and four.

Buber and von Balthasar both believe that the dialogue is a vehicle of love, and that through the dialogue each person encounters God's word in the concrete daily events of life. Buber called the Hasidic belief of encountering God in the everyday activities of life, and seeing the world in God "concrete reality." Although Buber's entire spiritual

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7 John O'Donnell, S.J., Hans Urs von Balthasar, 14
8 "Real love is the highest form of dialogue..." Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, The Middle Years, 1923-1945, 115
heritage did not belong to the world of Hasidism, his foundation was in that realm. He admitted later in life that it had had a “deep effect on him.”9 The Jew must trust God, for God is present with all Jews. God reveals himself in the darkness and he is the gate through which man must pass if he is to enter into the love of God.10 For von Balthasar, this presence is seen in the Ignatian themes of finding “God in all things” and being “with God in the world.” Von Balthasar presents the Trinity as a family of love open to the world. Jesus is a gift that reveals the mystery of Being - the revelation that Being is Trinitarian love. For Buber it is a world that becomes synonymous with God’s glory, and for von Balthasar the world is a reflection of God’s glory and it is “charged with the grandeur of God.” Von Balthasar’s idea of God moves beyond the grandeur of creation which reflects but a fraction of God’s infinite glory.

Both men believe that we are always open to dialogue and that God communicates with his creatures by being present. However, von Balthasar envisions a God whose “otherness” does not separate him from his creatures, and that Christ is the living person in the dialogue. Man is called into existence by a Thou. Man is addressed first by Being, out of love. Thus the dialogue begins. This dialogue bears a summons to respond. Man is therefore in his very structure designed to be an answer. Buber sees the dialogic process steeped in man while von Balthasar states that the process is rooted in God. Von Balthasar’s contribution to Buber’s pioneering work on the dialogic principle stems from

9 Ibid., 323
10 Ibid., 118
the Christian view that human beings are actually placed in the sphere of Christ in whom all dialogue occurs.\textsuperscript{11}

II. I-Thou Relationship

Buber’s contribution to philosophical anthropology was his development of the I-Thou relationship. His thinking and writing encompassed the current philosophical reflection of his day, and his subsequent theorizing helped to enliven those initial ideas. Well into middle age, he could reflect on his marriage to Paula as a continuance and development of his philosophy of dialogue. He could not intimately share in the Present Being without sharing in the being of his wife. In doing so, he entered into relation with otherness. His stress was upon what happened between the two partners in the dialogical meeting and not what happened in either of them. What appeared as novel and fresh in I and Thou is now a part of common parlance and thinking about relationship. Wholeness is found only in relationship and God’s revelation is dialogic. Our human way to the infinite is through fulfilled finitude. Marriage is an exemplary bond of this finitude. By Buber’s own admission his greatest contribution and insight was that the I-Thou relation to God and the I-Thou relation to one’s fellow man are at the same time related to each other.\textsuperscript{12}

While he stressed the similarity between creature and Creator, von Balthasar stressed dissimilarity. It will only be in Jesus Christ that the gulf between creature and Creator is

\textsuperscript{11} Raymond Gawronski, S.J., \textit{Word and Silence}, 84

\textsuperscript{12} Buber, still a prolific writer into his 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s was still laying the foundations of his anthropological system. Cf. Maurice Friedman, \textit{Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Middle Years, 1923-1945}, 256
bridged. Buber's insight about the similarity of the two I-Thou relations will be confirmed, but in a different way in light of Christ's coming.

A second insight of Buber was that relation, not substance, was the most important characteristic of being, which showed that man's need for other persons is "constitutive of man's very essence." Relation replaces substance or essence in Buber's philosophy. This Buberian thought has had far-reaching implications for the understanding of man. Unfortunately Buber did not give a full explanation of how the I-Thou relation functioned in an ontological manner that would have substituted for essence. He may have been referring to the existential preference of existence over essence, which for him would account for the actualization of man. His ideas help forward the philosophical and theological questioning of the importance of relation to being. (This will be an important issue in the discussion in chapter four.) Von Balthasar will build on Buber's theory of dialogue supplying how the relationship can lead to the actualization of the person (vertical approach). Buber felt that since the problem of alienation began with man, in turn the solution would be found in man through dialogue. However, von Balthasar, after a lengthy search through literature, philosophy and psychology, cannot support philosophical dialogism's claim as espoused by Buber, that the I-Thou relation can supply an answer to who man is or to the origin of personhood.

13 The Philosophy of Martin Buber, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 70
The Buberian solution to dialogic personhood is founded on a horizontal plane with an occasional nod to the Absolute Thou who in some ways seems very similar to man. Von Balthasar’s contribution was the restoration of the vertical dimension of the human person brought about by Christ. Only through Christ can man receive an answer to how the “I” becomes a person through the “Thou.” The further elaboration, naming the human person as the answer to God’s question, that places the person in the sphere of Christ then, is Balthasarian vintage. It is the opening of the dialogic principle to God’s reality and plan of creation and redemption. The dialogic encounter is modeled on the Son’s dialogue with the Father. The earthly dialogue is a reflection of the heavenly dialogue. Buber can only state that creation opens a dialogue between heaven and earth. He can only allude to a “voice” that speaks from within. Buber could not make theological or philosophical connections to this dialogue between Creator and creature.14 The dialogue between Creator and creature is nuanced quite differently in Buber and von Balthasar’s thought. We are left with the question of “how is God influenced or affected by being in an I-Thou relationship with his creature?”

Buber sees presence as the important ingredient in the I-Thou dialogue. For von Balthasar, God is complete within himself and God as Father pours out his love as he utters the Word.15 Dialogic event is more than presence; it is based on Trinitarian conversation. As we are made in God’s image, so we are made for speech and

14 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Later Years, 1945-1965, 276. “I pursue no theology as theology and no philosophy of religion as philosophy of relation.” Nor could he connect either to revelation. Nor is he capable of having a metaphysics by his own admission. Cf. 277
15 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Explorations in Theology, Creator Spirit, Volume 3, 312
conversation. "Where there is dialogue...there must be word."\(^{16}\) Maurice Friedman records and opines that Buber, in a seminary lecture in 1951 entitled "The Dialogue Between Heaven and Earth," brings together his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and his philosophy of dialogue in an explicit manner that cannot be found elsewhere in any of his writings. "To God's sovereign address, man gives his autonomous answer."\(^{17}\) This lecture, espoused that the Hebrew Bible reveals our life as a dialogue between heaven and earth, portrays Buber's thought as much more God-centered. Whereas in most of his writing, it is the man to man dialogue that takes precedence. These revelations approach von Balthasar's remarks that God is man's first Thou. His Trinitarian belief prompts von Balthasar's view that God is man's first Thou. In most of Buber's writings, dialogue begins with fellowman. As Buber's thought matured, he advanced his thinking. In his seventies, he would write to Maurice Friedman, "'To be addressed' is not enough: the man addressed must hear, must listen to it, this is religion. [And]... We do not respond 'to the present' but to God who is sending it, 'speaking it.'"\(^{18}\) In such words he begins to parallel von Balthasar's thinking about the spoken elements of dialogue and God's more active participation. There is an indication of the Absolute Thou entering more into the relation.\(^{19}\) At eighty-three Buber would state, in response to his critics, that even though he rejected the separation between the I-Thou relationship with God and with his fellow human beings and refused to pose the question of which of the two meetings is "the


\(^{17}\) Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work. The Later Years, 1945-1965*, 148

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Some of Buber's previous Eastern beliefs are evident here.
primary one,” the human person might be conceivable without the meeting with other men but not without that with God:

“On the plane of personal life-experience, the meeting with men is naturally the first; nevertheless, one only has to take seriously the insight that the genetically underivable uniqueness of every man presupposes the share played by a creative act, and the original nature of the contact between God and man is evident.”

Maurice Friedman defends Buber here by saying that the above quote is not a theological statement, thereby putting aside von Balthasar’s charge that such writing see-saws between theology and the philosophy of religion. Again Buber’s mature reflections are closer to Balthasarian concepts of the importance of God as the creator who comes into dialogue, thereby primarily constituting personhood for human beings. However, even if Buber’s ideas seem to approach von Balthasar’s, one would have to agree with von Balthasar’s criticism of Buber’s shifting of categories. This criticism reveals a recurring theme seen throughout this paper’s presentation of Buber’s thought -- the difficulty of capturing Buberian theological reality versus reading Buberian philosophy of religion. Although his statement cited above, “...the original nature of the contact between God and man is evident,” might seem related to von Balthasar’s framing God’s original creation of the person with a pre-formed mission, it is not!

Buber makes little mention of man worshipping and praising God as Thou, a living Being. In that same lecture of 1951, Buber mentions that man answers God’s address by supplication, silence, lament, thanks and praise-giving! By doing so, man experiences

20 Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Later Years, 1945-1965*, 276
21 Ibid.
himself as having been heard, accepted and confirmed. 22 Similar remarks can be found in his 1957 Postscript to the second edition of Land Thou. These additions made in his later life show a definite progression and change in Buber's thinking regarding a more inter-active and responsive transcendent God. 23

III. Uniqueness and Call

Buber sought unique particularity in distinction from the universal, while von Balthasar sought a distinct uniqueness. They approached uniqueness from different directions. As seen in this chapter, uniqueness was a salient point for both men. Each man was unique because of God-given potentialities granted him to accomplish tasks. For Buber this meant a general imparting of potentiality, whereas for von Balthasar an individual's uniqueness itself was a given, a specific given (a given uniqueness that calls for gratitude in and of itself). Past fifty years of age, Buber was still refining his thinking. He decided that man is not radically anything but "claimed" and that he is "the crystallized potentiality of existence...in its factual limitation...what Paul Tillich later called 'finite freedom." 24 Von Balthasar goes beyond man being "crystallized potential" in viewing man as uniquely free to fulfill this potential as a human person made free to choose by God's infinite freedom. In answer to philosophy's "Who am I?", Buber answers "Be yourself." Being yourself means the unfolding of your potential through the dialogue. 25

22 Ibid., 146
23 Buber would not use the term transcendent.
24 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber's Life and Work, The Middle Years, 1923-1945, 192
25 In 1951 in "Distance and Relation" and in 1954 in "Elements of the Interhuman," Buber stresses that uniqueness needs to be confirmed by others through the dialogue. Such confirmation supports the direction of the person's life.
Each person bears the obligation to unfold his personal potentiality. Following Buber’s “Be yourself,” von Balthasar would answer the question, “Who am I?” with “you are gift.” There is a clear distinction between Buber’s non-reflective acceptance of potentiality-making uniqueness and von Balthasar’s grateful acceptance of uniqueness as gift and as participation in God’s life. Von Balthasar, as always, begins with God who as the director assigns roles to each individual, thereby making each a theological person, who is unique because of mission or call. The uniqueness and unrepeatability of the human person unfolds in each new encounter or dialogue, according to Buber. Dialogue held the key to the creation of the person. The person’s uniqueness became more known and appreciated. Buber’s exposition of uniqueness that gives distinct particularity to each subject did not satisfy von Balthasar’s search for true uniqueness. Snowflakes hold within themselves the same uniqueness and unrepeatability. Even though man, unlike a snowflake, can reflect upon himself and his innate potential, this self-knowledge still, according to von Balthasar, cannot make him truly unique. What made the individual a unique person through the vehicle of dialogue was the mission or task assigned. Each person has a universal, spiritual nature which he shares with all others, but his personhood is unrepeatable. Although Buber went on the say that each person is stamped with God’s image, he did not differentiate how man and the rest of creation bear this similar stamp. Nor did he explain how each person was to make perfect its likeness to God.
However, at times, both men’s ideas are similar regarding the importance of uniqueness. Both were concerned with singularity and saw infinite beauty shining forth in infinite manifoldness. Yet Buber felt that God perfects himself through the differentiation of created objects, because God is present in each. All creation is God’s essence. The perfection of God is expressed through the multiplicity of individuals. Von Balthasar as a Christian believes that God is perfect in himself and that this world manifests his glory and in turn gives him glory but is separate from him. However, unlike Buber, he spoke of the perfection of human beings as a possibility only in God. Possibly, Buber’s legacy of the dialogue has been forgotten or passed over because some of his ideas, especially those on uniqueness, are intertwined with an overidentification of God and the created world.

Buber shared von Balthasar’s view of mission when he spoke of the “sense of direction” that resulted from each I-Thou encounter. However, it was a nebulous answer to the question, “What am I to do?” He came close to equating uniqueness with direction and task but never fully articulated it, whereas von Balthasar will build his dialogic event on this concept of uniqueness, joining uniqueness to role and mission given directly by God during the dialogue.

Buber’s work falls short of the fullness of truth regarding the answer to “Who man is.” Buber experiences a call upon his life but never generalizes it to others. Buber’s portrayal of man existing for the sake of relation through which he becomes a unique
person is somewhat contradictory to his idea that each man is already unique through his potentiality and unrepeatability. Possibly he is referring to growth in personhood without naming it. It was not until the 1950’s that this was made clearer in some personal correspondence between Buber and Friedman.

“The purpose of my uniqueness may be felt more or less dimly, it cannot be sensed; the objective direction to it does not mean a definite aim. It is not as if I first became aware and then took the direction -- I become aware in taking the direction....More precisely: in responding to God, in taking the direction to Him I become aware, in some measure, of the person meant for me in Creation.”

Buber adds further clarification, “The child in the womb is already created as a uniqueness to be developed and this fact is decisive: the origin of personality is the origin of the potential personality: uniqueness.” In doing so, Buber moves beyond his long-standing idea of relation showing more of an interest in being itself. This progression in his thinking is akin to von Balthasar’s long-standing interest in being. Do the ingredients that constitute uniqueness for both Buber and von Balthasar possibly speak of initial personhood and on going growth in personhood? These topics and questions will be re-visited in the discussion of Mary’s uniqueness in the Annunciation.

The topic of call and mission flows out of the uniqueness theme. There is a similarity and dissimilarity between Buber and von Balthasar on the question of call or being chosen for a task. This dissimilarity is most clearly seen in Buber’s recounting of a Hasidic legend and von Balthasar’s memory of the Black Forest call. For Buber it is

26 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work. The Later Years, 1945-1965, 184
27 Ibid., 185
inconceivable to be chosen by God for a task, whereas for von Balthasar it is of the essence of being a person to be chosen. Every person is chosen, every person is assigned a role no matter how lowly or lofty, and every person is offered a mission or call. "There is no Christian who has not received a unique, personal, irreplaceable sending by Christ." 29 How do you prove that there is always a call? Maybe you cannot prove it as a scientific rule. We can extrapolate from Christ's call to God's creatures. Mary as model of person also provides a "proof" of sorts that, like her, every person is asked to say yes to God's request. The saints are living examples of receiving a mission and becoming the person in the kingdom that God called them to be. It follows from von Balthasar's reasoning that if there is no mission then one never becomes a person, never has a role in salvation history. Buber's view is radically different. The person alone decides on the direction that necessity and responsibility demand. Both men, however, believe in direction as entrusted to the person.

Buber searched for truth concerning man. His writing casts considerable light on the subject of man's identity. For Buber it is not objective truth nor inspiration, but a voice that speaks out of creation. This is then what he means by saying all revelation is "summons and sending." The content of revelation and every I-Thou relationship are the same in nature. The voice speaks within. Every person responds not to knowledge or truth but to unheard, and at times not even conscious "summons and sending." This

29 John O'Donnell, S.J., Hans Urs von Balthasar. 59
“summons and sending” is the call or task that each person understands in the dialogue through a fellow human being.

Von Balthasar as a way of correcting this thinking “from below,” this call must come from above, not from one’s fellow human beings. It is a dialogue between heaven and earth. This idea is enriched by von Balthasar’s idea that God wants us, in Christ, to be persons who will express God’s unique idea of us. Possibly upon closer inspection there is more similarity to be found between them. What seems like a point of contention between the two men regarding how man as “task to be performed” carries out the task, may in fact not be so disputable. For Buber, there is a gradual coming to feel what the task is “which can change many times with each encounter”; for von Balthasar it is a mission from God that is based on Jesus’ receiving his divine mission that allows for growth and personal structuring of the mission. Person and mission become one in his system and, unlike Buber, he can only see a person fulfilling the mission in Christ.

Von Balthasar does not say that the mission or task comes wrapped in a package that can only be unwrapped in one way and contains only one mission totally known and embraced at the outset. It is at this point where Buber’s “any perceived task” is suitable and von Balthasar’s freedom of choosing the theological role that God has offered as mission, meet. Although Buber could not assent to God having a mission in mind for an individual, there is common ground here for the individual who is entrusted with a task.

30 Raymond Gawronski, *Word and Silence*, 83
Hasidism provided the foundation for accomplishing the deed for God. Buber would write in his later years, "...Hasidism spoke to me in compelling accents of a whole-hearted service to God that did not mean turning away from my fellowmen and from the world." The means by which the mission is offered and received are somewhat different, but the reality of the entrusting and the importance of doing the task is very important to both men. For Buber the carrying out of the task is paramount, since it utilizes the very talents and faculties given by God to perform the task. For von Balthasar, the embracing of the task or mission gives the individual the best opportunity to become the person God has in mind. The accepted task’s accomplishment is paramount because it comes from God, to be fulfilled specifically by the person that God has chosen.

Where Buber and von Balthasar part ways is the issue of salvific value of the task or mission. Buber does not believe in God’s specific design or destiny for an individual. The essence of von Balthasar’s belief in a personal mission for each person is that each mission carries with it salvific importance. God’s design for each person reflects his purpose in all things and that he wishes obedience from his creatures. In Christ, each person becomes a co-redeemer by accomplishing the assigned mission. This collaborative effort can be seen most strikingly in the lives of the saints who were most responsive to God’s proffered mission. It is at the heart of salvation that we become who we are meant to be. Our models are Jesus and Mary. Mary’s living out her mission as

31 Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Later Years 1945-1965*, 134
mother of the Messiah in such a unique and exemplary fashion helps to encourage others
to do likewise.

This connection between mission and salvation is certainly an Ignatian idea that lies at
the foundation of the Spiritual Exercises. One of the main purposes of undergoing the
Exercises is to learn what one’s election is, or said another way, what your mission in life
is. During the Exercises the exercitant asks for the grace to say yes to God’s will.

Another major contribution of von Balthasar to the dialogue’s relationship of mission and
person is obedience. “Obedience to God comes before obedience to men” (Acts 5:29). It
is an obedience that results from having no preferences and being completely open to
God’s will (another Ignatian concept). Being indifferent to possible alternatives, standing
ready to accept what is given, is what obedience calls for. The indifferent person stands
waiting, with scale balanced, for God to drop his choice as a weight upon that scale. It
calls for prompt obedience. This prompt obedience will be noted in Mary in the
Annunciation dialogue.

It is important to notice through the dialogic event, how a person receives the mission
which constitutes theological personhood. God as director assigns the roles as he wills.
Some individuals receive “bigger parts” or “more important calls.” Von Balthasar
learned of this call first hand while visiting the Black Forest. This incident no doubt,
assisted him in understanding and formulating the importance of mission. It is ironic that
Buber, who stated that he felt he had received a felt call regarding the promulgation of the dialogic principle, could never generalize from his own call.

A final Balthasarian addition to this idea of mission is the working of God’s Spirit who allows the follower of Jesus to narrow the gulf between person and mission in their lives. Neither the Holy Spirit, naturally, nor prayer are highlighted in Buber’s presentation of the dialogue. His God is too transcendent to engage in dialogue through personal prayer. It is the gradual unfolding of God’s will as manifested in a person’s mission (von Balthasar) that is sought in prayer.

Both men would agree that there is a task to be performed, we are given the freedom and gifts to do it, and that we are “created for good works.” Von Balthasar’s viewpoint of holiness and the spiritual journey speaks to this growth of the person in personhood. It suggests not just a one time occurrence being a person. It is becoming a person. Jesus and his followers had to go step by step in “faith” in the unfolding and discovery of mission. Only in Jesus was mission and person one. His mission was his identity. For all others it is a movement towards this identity between mission and person. If person and mission are synonymous for von Balthasar then it follows that as the mission unfolds and is embraced that there is some change or growth in the person or, if you prefer, in personhood. This will be an important issue in the exposition of person that will be dealt with in the Annunciation.

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IV. Freedom

The hallmark of Buberian freedom is lack of compulsion. Divine destiny is not a plan carved in stone. He speaks eloquently of the person who has no purposes or self-will but becomes aware of the destiny in the presentness of the encounter. “The future is not fixed, for God wants man to come to Him with full freedom, to return to Him even out of a plight of extreme hopelessness and then to be really with Him.” Buber, steeped in Judaism, views man’s choice as creating his destiny, the completion of creation and the hastening of redemption, which is entirely wrought by man. He retained this stance on freedom all of his life. At seventy-six in answer to Barth, he pointed out that among the Hasidim “the freedom of the heart is...the innermost presupposition, the ground of grounds.”

Von Balthasar moves beyond Jewish beliefs of creation, revelation and redemption into the heart of Catholic theology, by stating that a human person’s freedom is only fully illuminated when it is bound up with divine freedom. There is mystery for both men regarding the origin of freedom. Buber takes freedom for granted, and does not believe that God promotes man’s freedom. It is a further mystery how a person receives direction through the dialogue, and how freedom follows in order to carry out duties and responsibilities. This freedom is ineffable. Unlike Buber who accepts freedom as a given, von Balthasar writes at great length about finite and infinite freedom.

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33 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work: The Later Years, 1945-1965, 198
34 Ibid., 101

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comes from God, from the outside. Our freedom is based on the realms of freedom in God. Being presented with a call that requires a yes or no calls forth the exercise of freedom, since the individual knows with some degree of certainty what is being asked. Sometimes it is a decision that must be made quickly with little certitude regarding the person's ability to perform the task and with little knowledge of the future outcome. Von Balthasar's presentation suggests that after the initial call has been made that future encounters with God or with other "Thou's" help to clarify decisions that were made freely and obediently, but that are still covered in darkness and uncertainty. This is related to growth in personhood. It raises the question, "At the moment of choosing the mission does God grant grace of full knowing and understanding?" Or is there a gradual unfolding of mission and repetitive acts of freely choosing aspects of the mission.

This question of freedom is related to how God chooses to manifest himself. If he would allow his Taboric light to shine upon the lowly creature, freedom would be compromised. Such an opening of his glory would diminish any genuine choice. These ideas of freedom and uncertainty along with mediation and freedom will be seen in chapters three and four. Buber can only advance so far in his religious thinking which always stops short of Jesus Christ who is the key and answer to the question of 1) relationship to God, 2) I-Thou (dialogue), 3) our uniqueness stemming from individual mission, and 4) freedom as a gift from God himself. It is von Balthasar's singular contribution to theology to place the dialogic principle within the framework of Theo-drama which, in
turn, adequately and coherently unites all the elements of the dialogical principle moving it in the direction of eschatological closure.

Lastly, we deal with a few significant elements developed by Buber and von Balthasar individually, that share some common features. Buber set forth several ideas that parsimoniously explained philosophical and theological aspects of man’s thinking and relating. Distance is a state of being that provides for man’s becoming in a relationship. It also is related to God’s relationship with Israel. Israel knows the covenant not as just an event in the history of the world but as one that took place in “the reality of the distance between God and Israel...”35 This concept is a useful one that speaks to the need for distance in every relation to insure independence between I and Thou, but addresses the required lack of distance within each subject. There must be no distance between being and itself. Along with this distance, Buber coined the term, the between. In this dimension of the between that the I-Thou enter, each member of the relation is affected, given knowledge and direction for life. The spirit dwells only within this between. This is an interesting Buberian concept that highlights the relationship and not the individual; it also accents the task to be performed instead of the spirit dwelling in the person. Von Balthasar speaks of the infinite space between the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit into which “space” the world is inserted. In The Glory of the Lord, he speaks of Jesus’ mission of bringing his disciples and all mankind into the interior space of the

35 Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, The Middle Years 1923-1945, 180
Trinity. However they do not share similar thinking about this space but possibly there is some approximation regarding what “happens” in the between.

Von Balthasar’s reflection on infinite distance and infinite nearness in the Trinity is partially seen in Buber’s thinking which lacks a Trinitarian foundation. The infinite distance for von Balthasar is bridged by love. The Trinitarian kenosis that is always emptying itself for the other and retaining nothing for itself reminds one of Buber’s idea of having no purposes when entering the dialogue. Returning to the between, there is a possible relationship in Buber’s between, and von Balthasar’s concept of mission. Emanating from each partner, the between simply exists (in distinction to happening). What happens in the between for Buber is an event, called spirit, in which the person is confirmed and lead into a life direction to perform the task. This could be a partial description of how mission is communicated in von Balthasar’s understanding of the dialogue. The similarities hold interesting possibilities that will be alluded to in chapter four.

The concept of Covenant shows another marked difference between Buber and von Balthasar. The covenant between God and creatures holds a prominent place in the Old Testament. It is surprising that Buber did not write more often about covenant and its consequent relationship with God. In 1946 he wrote Moses The Revelation and The

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36 Volume I, 618
37 In the three volume trilogy of Maurice Friedman that covers all Buber’s writings over his entire lifetime, covenant is not mentioned in any index.
Covenant. His observations are typical for Old Testament covenants -- God extends relationship to a people; he cares for them; he is their leader, advance guard and "sender of a great message." In this book unlike most of his writing and unlike his verbal communication, Buber speaks at length about God. Through covenant, God makes his demand that this people be entirely "His." "And He is and does all this as a manifesting, addressing and revealing God. He is invisible and 'lets Himself be seen,' whatever may be the natural phenomena or historical process in which He may desire to let Himself be seen on any given occasion." As usual Buber has God speaking through others and it is these persons who "mature the work divine."

True to his dialogic understanding of covenant, he states that the tribes only became Israel when they became partners through the dialogue of the Covenant with God. This relation offered a new fellowship to these partners of the Covenant. God manifests Himself to Moses yet remains invisible. He accomplishes this by letting Himself be seen in the fiery flame, "not as a form to be separated from it, but in it and through it, ...'the messenger of YHVH,' that is, YHVH as the Power that intervenes in earthly affairs, given to be seen by Moses.' The additional comment Buber makes reflects the other major feature that he sees in both the Covenant with God and the dialogic principle --

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
presence. The recalling of the Covenant causes continuous consciousness of this Divine Presence.\(^{42}\)

Von Balthasar’s Volume VI of the *Glory of the Lord* is entitled *Theology: The Old Covenant*, and the seventh volume is *Theology: The New Covenant*. The New Covenant joins God and the world in a new and eternal covenant. This covenant being at the same time a dialogic relationship, will never come to a close. Von Balthasar points out that God’s "free love" can never be clearly seen in the Old Testament. This love is obscured by Israel’s breaking of the covenant. This obscurity is dispelled by God only when he reveals his inmost heart, his Trinitarian love, in Jesus Christ. God fulfills the Old when Jesus takes up the world into the eternally flowing dialogue of love.\(^{43}\) Jesus is the revelation of God’s absolute freedom. These essential features of the New Covenant -- love and freedom -- are also key elements of the dialogue.

Von Balthasar understands that the New Covenant is not just an addition to the Old Covenant but a new creation. There is a demarcation therefore between the two testaments and covenants. This must be kept in mind in evaluating Buber and von Balthasar’s views of both covenant and dialogue. The dialogic relationship with Christ in the New Covenant empowers the human partner to experience genuine transcendence thereby winning access to his own being. This is accomplished by God’s own

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 118  
\(^{43}\) *Glory of the Lord*, Volume VII, 17
transcendent love. Christ’s role is one that Buber would find difficult to understand as an Old Testament person. All references that are made in this chapter and those to follow, regarding persons of the Trinity or Trinitarian life, would be out of Buber’s ambit of belief. Although it sound like a harsh criticism of Jews, the following statement made by von Balthasar can shed light upon some of Buber’s ideas as he speaks of creation, revelation, redemption, grace and repentance.

“And everything that the Jew might have undertaken in order to force something like a convergence, in his longing for fulfillment, showed itself subsequently to be the opposite of convergence: he was an obstacle in the path of God’s plans, merely taking up the place that God wanted empty, in order to fulfill himself.”

At first glance there seemed to be a wide disparity of belief on a number of dialogical topics, however this comparison has revealed shared beliefs. As Buber struggled to know the truth of who man is and how he becomes a person, he has provided concepts that would, upon reflection, be similar to the fresh Balthasarian presentation of the dialogical event. Through the Spirit, God shines his light upon all minds in search of him. The shared beliefs and opinions of these two promoters of the dialogical principle will hopefully supply adequate theological reflection for a re-reading of the Annunciation. Where Buber can go no farther, von Balthasar will take up the challenge of applying the dialogue and concept of person to the Annunciation scene. He will, of course, move beyond the Old Testament and Hasidic tales of Buber, and even beyond his other insightful constructs to place the dialogue in the framework of Theo-drama as founded on Christ as Word. Like the Old Testament, Buber can only cast so much light on some of

44 Ibid., 29
45 Ibid., 37
these topics. He can only point the way to the solution that stretches beyond him. Von Balthasar will build upon Buber's original ideas set forth in *I and Thou* offering to the pursuer of truth an entire system of viewing the divine intervention in the affairs of men. These two chapters situate the dialogical principle biblically and philosophically (chapter one) along with the detailed presentation of Buber and von Balthasar's work on the essential features of the dialogical principle in this chapter and are a prelude to chapter three which presents an examination of exegetical work that deals with the dialogal elements found in the Annunciation scene.
CHAPTER 3

GOD-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP IN THE ANNUNCIATION

Chapter one situated the dialogue and developed the theme of the relationship between
dialogue and the God-human relationship. Covenant is an expression of that dialogic
encounter and several dialogal covenants were mentioned. The Annunciation scene of
Luke provides the perfect example of the dialogal, covenantal, God-human relationship
because it quintessentially demonstrates all the elements of the dialogic principle, their
operation, and results. In this present chapter, Mary and the Annunciation dialogue will
be examined to further the hypothesis that dialogue is the vehicle for becoming a
theological person. This chapter then will address the Annunciation to verify the stated
hypothesis that the dialogue between God (through Gabriel) and Mary contains the
essential dialogical elements that lead to personhood. The representative scholarly
exegetical works have been selected because they examine those elements of the
Annunciation that have a direct relationship to the already selected dialogical elements
discussed in chapter one, i.e., relationship with God, I-Thou relation, uniqueness,
mission, and freedom. It is expected that their research will support the study’s
hypotheses regarding dialogue elucidating theological personhood and that a person,
specifically Mary, achieves its fulfillment through the dialogical principle.

Although the exegetes, that are cited along with well known commentators, allude to the
separate elements of the dialogic principle, there is no study that examines the
Annunciation from a dialogical viewpoint, according to Buber and von Balthasar’s criteria, i.e., all the necessary elements that lead to establishing the uniqueness of theological personhood. The authors may mention at least one of the elements in an article but they are always in reference to a different context, e.g., an etymological study, marvelous birth or vocation-call narrative. This study will attempt to sift the dialogical elements from these noteworthy studies and join them to advance a coherent study of theological personhood. Ultimately both in this present chapter and chapter four, Mary will be clearly seen as the fulfillment of personhood and as model and prototype for all persons.

The New Covenant was made between God and the woman, Mary.¹ The work of de la Potterie in his book, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, reflects on the “profound structure of the mystery of Mary” calling it the “very structure of the Covenant” seen from the side of humanity, whom Mary represents.² Covenant is the concretization of the dialogue. It is a form of dialogic encounter. Since Mary entered most deeply into a covenant with God through the dialogic encounter at the Annunciation, there can be noted how Mary’s identity as partner with God both in covenant relationship and dialogue are closely related. The faith and obedience essential to God’s covenant are also conditions of the dialogue.³ There is a definite inner relationship between who Mary is and what the Covenant represents. De la Potterie concludes, “Mary thus becomes the image, the

¹ Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, xi.
² Ibid., xii.
figure, the total people of God in its relations with God." It will be de la Potterie's hypothesis that Mary in the light of the Covenant is the personification of the "People of God," the "Daughter of Zion," the "Figure of the Synagogue," and the "Image of the Church." His stature as a Jesuit priest who taught for thirty years at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome lends credibility to these proposed figures and images of Mary. This study, like his, will attempt to rely on the same methods used by well known exegetes who faithfully follow the Decree on Divine Revelation. Since Scripture is hailed as the "soul of theology," it is of paramount importance that this study utilize the most well informed exegetical information provided by those exegetes who profess, as de la Potterie does, adherence to the Decree on Divine Revelation: solid philological analysis, immediate searching for the "meaning" of the texts in light of "all Scripture" and of the "living Tradition of the whole Church and of the analogy of Faith."

After years of study, de la Potterie and others have, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, proposed some august Marian titles that exist in the mystery of the Church. Because Mary is also a mystery whose depths we have not, nor may never, fully plumb, these models, figures, and analogies regarding her remain part of her, but as not fully grasped mystery. Only the Holy Spirit working in the Church can help us plumb these depths. It is advantageous to recall Gregory the Great's words on the subject of Scripture:

4 Ibid.
5 Decree on Divine Revelation, No. 24.
6 Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, xvii.
"By one and the same language, through the accounts of its texts, it reveals a mystery and is sure in speaking of past events in such a way as to know it can proclaim future events, and without modifying the order of its discourse, in the same texts, knows how to both describe the events which have already taken place and to announce those that are yet to come."\(^8\)

This study reflects upon Holy Scripture which is the mystery of the Covenant between God and his people.\(^9\) In light of what has been mentioned in quoting de la Potterie’s approach to theology and by following St. Gregory the Great’s principle of Scripture as it announces events that are yet to come, it is quite possible to return to the Annunciation as a setting in which theological anthropology might find a partial answer to who man is and how he becomes a person. It certainly is not surprising that the Holy Spirit would reveal so much through the Annunciation, since it contains the mystery of all Scripture: the mystery of God’s Covenant with his people. For that very reason the relationship between Covenant and dialogue assumes even greater importance by their common association.

"The fundamental idea of the entire Bible is that God wishes to draw up a covenant with mankind."\(^10\) This covenantal pact is seen in God’s relationship with Abraham, Noah and Moses. The newly emancipated slaves encountered God while roaming in the desert. God entered into a special relationship with them. They accepted God’s offer to become his people and a Covenant was “cut.” God established the Covenant with this small tribe in complete freedom. God gave the Israelites a mission to keep the Covenant. The

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\(^8\) Ignace de Ia Potterie, S.J., *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, xvii.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid., xxiv.
greatest blessing from God is to be in communion with him, which is what Covenant accomplishes. God initiates the Covenant, but the “People of Israel” must fulfill their part. God makes them “his very own,” but they must keep the Covenant in faithfulness (Exodus 19:3-8, 24:3-11). By acclamation the People say yes to the relationship with God. God out of love invites them to freely accept; He does not coerce them. These two essential elements of Covenant -- binding himself to them and a promised presence -- will remain in the mind of every Jew. The Jew or Israelite remembers that his own people were elected by God himself. It is an election to responsibility, to task. The New Covenant holds the same invitation to fidelity and to God’s presence. Every follower of Christ knows a personal election, a call to follow God’s will. Therefore every follower of God realizes that God makes a Covenant with each person. Each is elected. Each carries a responsibility. All followers are in a bond of communion freely embraced. As the life of Israel was forever changed by God’s binding himself to them in Covenant, so every Christian believer’s life is radically changed and given new direction and meaning by God’s Covenant. The Jews’ answer to God was a yes spoken through adherence to the Law. The believer’s yes today is the yes spoken through love and obeying the “voice of the Lord.” The New is the fulfillment of the Old, since the election is now made through Christ who is the model of saying yes to mission. It is in Christ that his followers live and fulfill their mission. Through the freedom won by Christ the partner in the covenant can freely say yes, embracing the task in joy.

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11 Cf. Aristide Serra, E C’era la Madre di Gesù, Chapter 3.
The structure of the Covenant, both Old and New, is the dialogue. Through the dialogal relationship, Covenant encompasses: I-Thou relation, election or call, the yes to mission, and responsibility to do or accomplish something for God in gratitude. Covenant-making is always dialogal; the best example of the dialogal, covenantal relationship is found in the New Testament in Luke’s account of the Annunciation. Our interpersonal God reaches out from the very beginning and initiates a dialogue with his creatures thereby forming Covenant. It is through the dialogue that Covenant occurs, and the individual who says yes to mission, in the dialogue with God, enters into Covenant thereby becoming a theological person, a person of value, rights and duties in salvation history.

In his *The Birth of the Messiah, A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, Raymond Brown has a complete and up-to-date (1993) bibliography listing the extensive exegetical work done by Scripture scholars on this most famous Luke 1:26-38 passage. For the purposes of this study another exegesis or quasi-exegesis is not needed. Instead the author has chosen to place to the side Biblical arguments and discussions on a great many points usually expounded upon in this passage, and has decided to cite verses that directly bear on the topics: dialogue, uniqueness, vocation (call), mission, free consent and relationship. The exegetical disputes are cited only if they relate to the development of the dialogal elements. The scholarly citations of the exegetes are meant to quickly clarify the points being made concerning the theological concept of the uniqueness of the individual who becomes a person by freely assenting to God’s call or mission.
DIALOGUE BETWEEN GABRIEL AND MARY

Luke 1:26-38

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you.' 29 She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, 30 but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor. 31 Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; 33 he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.' 34 Mary, said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I do not know man?' (since I am a virgin) 35 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,' the angel answered, 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the one to be born holy will be called Son of God. 36 Know this: your kinswoman Elizabeth has also, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, 37 for nothing is impossible to God.' 38 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her." 12

Usually the passage of Luke 1:26-38 is entitled “The Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus.” 13 There certainly are many features found therein that would indicate a birth or marvelous birth narrative. 14 In 1980, Klemens Stock wrote a ground-breaking article that pointed to the Annunciation as a call narrative, "Die Berufung Marias (Lk 1,26-38)." Luke’s literary genre of historical narration relates a story in which a dialogue occurs between Gabriel and Mary. 15 These literary genres of birth narrative and call narrative

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12 Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, 3. De la Potterie’s translation.
15 Benedetto Prete, O.P., “Il significato di Luca 1. 34 nella struttura del racconto dell’ annunziazione,” 249
placed in a dialogue reveal an encounter between God and his creature. Luke presents a dialogical structure determined by the literary genre of annunciation. René Laurentin views the Annunciation as a call narrative and less a story of a birth. He emphatically advances his argument that the Annunciation holds within itself a model or type of call narrative. In the following discussion of *kecharitoméne*, the point will be reinforced that the marvelous birth is Mary’s vocation; it is her call narrative.

The Annunciation account is composed of three sections. Following a brief introduction in verses 26-27, in which the individuals are introduced, the “dialogue” between Mary and Gabriel ensues. There are three exchanges or articulations, as de la Potterie names them. The exchanges are brief, the message is delivered, “and the angel departed from her.” Like the other episodes of his infancy narrative, Luke’s Annunciation is a “clearly-defined and a well-rounded whole.”

Luke presents the Annunciation to Mary as a narration utilizing a dialogue form. Therefore it is important to view the verses in light of a dialogue by presenting each verse

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19 Ibid., 119.


commenting on the specific elements of the dialogue. We examine the literary form by presenting the transliterated Greek text. Exegetical comments will assist in this examination of the Annunciation.

26) En de το μενι το ήκτο άπεσταλε ο άγγελος Γαβριήλ απο του θεου εις πολιν της Γαλιλαίας η α νωμα Ναζαρεθ 27) προς παρθενον εμνεστεμενην ανδρι η α ονωμα Ιωσηφ εξ οικου Δαυιδ και ο ονωμα Ιωσηφ εις θεον την ανωτατου θεου θρονον Ισακου εις τοις αιονας και της βασιλειας ουκ εσται τελος. 32) houtos estai megas kai huioi hupsistou klēthēsetai kai òsei autō kuriōs ho theos tòn thronon David tou patros autou, 33) kai basileusei epi ton oikon Jakōb eis tous aīonas kai tēs basileias autou ouk estai telos. 34) eipen de Mariam pros ton aggelon, Pōs estai touto epei andra ou ginōskoi? 35) kai apokritheis ho aggelos eipen autē, Pneuma hagion epeleusetai epi se kai dunamis hupsistou episkiasei soi dio kai to gennomenon hagion klēthēsetai huioi theou. 36) kai idou Elisabet hē suggenis sou kai autē suneileaphen huion en gērei autēs kai houtos mēn hektos estin autē tē kaloumenē steira; 37) hoti ouk adunatēsei para tou theou pan rēma. 38) eipen de Mariam, Idou hē doule kuriou; genoito moi kata to rēma sou. kai apelthen ap autēs ho aggelos.

Although we know that the reported conversation need not have occurred exactly as recorded, we keep in mind that we pursue Luke’s intention in presenting the content while still appreciating the literary form by which he chose to communicate the all important content. 24

Verse 26

En de το μενι το ήκτο άπεσταλε ο άγγελος Γαβριήλ απο του θεου εις πολιν της Γαλιλαίας η α νωμα Ναζαρεθ

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth."  

This verse sets the stage upon which will "step" the two partners of the dialogue, Mary from the unknown village of Nazareth and Gabriel the messenger sent from God. The verse informs the reader that God has taken the initiative. Mary responds in dialogue with Gabriel, who represents God, and through whom God speaks. Mary speaks with God about the "Son of the Most High" who becomes her son through an "admirable exchange."  

This verse marks the beginning of the rhetorical dialogue which will end with the departure of Gabriel. The angelic message, unlike a dream, demands little interpretation. Regardless of which literary genre is chosen (a dream, angelic message, or prophecy), God always takes the first initiative. The angelic messenger allows for a dialogue between God and his creature. Although it is common for difficulties to arise during the dialogic exchange there is usually a resolution and the message is clear.

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25 De la Potterie's translation as found in Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, 3.
28 Frequently God reveals himself in an exterior form of an apparition; at times the angel "does not seem, or hardly seems to be distinct from Yahweh himself. Cf. Gn. 16:17, 16:13, Ex. 3:2 and 3:4." Cf. Ignace de la Potterie, S.J, Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, 8.
It is clear then that the Annunciation to Mary carries a message or is a message itself.\textsuperscript{33} Audet thinks that the visual element of the scene is purposely reduced by Luke in order to heighten the message being transmitted by Gabriel. It will be through this dialogue that God calls Mary and gives her a mission or task.\textsuperscript{34}

Verse 27

\begin{quote}
pros parthenon emnesteumenēn andri ho onoma Ḥosēp ex oikou Dauid kai to onoma tēs parthenou Mariam.
\end{quote}

"To a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary."

This verse identifies the other person, the virgin Mary, who will be in dialogue with Gabriel. Mary is already betrothed (yet still a virgin) to Joseph of the “house of David.” In the forward to his book, \textit{Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant}, Ignace de la Potterie calls for biblical resources that portray Mary “in her earthly journey.”\textsuperscript{35} The opening of the Annunciation certainly invites the reader to imagine Mary as a very normal human being of her era, living a simple life, engaged to a man named Joseph. It reflects Buber’s “concrete everyday” as God breaks into someone’s life, initiating an I-Thou experience. This virgin named Mary is unquestionably the principal character of Luke’s infancy narrative.

\textsuperscript{33} John-Paul Audet, O.P., \textit{“L’annonce à Marie,”} 355.
\textsuperscript{34} Cf. John-Paul Audet, O.P., \textit{“L’annonce à Marie.”}
\textsuperscript{35} Cf. xvii.
Verse 28

Kai eiselthôn pros autên eipen, Chaire, kecharitomêne, ho kurios meta sou.

"He went in and said to her, ‘Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you.’"

It is God who will “break into” Mary’s life by his sending of a messenger. Gabriel enters and begins the dialogue with chaire - rejoice greatly. Although the Vulgate translation of St. Jerome translated the Greek chaire into Latin “Ave” or “Hail,” there has been a lengthy discussion which had been initiated by Lyonnet’s enlightening article of 1939, Chaire, Kecharitoméne. A divine messenger conveys the divine words which are an invitation to joy and to rejoice. This is an extraordinary and unusual salutation by an angelic being encouraging Mary to “rejoice greatly.” So instead of a greeting of “hello” or “peace,” it appears that Luke had this invitation to joy in mind. Exegetes find added meaning to this choice of the word chaire noting that in the Septuagint it appears in the context of Zion being invited to messianic joy that will occur in the future (Jl 2:21-23; Zp 3:14; Zc 9:9; cf. Lm 4:21). Note especially in Zephaniah 3:14-15:

“Shout for joy [Chaire], daughter of Zion!
Isreal, shout aloud!
Rejoice! exult with all your heart,
daughter of Jerusalem!
Yahweh has repealed your sentence;
he has driven your enemies away.
Yahweh, the King of Israel, is in your midst;

37 This article is recognized by many as a true breakthrough in its day.
38 S. Lyonnet, S.J., “Chaire, Kecharitoméne,” 133.
39 Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, 14.
you have no more evil to fear."  
De la Potterie refers to the rich tradition of the Greek Fathers of the Church and to the Byzantine Liturgy which understands the words of the angel as an invitation to joy. It is not within the proposed scope of this study to examine and weigh exegetical arguments over meaning or philology. This well documented preference of the meaning of chaîré (rejoice) lends itself to the hypotheses of this study regarding Mary, her role and mission and her relationship with God through the dialogue of the Annunciation.

De la Potterie is not alone in his estimation that chaîré is related to the Daughter of Zion passages of Scripture. This proclamation of messianic joy (rejoice) is addressed to Mary as the eschatological Daughter of Zion as Mary represents the faithful of Israel. Lyonnet finds chaîré announcing the end of the Old Testament with Mary representing the remnant of the Israelite faithful. As the Old Testament era closes, Mary is asked to rejoice at the opening of the New Testament era as the messianic period begins. Chaîré introduces a messianic prophecy related to peace, joy and the presence of the Lord in the

40 Only in Zephaniah 3:14, Joel 2:21 and Zechariah 9:9 does the present imperative of chaîré appear. It refers to the rejoicing that will accompany the deliverance of Israel.
41 He cites Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom.
42 “Greetings are notoriously difficult to translate accurately in other languages and chaîré is more difficult than most.” Cf. Lyonnet, Châire, 137; Lyonnet, “Le récit de l’Annonciation et la Maternité de la Sainte Vierge,” 33-46; Laurentin, Luc I-II, 64 ff., 148 ff.; Serra, Contributi, 169-173; “L’Anunziazione a Marie Lc 1, 26-38 Un Formulario di Alleanza?,” 164-171.
43 Cf. Bertrand Buby, S.M., Mary of Galilee, Volume I, 73.
46 It must be stated that there are opposing views regarding the translation and application of these concepts - biblical themes. Fitzmyer, Brown, and Marshall do not view Mary as identified with the Daughter of Zion theme.
midst of the Daughter of Zion. Mary will be seen as the bridge between the Old Testament and New Testament, between the Old Covenant and New Covenant.

De la Potterie finds this call to joy not only present in the Annunciation *chaire* but joy is echoed throughout the Luke Infancy Narrative and can be seen in Mary’s “fiat.”\(^{47}\) We have established that *chaire* means *rejoice*. The Lord has sent an angel to announce to the world a new era and a new covenant but the angelic salutation is less an expression of salvation addressed to Mary than the joy placed in her heart as a mother chosen by God for the salvation of men.\(^{48}\) *Chaire* may have been selected by Luke because of its alliterative sense with the following word spoken by Gabriel *kecharitoméne* which Lyonnet finds translated at times by Eastern exegetes as “full of joy.”\(^{49}\)

This study finds importance to *chaire* being translated *rejoice greatly* as it relates to the dense meaning and interpretation of *kecharitoméne*. It also relates to the theme of joy occurring within the dialogue and the relationship to Mary as an Old Testament figure representing not only the Daughter of Zion but the people of God in the context of the Old and New Covenant. Mary as the figure in whom the Old and New Covenant are fully realized (through her Son) is called to rejoice as the partner not only in this dialogue but in the New Covenant.\(^{50}\) She represented all of Israel, the people of God in the Old

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\(^{47}\) *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 16.  
\(^{48}\) Eduoard Delebecque, “*Sur la salutation de Gabriel à Marie*,” 353.  
\(^{49}\) Cf. “*Chaire, Kecharitoméne*,” 137. O’Fearghail makes reference to this alliteration.  
\(^{50}\) Lyonnet remarks that this call to joy is found in every messianic announcement in Old and New Testament.
Testament. Now she represents all the people of God as the partner in the New Covenant as the “spouse” of God.\(^5^1\) This topic of Mary’s role in the New Covenant will be discussed in chapter four.

Kecharitoméne is the second part of Gabriel’s salutation meaning “Highly favored.” As chairé was addressed to Mary for a variety of reasons, already mentioned, due to her unique role and mission, the name of kecharitoméne holds even greater significance emphasizing Mary’s uniqueness, her relation to God and her mission. The study explores the nuances of this word that relate to these just mentioned dialogical elements.

Kecharitoméne is the perfect passive participle form of the verb charitoo, confer grace. The verbs in “oo” are causative and indicate an action which effects something in the object.\(^5^2\) Like all the verbs in its class, charitoo signifies to be endowed by its root (grace) and in the passive to be the beneficiary. The perfect tense then adds the quality of permanence when speaking of the obtained effect. Mary is endowed with grace as a recipient of God’s goodness and gratuity which has always been and will always be a part of who she is as a person. Charitoo like the other instances of this verb form emphasizes the exhaustiveness of the action or the full intensity of an action, e.g., karoo, plunge into deep sleep; haimatoo, turn into blood; thaumatoo, fill with wonder.\(^5^3\) Hence Mary has been fully and thoroughly favored or graced by God. As we read in Ephesians 1:6, God

\(^5^1\) "La Femme et le Mystère de l’Alliance," 11.
\(^5^2\) Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, 17.
is shown to have completely exhausted His favor and grace upon all of mankind through His beloved Son’s redemption. So we see an approximation of this “complete exhaustiveness” his pouring out his grace upon Mary. Mary is the embodiment of the full grammatical- etymological significance of kecharitoméne. The name “...denotes one who has been and still is the object of divine benevolence, one who has been favored and continues to be favored by God, one who has been granted supernatural grace and remains in that state.” This statement reflects the meaning of a perfect passive participle; what has been received in the past continues into the present. For example, leukoo means to whiten; douloo means to enslave; and eleutheroo to render free. Charitoo signifies an endowed change brought about by grace with grace, endued with divine grace. The form of this causative verb then would signify that the action of the grace of God has already brought about a change. Mary has been transformed by the grace of God. God’s grace has rendered her holy, perfectly holy.

Mention must be made that this transformation by grace has occurred long before the conversation with Gabriel recorded by Luke. Kecharitoméne as a perfect participle indicates this past event. R. Brown and J. Fitzmyer both believe that this word refers to the divine maternity which is being announced to her. This study agrees with the

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54 Cf. Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant.
57 Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, 18.
58 Ibid., 17.
opinion of de la Potterie and others that *kecharitoméne* refers to the action of grace that has already taken place.\(^{60}\) Fr. Bertrand Buby states, "Chronologically, literally, and theologically this text can be seen as referring then to the holiness of Mary prior to the birth of Jesus.\(^{61}\) It is a major contention of this paper that during the dialogue she will receive her mission and formally begin it by saying yes to the divine maternity. There will be a discussion below how *kecharitoméne* signifies a preparation for both motherhood and virginity.

*Kecharitoméne* reflects the grace given at Mary’s conception and is referenced in the bull of 1854, *Ineffabilis Deus*. This grace allowed her to carry out her role up to the moment of the conception of Jesus in her womb. This new name was chosen by God to fit Mary’s role in his divine plan.\(^{62}\) This grace prepared her for this encounter and for her virginal maternity. J. P. Audet goes so far as to say that the whole message is already there in this one word.\(^{63}\) The “whole message” is situated in a heaven-earth dialogue in which Gabriel tells Mary of God’s choosing her to be the mother of the Messiah. Her name of grace, never given to anyone before in all of Scripture, sets her aside for a singular role. Her new name heightens her uniqueness as person and the uniqueness of her role. Uniqueness of each person as created by God (Buber) and uniqueness that comes from a specific call (von Balthasar) is reflected in her new name.

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\(^{60}\) Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 18.


\(^{62}\) J. P. Audet, 351, and M. Cambe, 204, both express the thought that *kecharitoméne* is almost a new name or the name of a vocation similar to Simon being changed to Peter.

\(^{63}\) “L’annonce à Marie,” 359.
The name fits the addressee for the role in God’s plan. This approach to understanding the relation between an angelic salute and subsequent mission can be seen in Joseph being called, “son of David” in Matthew’s annunciation (Matt. 1:20) because his role as a Davidid will be to name Jesus, thereby giving him Davidic descent. Although differing from de la Potterie’s interpretation of *kecharitoméne*, both R. Brown and J. Fitzmyer understand this favored condition in light of the “unique role” that Mary is to perform in conceiving God’s messiah. 64

*Kecharitoméne* carries the “whole message” which means that Luke’s Annunciation combines two distinct and highly organized Old Testament forms. 65 It integrates the birth oracle into a call narrative in which a commissioning occurs. 66 *Kecharitoméne* is highly significant for this study because it alludes to Mary’s mission. In demonstrating the likely possibility that Luke utilized Old Testament annunciation narratives to compose the Annunciation to Mary in the New Testament narrative, we have the clearest example that Mary receives a new name that reflects her mission. In a sense “highly favored one” is a new name (*nom nouveau*) given to Mary and this name represents God’s design regarding his people. 67 The same will be seen in Gideon as “Valiant Hero.” Such a name change reveals the future event in the manner of a prophetic name, as a type of sign,

65 It has already been mentioned that one group of exegetes favors the birth oracle while the other favors the call narrative.
67 Jean-Paul Audet, “*L’annonce à Marie,*” 358.
showing God’s benevolence toward Israel. Most exegetes agree that the call narrative of Gideon in Judges 6 provides the most perfect example of the Old Testament call narratives as regards the form. Also most agree that Gideon’s call is most clearly imitated in Mary’s call. Fearghus O’Fearghail provides the following schematic arrangement of the two texts which amply demonstrates the striking similarity between the two call narratives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judges 6, 11-24</th>
<th>Luke 1, 26-38</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Angel of the Lord comes (11a)</td>
<td>a&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Angel sent by God (26b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Place of encounter (11b)</td>
<td>b&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Place of encounter (26c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Recipient’s name (11c)</td>
<td>c&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Name (27b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d Present situation (11cd)</td>
<td>d&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Recipients present situation (27a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e Encounter (12a)</td>
<td>e&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Encounter (28a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f Greeting (12b)</td>
<td>f&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Greeting (28b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g Fitness for his mission (12b)</td>
<td>g&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Fitness for her mission (28b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h Reaction - ironic play on angel’s words of greeting (13)</td>
<td>h&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Reaction - puzzlement at meaning of greeting (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i Commission (14)</td>
<td>i&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Commission (= birth oracle) (31-33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j Difficulty because of Gideon’s present situation - weakness of his ‘army’ - least in father’s house (15)</td>
<td>j&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Difficulty because of Mary’s present situation - a virgin, betrothed but not yet living with her husband (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k Reassurance (16)</td>
<td>k&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Reassurance (35-37)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both passages are conducted through a dialogue. An angel encounters Gideon, greets him and addresses him with a name “mighty man of valor,” that suggests the mission he is to receive. Mary is greeted with a name signifying her mission. Mary and Gideon are both described as fit for the mission which God has selected for them. She is fit since she is “full of grace” through God’s action and is now ready for the mission to be given her. The angel tells both that the Lord is with them. Gideon receives a commission which is typical of call narratives. Mary receives the announcement of the birth as her commission. Both have an objection and both are reassured. There follows a sign to confirm the call. (In Mary’s case, the sign was not requested.) Mary stands with the great Old Testament figures who were called by God to play a role in salvation history (Moses, Gideon, and Jeremiah). *Kecharitoméne* underlines Mary’s unique, privileged and decisive role in that salvation history.\(^70\) No other human being has been called to such a role as the *kecharitoméne*, the ‘favored one.’

“The Lord is with you” is the third part of Gabriel’s greeting. There is an inversion here in comparison to the angel’s greeting to Gideon. The covenant salutation (“the Lord is


\(^{70}\) Ibid. 344.
with you”) precedes the invocation of the person addressed “mighty man of valour” but follows it in Gabriel’s greeting to Mary.71 The inversion gives prominence to the figure of Mary as does the additional greeting of chaîrê. This triple greeting is a solemn one that adds to its uniqueness and emphasizes Mary’s unique role and stature. This phrase reflects covenant overtones which anticipates the commission. In Gideon’s case his new name signifies the mission he is called to and the promise that “the Lord is with you” is a reminder that he will be empowered to accomplish the mission or commission. Mary also hears the words of encouragement, that whatever the commission, she will experience God’s presence and assistance. It is a message of hope guaranteeing the Lord’s presence. These words apply to the immediate future as well as informing Mary of God’s presence in this scene’s present dialogic encounter. No mere polite greeting but an assurance of triumph for both Gideon and Mary in whatever task the Lord assigns.72 This expression usually applies to God’s assurance not in a general way of always being present, but in a specific time and place, namely in reference to the task at hand.73 The expression “does not define a static presence, but a dynamic power,”74 as seen in the Old Testament. Relationship with God is the underlying idea of all three parts of this salutation. “The Lord is with you” can refer to 1) protection and deliverance, 2) blessing and success, typically in concrete worldly affairs, 3) assurance that there is no reason to fear, 4) exhortation to valour and in other aspects.75

72 Jean-Paul Audet, “L’annonce à Marie,” 354.
73 Klemens Stock, “La vocazione di Maria: Lc 1, 26-38,” 103.
75 Ibid.
Some Scriptural passages to exemplify the familiar use of this expression are:

Genesis 28:15 ‘And behold, I am with thee and will keep thee withersoever thou goest.’

Exodus 3:11ff. The call of Moses: ‘And Moses said unto God, who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said: Certainly I will be with thee.’

Isa. 43:1-2 ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed them....When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee.’

Jer. 1:8 (Calling of Jeremiah) ‘Be not afraid because of them, for I am with thee.’

Judges 6:12ff. ‘The angel of the Lord appeared unto him (Gideon) and said unto him, The Lord is with thee’; v. 16 ‘Surely, I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.’

This expression is not simply a greeting but is related to call. At some time in the future, albeit immediate future as with Mary, God will be present. In Mary’s case God’s presence will be a dynamic experience that is discerned by his action in Mary. In Gideon’s case it was his action in the fight against the Midianites. Presence of the other person, specifically God as the other person (Thou), is a key idea in dialogue. The successful completion of the task or mission is a confirmation of God’s presence. In the presence of another person, in the encounter, an individual accomplishes the task as the realization of one’s potential. In the encounter of the I-Thou relation, a person is lead in the direction of the goal or task. With each such meeting a person realizes more of his or her God-given talents and is called upon to utilize them. In the presence of God especially, a person is enabled to accomplish the task or reach a goal. The dialogic meeting of both Gideon and Mary with God, through his messenger, reveals how these
two individuals become, for him, theological persons by his enabling them to carry-out the mission. For Mary, his presence, announced in the dialogue, confirms her transformation by grace and fulfills the mission for which she had been prepared since conception -- the divine birth.

All three parts of the salutation are meant to prompt Mary to rejoice. Through the dialogue she is approached by God who interrupts her life to turn her in a particular direction. Her name of grace is revealed and she learns that she is highly favored by God. Finally she receives the assurance of his presence at the moment the task is to be accomplished which should bring her joy in the knowledge of a personal God who does not call us to a task or mission without equipping us for it, thereby bringing it to completion in himself. The preparation done by God in her was not for the completion of a task of her own choosing but to complete a work of God. 76 Mary stands before God lovingly surrendered before his eyes having been prepared for the task of divine maternity. 77 In the beginning of this dialogue she receives an inkling that her life has been a preparation for this great event that these opening words suggest might soon come about.

These prefatory, salutatory remarks will help unfold the hidden potentialities of the rest of the short dialogue. As the dialogue continues, as in any dialogue, more is disclosed and revealed about God’s relationship with Mary. Relationship is a common element of the

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76 Ernesto Della Corte, "Kecharitoméne 'Crux Interpretum,'" 113.
77 Ibid.
dialogic principle. It is discovered that God has possibly called Mary “highly favored one” because of the attitude that he has taken in her regard. Stock points out that she does not receive a new name, but is called by that qualifying feature that has already been placed within her because she will be entrusted with a particular task.\textsuperscript{78} This thought stresses how God has always viewed her and that her being highly privileged is always in relation to the task of bearing the divine son while she has been preserved from all sin.\textsuperscript{79} Both of these ideas of Stock and Audet reinforce the elements of dialogue, i.e., the fullness of grace, or being highly favored is not for oneself but only in relation to God. The idea of greatly privileged always leads onto the questions by whom, for whom and for what? The answers to these questions stress the relationship with God that occurs in dialogue or in the I-Thou encounter. The opening three remarks of God through Gabriel set the stage for the further encounter through which Mary becomes a theological person through obedience to God’s plan and designs.

Verses 29 and 30

\begin{quote}
he de epi tō logos dietarachthē kai dieologizeto potapos eī he aspasmos houtos.

kai eipen ho aggelos autē, Mē phobou, Mariam, heures gar charin para tō theō.
\end{quote}

“She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, ‘Mary do not be afraid; you have won God’s favor.’”

\textsuperscript{78} Cf. “La vocazione di Maria: Le 1, 26-38.”
\textsuperscript{79} Ernesto Della Corte, “Kecharitoméne ’Crux Interpretum,’” 130. Cf. Jean-Paul Audet, “L’annonce à Marie,” for his defending the translation of kecharitoméne as Privilégiée which he hails as a new name, a prophetic name.
Mary is troubled by the words of Gabriel since they carry so much meaning (to the ears of an Old Testament figure) and so much mystery (to the ears of a New Testament figure). Either Gabriel senses or Mary exhibits her consternation, since she is a humble maiden being addressed in a language that connotes election, mission and God’s promise to help her. He speaks a second time telling her not to fear. Mary knows that there is more here than the usual appearance of an angel with a heavenly greeting. And even the intended solicitation, “Do not be afraid,” might stir up past images relating to Israel’s destiny and her possible role now in Israel’s future. “Be not afraid” is a formula found in the Old Testament at the beginning of a theophany (cf. Tb. 12:17). It is also found in the New Testament when Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection (cf. Mt. 28:5; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 24:38). It is spoken as a reassuring word to a justifiably frightened creature of God. Out of deference to Mary and in order for his words to “sink into” Mary’s heart, Gabriel pauses after his words of verse 28. Mary’s non-verbal response is reflected in Luke’s words “she was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean.” He pauses only to speak again “Mary do not be afraid...” This is not just an attempt to dispel fear from the soul of Mary but it is another call to joy.80

Because the triple salutation contained so much news and information, challenge and mystery, Mary is deeply disturbed and rightfully so. No one has ever been so addressed in the history of mankind. Origen wrote: “Since the angel greeted Mary in new terms --

80 S. Lyonnet, S.J., “Chairé, Kecharitoméne,” 141.
terms that I have been unable to find in all of Scripture, it is necessary to say something about it: *Chaire* Kecharitomene... it is a greeting exclusively reserved to Mary."81 St. Ambrose's remarks are similar: "She is startled by this new formula of benediction which has never been read, never been used before. For Mary alone was this greeting reserved."82

The words "you have won God's favor" or "found favor with God" is another theological term of the Old Testament that contains levels of meaning.83 What may be intended to comfort may instead stir up more feelings in Mary, who most likely would be aware of these familiar words addressed to the great figures of the covenant in the Hebrew Scriptures. Noah (Gn. 6:8), Abraham (Gn. 18:3) and David (I Sam. 27:5) had those words addressed to them. It is significant that these words follow Mary's new name *kecharitomene*, an expression especially chosen for her, carrying a broad theological scope that is undeniable.84 M. Cambe believes that *kecharitomene* and *charis* cannot be separated from each other in Luke's writing. Winning God's favor is directly related to being "highly favored" by God and this divine benevolence is obtained by one's closeness to God.85 Both Moses and Mary have found favor in God's sight which God himself states and affirms. The meaning of these words is that God, a superior Being,

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83 This expression to find grace in the sight of anyone occurs 40 times in the Old Testament, 13 of these in connection with God. Cf. Klemens Stock, "La vocazione di Maria: Lc I, 26-38," 113.
84 M. Cambe, "La Charis chez Saint Luc," 197.
85 Ernesto Della Corte, "Kecharitomene 'Crux Interpretum,'" 138.
condescends and bows to an inferior being extending his beneficence. It is by an action of God's grace that she is favored and wins God's favor.

This verse bears the dialogal element of uniqueness as these words mark her as a person of covenantal importance. She stands with the small band of great figures of the Old Testament with whom God formed a covenant. She is the most unique being highly-favored and having won God's favor. This verse hints at the intimacy that becomes more obvious as the dialogue continues. The idea of intimacy in the personal relationship of the dialogue is important in itself and in the context of the spousal aspects of covenant. Mary, as our model in faith, is the object and recipient of God's grace and favor. Each person who enters into the encounter or I-Thou relationship with God is likewise the object of God's favor which at times can be sensed during the encounter, but can never be adequately described. This intimacy is further shown by Gabriel calling her by her name, Mary. This certainly refers to another dialogal element -- relationship with God. It is a relationship built not on a single event and does not refer to a particular gift of grace or favor but an all encompassing attention and love. Through the dialogue one is able to investigate God's disposition toward Mary. By doing so we can extrapolate to how God relates to all of his creatures. Klemens Stock makes an insightful observation regarding this God-human relationship when he states that God's favor refers first of all to the person Mary and then to the task he has chosen for her. 

86 "La vocazione di Maria: Lc 1, 26-38," 114.
It is not primarily the appointing, the strength, or the ability to carry out the task that is important, only the relationship of person to person, the relationship of God with the person Mary. God provides strength and ability, Mary provides her availability, her willingness to hand herself over to him (as seen later in the dialogue). The sphere and basis of God's favor is concerned with the person. God does not know or relate to simple instruments but to persons. Although God has in mind the eventual task to be carried out by Mary and equips her for this task by her transformation in grace, he relates to her first as a person. In these verses he shows his concern for her dismay and confusion. This quiet intimate encounter with God will dramatically change Mary's life and future.

If he had so wished, God could have related to Mary as he did to Jonah, i.e., in a command fashion -- "Get up and proclaim"; and to Abraham, "Go." Such a military style does not allow for an invitation to cooperate. It speaks of a master-servant relationship without the exercise of complete freedom. It is in the dialogal type of vocation that one can see choice and freedom operating between God and the human being. God takes the initiative but he sends a messenger to deliver a message that he desires to impart. This dialogue underlines the close intimacy between man and God. Mary is free to ask questions, to respond and to expose her thinking and her point of view. Dialogue is present in all of God's calls in the Old and New Testament except

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87 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 15.
those that fall into the category of military-like command. The call seems to be prolonged in the dialogue as the conversation proceeds between God and man.

Verse 31

\[
\text{kai idou sullēmpse en gastri kai texē huion kai kaleseis to onoma autou Jesoun}
\]

"Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus."

The angel continues to speak, predicting what is to occur. This is the actual announcement of the birth. Mary's pregnancy will be the proof that she has found favor with God.\textsuperscript{90} This wording is reminiscent of Old Testament recounting of the conception of an extraordinary child (cf. Gen. 16:11ff. -- the annunciation of Ishmael, and Judges 13:5 -- the annunciation of Samuel).

Verses 32 and 33

\[
houtos estai megas kai huios hupsistou klēthēsetai kai dōsei autō kurios ho theos tōn thronon Daviδ auτou patros autou, kai basileusei epi ton oikon Jakōb eis tous aionas kai iēs basileias auτou ouk estai telos.
\]

"He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end."

This part of Gabriel's message tells Mary of the Messiah's conception and that she will be the mother of the Messiah. It is important because such an announcement colors her

\textsuperscript{90}Rita Maria Isabell Naumann, \textit{The Annunciation Narrative of Luke 1:26-38 and Its Interpretation for a Theology of Discipleship}, 75.
decision whether to say yes or no. Mary has been told in this dialogue thus far the identity of the child she is to bear and the task he will accomplish.

These verses and the one before them indicate the imperative nature of the call and the demand for an immediate response. Mary must have experienced in the encounter this sense of urgency and a demand for a response. As in most dialogical encounters there is the element of ineffability. The outsider does not know the content of the encounter and the partners cannot fully or adequately put into words what transpired between them. Mary must have perceived or sensed that acceptance or rejection was to be made by her in the near future. This announcement to birth a son who will be called “Son of the Most High” signals to Mary that saying yes to such a wondrous event will create an entirely different life for her. The abruptness of God’s encounter causes a disruption, a disconcerting disruption of her up-to-then quiet life. Like the story of Gideon, the angel’s message calls for immediate response that has immediate results. For Gideon it was going from an anxious, weak person to a strong and valiant hero. For Mary it means becoming pregnant immediately.

**Verse 34**

*eipen de Mariam pros ton aggelon, Pōs estai touto epei andra ou ginōskō?*

“Mary said to the angel, ‘But how can this come about, since I do not know man?’ (since I am a virgin)”

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The dialogue continues with Mary registering an objection to Gabriel’s announcement. The response is based on her being a virgin. Her question leads exegetes through the centuries to raise the issues of a previous vow of virginity, disposition toward virginity, or possibly accepting virginity at the time of the Annunciation. All the possibilities could have made her raise the question, “How can this come about?”.

In the above translation de la Potterie offers two versions. In the Greek text we find “ṇḍra ou ginŏsko,” and in the Vulgate “quoniam virum non cognosco.” Both expressions are translated literally as “I do not know man at all,” or “since I have not had relations with a man.” This rather simple verse has presented many problems among Scripture scholars. It is important for this study to investigate the reasons underlying Mary’s question of verse 34, since it involves her understanding and acceptance of the proffered mission. Furthermore the issue of virginity alluded to here directly relates to Mary’s obedience and freedom that she will exercise in the dialogue. The exegetical arguments must be pursued in part whenever they impact on the elements of the dialogical principle (her yes to mission and freedom but also relation to God and the singular uniqueness of a virgin giving birth). The issue of virginity is a complicated and multi-faceted topic that relates to Mary’s assent to God’s plan. This topic of assenting freely to God’s plan in the encounter with God will be a part of the focus of attention in chapter four.


334
As mentioned earlier this is not an exegetical or philological study. There will not be any attempt to present an exposition of the different schools of thought nor a marshaling of arguments to convince the reader of the merits of the school the author has decided to rely upon. These prefatory remarks serve as the author’s rationale for choosing de la Potterie’s well reasoned out, balanced and “faith-filled” approach to Mary’s inner disposition regarding virginity as a young girl of Nazareth in the first century A.D. We will place to the side the arguments of the vow theory, i.e., the belief that Mary had taken a vow of virginity as a young girl. Some might say it is anachronistic to believe Mary could have imagined the vow of virginity, since it was first proclaimed as a Christian ideal by Christ himself and did not become well known or enacted until the Middle Ages.

In Mary’s era remaining a virgin was considered a chastisement from God and a curse. Most scholars agree that for a Jewish maiden to even conceive of a vow would be unthinkable. Childlessness in marriage was looked upon as disgrace for women, e.g., (Lea, Gen. 29:32; Rachel, Gen. 30:23; Hannah, 1 Sam. 1:11).

Nor will this question be viewed as a literary device. In essence then, we pass over all the discussions to arrive at the presentation made by de la Potterie. The picture that Luke presents is that of a normal marriage situation in Palestine with Mary legally married to

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93 Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Gratian, Peter Lombard, St. Thomas, René Laurentin (in our age) have all maintained, along with other saints and mystics, that Mary decided to be a virgin which lead to the taking of a vow prior to the Annunciation. Cf. Fearghus O’Fearghail, “The Literary Forms of Luke, 1:5-25 and 1:26-38,” 335.
94 R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer and F. O’Fearghail find no possibility for such an intention of virginity.
Joseph but, as was the custom, not living in his home. Mary’s "how" refers not to a lack of faith but to the way such a conception can take place given the fact that she is not living with her husband. Her objection is raised because of this and reflects her puzzlement to the strange greeting of the angel. For such a humble, lowly Nazarene villager this dialogue itself between heaven and earth is beyond her comprehension. Her objection is a result of the disruption by God’s hidden presence and is a logical reaction. Although rarely used in the Bible and in Greek literature pos in dialogue refers to "how" or "in what way" in the future.

Klemens Stock feels that even as she asks "how" that she is absolutely open to God’s word. She asks to understand though she cannot fully comprehend in her mind or imagination. She knows it is impossible to become a mother while remaining a virgin. This is the message of joy contained in germ form in her new name, kecharitoméne. She is to be joyful because that for which she had had a desire her entire life -- to be a virgin or to lead a virginal life, was going to be left intact while she was going to bear the Messiah. It is cause for a "double joy" or even greater joy that as the "highly favored one" she would be the virgin mother of the Messiah. Her statement not knowing man does not refer to a deliberate choice to remain a virgin but a secret desire for virginity, a "profound propensity" for the virginal life. Mary’s virginity does not only refer to her

97 “La vocazione di Maria: Luc 1:26-38,” 118.
99 Ibid., 140-141.
sexual identification but to her fundamental relation to and behavior with God. Guardini calls this a Marian relation -- an intimate feeling.\textsuperscript{100} Virginity is first of all an attitude. Guardini’s \textit{The Mother of the Lord}, although not an exegetical work, speaks of a “profound disposition in Mary which pushed her in her heart to live already in a virginal manner,”\textsuperscript{101} while she quietly lived her life in traditional ways. De la Potterie names it a “profound inner conviction” that said to Mary that things would take a different course for her in her marriage and its relationship with Joseph.\textsuperscript{102} Even before being proposed by Christ, Mary lived virginity existentially as it grew in her heart before the conception and during the months before the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{103} Mary “filled to the brim” with grace already lived the virginal life completely.\textsuperscript{104} Reminiscent of Augustine’s words, Mary lived virginity in her heart first before knowing virginity in her flesh.\textsuperscript{105} She lived for God in complete confidence as a result of grace and persevered in the face of the incomprehensibility of God’s mystery.\textsuperscript{106} For him this “grace” is the key to a fuller understanding of the entire revelation of the angelic annunciation to Mary.

This has been a detailed excursion into the topic of Mary’s virginity from several viewpoints. The reason for this extensive examination is the bearing that Mary’s

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{101} Cited in Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., \textit{Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant}, 28.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{103} Ernesto Della Corte, “Kecharitomène ‘Crux Interpretum,’” 141.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} De la Potterie labels this perseverance as a “Marian” disposition. In agreement with St. Bernard in seeing in Mary the “grace of virginity” de la Potterie would harken back to the meaning of \textit{kecharitomène} which prepared her to live out virginity in preparation to become the mother of the Messiah, the Son of God, virginally.
“disposition” to lead a virginal life through a virginal attitude of giving oneself over to God completely has on the dialogical principle. If Mary had been leading this virginal existence even though not consciously being able to even articulate it, she would experience confusion and dismay over the announcement that she would bear a son. If she had actually made something similar to a vow to God, her dismay and bewilderment would have been even greater. Only through this dialogue with God does she discover that she will give birth to the “Son of the Most High.” Here occurs the juxtaposition of the highly favored and grace-filled life, a virginal life, and the reality of impending motherhood announced by an angel sent by God. Through the dialogic encounter she must struggle with this news and decide what her answer will be. Her relationship to God has been in a singular direction but she now learns that life will be changed and a new direction given through the dialogic encounter. The “virginal disposition,” of course, disposes her to choose not her will, even if she believes it is prompted by God, but God’s will.

Verse 35

\[ \text{kai apokritheis ho aggelos eipen autē, Pneuma hagion epeleusetai epi se kai dunamis hupsistou episkiasi soi dio kai to gennomenon hagion klēthēsetai huios theou.} \]

“‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you,’ the angel answered, ‘and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the one to be born holy will be called Son of God.’”

Again the angel speaks and Mary listens in rapt attention for now the angel explains how this marvelous conception will occur. As these familiar words from her Old Testament
reading, knowledge, and tradition strike her ears, they speak of the power of God as the
Creator, the Messianic era, and God's over-shadowing, protective presence.

First of all she realizes that this will be a virginal maternity. The conception of this child
will be accomplished by the Holy Spirit covering her with its shadow. Some Scripture
scholars see a direct connection and allusion to the cloud covering the tent of the
covenant in Exodus 40:35. Hence for some, Mary becomes the new "Ark of the
Covenant" bearing within her womb the Son of God. Mary could be quite aware of the
meaning of the words and their allusion to the Covenant. All Jews were quite attuned to
the abiding presence of God in their history as a people or nation dear to God. She could
take comfort in this promise of God's presence. Certainly there would be great
consolation in being told again in dialogue, in relation to God in words that she must
trust, that she is confirmed in her virginal stance and that this will be a virginal
conception. This must occur only through a dialogue. A prophetic interior message or
dream would be open to misinterpretation or lack of credibility by a creature as humble as
Mary. This is an auditory message that must be heard, heeded, contended with and
assented to.

We pass over the second part of this verse since it does not bear directly on the dialogic
principle.108

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107 Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, 30.
108 De la Potterie presents the four interpretations of this second half of this verse explaining its importance
to understanding the virgin birth.
Verse 36 and 37

"Know this: your kinswoman Elizabeth has also, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month; for nothing is impossible to God."

Unlike Gideon who asked for a sign and was given one to confirm the veracity of the angelic message, Mary did not ask for a sign. However God, who knows best what every human being needs and knows Mary’s heart, gives a sign. What better sign to a woman who may have planned to remain childless and will now conceive virginally, than that of God’s power to grant a child to a sterile woman, Elizabeth, advanced in years besides! It is a convincing message proving that "nothing is impossible to God." Only God can unite virginity and maternity in Mary. She has only to believe his words. These reassuring words are typical of the call narrative expressed in dialogue. This narrative keeps moving in the direction of the offering of the mission, thereby conferring personhood. It is this birth oracle that constitutes the mission or commissioning found in call narratives.109 The uniqueness of this call elicits from God a revelation of his power and its infinite possibility.110 These words tell Mary that God has the power to do what has been related thus far. It is important that Mary hears of God’s power and action to aid her impending decision-making. God has the ability to act as described in verse 35

("The Lord is with you") can this virginal conception come about. This I-Thou relation with God reveals the mission and God waits upon Mary for her answer.

**Verse 38**

*eipen de Mariam, Idou he doule kuriou; genoito moi kata to rema sou. Kai apetthen ap autes ho aggelos*

"'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her."

The dialogue closes with Mary's joyful assent, in obedient bidding, to Gabriel's opening word of command "Rejoice."

Luke again uses a unique word genoito an optative form of the verb which is used positively only in this unique place in the New Testament. The optative form of the verb expresses a joyous desire to, in distinction to resignation. By her fiat, the Latin translation of genoito, Mary joyously says "yes" to whatever God has in store for her in the future. It is a total abandonment. The word expresses the joy that she experiences in handing herself over to God in freedom. Freedom is one of the elements of the dialogue principle. In the encounter the partner must be willing to yield to the other especially when the other is God. The inferior must acquiesce to the superior as servant to master. Joyous acceptance is the coin of the realm in God's kingdom. In typical Lucan style this pericope is a balanced "whole" presentation with the scene ending in a joyous yes after the angel's initial invitation to joy. Mary in her obedience enters into this joy.

\[111 \text{ Cf. Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 35.}\]
CONCLUSION

Mary is now partially aware of God’s purpose through this dialogue. She accepts in humility not even protesting, admitting her unworthiness. She bows before God’s will. Having been transformed by grace and having the virginal attitude of surrender and abandonment, she is so much God’s possession that she cannot think of herself. Her fiat is still an act of faith, since parts of God’s plan were probably still not known to her.

It is important to stress once more, how this interruption of Mary’s life was naturally upsetting for her. Only through God’s presence was she supported and sustained. There is an irresistible quality to God’s call and to this call especially. Mary’s unique call is a call from freedom to freedom. She says yes in complete freedom. God sovereignly chooses whom he will. He encountered in Mary the completely obedient response freely given in great joy. Like her son, she is a servant of God’s will. Her yes confirms God’s action in her life and gives shape to her human life in greater definition of who she is as person.

Her acceptance is unique to this call narrative and stresses the importance of her free choice. Usually in call narratives the acceptance of the call is taken for granted but such is not the case here.112 Obedience to God is an integral part of the Covenant in the Old

Testament. It is a *sine qua non* of the New Testament Covenant. What in the Old Testament was a generalized faith of Abraham representing a nation, becomes through Mary a very specific and focused faith in a person.

The entire structure of the Annunciation story is framed in Old Testament forms. Luke wanted the reference to be obvious. The announcement of the birth of Jesus is to be understood in light of all the previous marvelous birth oracles. The Annunciation is to be understood as the continuation and culmination of God’s eternal design. The birth oracle places paramount importance on the conception and birth of Jesus but this birth oracle has been woven into a call narrative. Thus the Annunciation casts light upon Mary and her vocation, her call to a mission.

Mary is to play a role, a unique role in salvation history. *Kecharitoméne* is to play a role so lofty and exalted played by no other. This dialogue demonstrates that there is more to Luke’s Annunciation than the announcement of the birth of Jesus. In a manner that is not recorded in any other call narrative, Mary is addressed and viewed as a person. Mary’s maternity is not viewed simply as an instrument but through the dialogue it is her personal, free service, established by God, that is also considered. Mary’s whole being as a person is involved in this service and task. God’s favor is definitely applied to Mary, but never in a coercive way that makes her obliged to say yes or to give up her personal

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114 Klemens Stock, "La vocazione di Maria: Lc 1, 26-38," 122.
freedom. Her fullness of joy reflected in her joyful yes stems not from obligation but from the willingness and freedom of serving God. Giving birth is her vocation. She takes her place beside all the leaders and prophets called by God and charged to do service for the salvation of their people. Her maternity yields such service, fulfilling God’s will freely, as she plays her unique role, in the salvation of God’s people.

The entire Annunciation dialogue serves as a model for the I-Thou relationship with God. It reveals the God-human relationship, it places the accent on God but also emphasizes the reciprocal nature and the importance of the human being’s involvement. The uniqueness of Mary reminds each individual of his or her own uniqueness granted by God through grace. Each person is the bearer of a divine task or mission that can be known through the dialogic meeting with God. It is the responsibility of each individual to say yes to the role and mission for which they have been equipped by God. Talents and potentialities placed there freely by God must be utilized and returned freely to him for his use. Through each encounter, whether with God or his messenger (angelic or human), individuals are prompted to embrace each new direction, to play the role assigned, thereby becoming a theological person in God’s kingdom.

Chapter two demonstrated that Buberian and Balthasarian dialogical thinking elucidates the concept of theological personhood and that a person does achieve fulfillment through the dialogical exchange. This chapter has just examined the Annunciation, to discover

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116 The sending of the angel is less coercive than other possible interventions.  
the dialogical elements that had first been posited in chapter one and more thoroughly discussed in chapter two through the exposition of the work of Buber and von Balthasar. These exegetical and etymological studies have addressed the key factors of the Annunciation as a call narrative, revealing Mary as a unique and highly favored figure in salvation history. The collating of the dialogal elements has clearly spoken of humility, surrender, obedience, freedom as integral parts of her vocation and mission. This dialogue, examined by Scripture scholars, leads one to see Mary as a role model in the God-human relationship. In the final chapter of this study there will be an application of Buber and von Balthasar's elements of the dialogical principle to the Annunciation. Chapter four maintains that the Virgin Mary's dialogue with God as witnessed in the Annunciation is the exemplary event of the God-human relation.

In conclusion and in preparation for chapter four, the author quotes a passage from Pope Paul VI's *Marialis Cultus* that Raymond Brown also quoted at the end of an article.118

The author defers to his judgment when he praises Pope Paul VI's writing, "I cannot phrase better what the Bible tells us about Mary in the Infancy Narratives and elsewhere:

"The Virgin Mary has always [been] proposed to the faithful by the church as an example to be imitated, not precisely in the type of life she led and much less for the sociocultural background in which she lived and which scarcely today exists anywhere. Rather she is held up as an example to the faithful for the way in which in her own particular life she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God, because she heard the word of God and acted on it, and because charity and the spirit of

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service were the driving force of her actions. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and most perfect of Christ's disciples."
CHAPTER 4
RE-READING OF THE ANNUNCIATION
IN LIGHT OF THE DIALOGIC PRINCIPLE

INTRODUCTION

The final chapter intends to support the third hypothesis: the dialogue between the Virgin Mary and God is an exemplary event of the God-human relation. If an individual, spiritual subject truly becomes a theological person through the dialogue with the Creator, it is further hypothesized that the Virgin Mary who was uniquely blessed and called, accepting mission with the greatest freedom and love, be considered the prototype of the human person.

Through the proposed re-reading of the Annunciation as a dialogic event, aware of all that the event conveys, it should be made clear that the Virgin Mary is the exemplar for all human persons. We turn first to Martin Buber’s dialogic principle and apply it to the Annunciation.

A disclaimer must be made here. As mentioned often, Martin Buber is a Jew, a man of the Old Testament whose writings and thinking, for the most part, addressed only the Old Testament and not the New. It would be presumptuous to try to intuit what he would say about each verse of the Annunciation. However, the dialogic principle that he discovered and promulgated all of his life holds great merit and has been applied to various fields,
e.g., education, philosophy, anthropology, psychology etc., as has been mentioned in chapter two. Therefore it is feasible to apply the principle to the Annunciation, since it is a dialogic event that contains some of the dialogal elements which Buber espouses. No attempt will be made to have Buber’s ideas proclaim the Virgin Mary as anyone other than a person who has achieved personhood through the dialogue. The following application of his principle will reveal how the Virgin Mary became a person through the dialogic event of the Annunciation.

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A selected application of Buber’s thought can easily be made to the Annunciation passage. Mary is willing to follow a goal that on the face of it would bring her ridicule and possibly death in her strict Galilean town of Nazareth. She is willing to forego earthly happiness to fulfill a heavenly task that she is either deeply aware of from within or that is being presented to her by an angel. She is attempting to live up to her potential as the only human creature made worthy to be the mother of the Son of the Most High. For the sake of the mission she places aside, for the moment, her marriage, her probable child from Joseph, a possibly lived-out orientation to virginity and acquiesces, in trust, to God’s choice or role for her. She is deciding for God’s mission in all humility. There must have been an awareness given to her, a special trust (emunah) to believe the impossible, that a virgin could conceive and be with child and remain a virgin. All of this is accomplished through the dialogue with God. One cannot become a person alone, only
in dialogue; and a person grows in personhood as it accomplishes more of the task.¹ This task becomes more important than either earthly or heavenly happiness.

First we turn to dialogue that holds within itself certain elements (relation, vocation and mission, uniqueness, freedom) that lead to personhood. Martin Buber is well known for his contribution to the dialogic process. As mentioned earlier, even though Covenant is so important for Jew and Christian, the accompanying idea of dialogue has not been fully investigated or applied to theological discourse. This becomes immediately apparent when applying Buber's I-Thou dialogic relationship to the Annunciation scene, if one is looking for corroboration among exegetes (there is little). Since to the author's knowledge, Buber never wrote about the Annunciation in any formal manner, this presentation will attempt to understand the Annunciation in a manner consistent with Buber's ideas.

Although much of what Buber says about the "ontological" elements of the dialogic event are more readily applied to man to man encounters, he also extends these to the encounter with the Absolute Thou. For the purpose of this study only those elements that shed light on the Annunciation, and help to forward the dialogue as a tool for studying, explicating, and ultimately in understanding certain aspects of the Annunciation, will be used.

¹ Buber and von Balthasar hold definite viewpoints regarding choice and destiny and God's presence vs. direct call to a particular mission.
The Annunciation portrays an encounter between an angel and Mary in which there is a two-directional relation as evidenced in a dialogue. There is a reciprocity present. The immediacy of the I-Thou relationship stresses the ineffability of the encounter and the sense of presence. Mary is approached by Gabriel in the ordinariness of her everyday life. God initiates the contact and the relationship. Such a scene satisfies Buber's idea that seeks the normal in the concrete life of everyday. Mary is not a single entity here but is in relationship to another. The angel Gabriel is an intermediary, for it is really God who is speaking through this angel. God, as always (as seen in Covenant stories), is revealing himself within a dialogic encounter. Man's relation with God is seen in the context of God's revelation to man. According to Buber's anthropology, the dialogic relation is the underlying reality of all human existence. Mary is only a person in her relationship to God through Gabriel. She becomes a unique person through a relation with another. This relation constitutes an I-Thou relationship. What takes place between Gabriel (God) and Mary is steeped in unexamined reality fully present to each other without intellectual manipulation or unreal abstraction. To be a "theological person," in order to discover who she really is for God and what her mission is, Mary must be in relation to another, namely, God. Her reason for existence becomes focused precisely through standing in relation with others.

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3 *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 19.
4 Ibid., 77.
In the I-Thou relationship of the Annunciation, Mary’s uniqueness is revealed. God, in turn, revealed himself in his uniqueness and Mary responded with her total self by saying yes. It was a yes to relationship, of being a mother to the Son of God. By entering this relationship with God, she emerges from the relation a new person. As Buber states in I and Thou, the I contacts the Thou and is stirred with the breath of God. This I (Mary) knows “[herself] to have being.”\textsuperscript{5} Man exists to become through the I-Thou relation.\textsuperscript{6} Mary’s relation with God in the Annunciation scene fulfills the goal of becoming. Mary stood in relation with God. In the encounter she spoke with her whole being. She withheld nothing of herself but gave her entire self in humble obedience to God. According to Buber, by withholding nothing of herself, she could behold the other as it exists in the present. The I and Thou each affect the other in a truly real relation.\textsuperscript{7} God “stepped forth” to meet Mary in relationship.

Buber held that only in and through relationships with other finite selves could one’s relationship with God be realized.\textsuperscript{8} Possibly he could include an angel as one embodiment, a part of creation, through which God typically reveals himself. His early Biblical view of man, later reinforced by Hasidism, helped to answer the anthropological question, “What is man?” This Biblical influence provided the basis for a religious anthropology. Man in relation to man, or here Mary in relation to Gabriel, is the connection between anthropology and religion. This I-Thou relationship is the source of

\textsuperscript{5} Martin Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 64.
\textsuperscript{6} Arthur A. Cohen, \textit{Martin Buber}, 27.
\textsuperscript{7} Martin Buber, \textit{I and Thou}, 10.
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{The Philosophy of Martin Buber}, edited by Paul Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 77-78.
a religious relationship. We can only encounter each other in the I-Thou relation. Man finds his highest fulfillment in the I-Thou relationship with God. Therefore we could conclude that Mary is finding her highest fulfillment in the I-Thou relationship with God, specifically in the Annunciation scene as she turns to meet him. She is fulfilling Buber’s belief that faith means living in relationship to the Being that is “believed in.” In the concreteness of her existence Mary is exercising that faith par excellence as she lives before the face of Being. What happens to Mary in this scene is the epitome of the life of every person, “the unfolding of the existence that is but to man, the development of the existence of the whole person standing over against eternal Being.”

Mary can only meet God in existence during this moment of the Annunciation. She has no time to reflect on it, for God’s approach is sudden and expects a prompt answer. There is no time to ponder the message, except for the natural objection regarding being a virgin who was about to conceive a child. Nor was there a magic formula for summoning God; he comes abruptly into our lives. This existential event bears all of Buber’s marks of true dialogue -- ineffability, non-rationalization, and non-conceptualization.

Just as every encounter with God in dialogue advances creation and creatures toward their realization of their potential, Mary did it to the fullest as an exemplar. She is the perfect example because she said a prompt and obedient yes, in the face of the greatest

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9 Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J., God as Person in the Writings of Martin Buber, 36.
10 Gilya Gerda Schmidt, Martin Buber’s Formative Years, From German Culture to Jewish Renewal 1897-1909, 38.
incomprehensibility, devoid of rationalizing, to a mystery never presented or accomplished previously. Only in dialogue, by being truly present to another (God) could Mary assent to that which was impossible. Her being was completely open to the encounter and she left behind all abstraction and rationalization of what Buber calls the I-It world.

Buber's view of the dialogue entails an ineffability that cannot be documented, articulated or shared in anyway, which leaves no room for describing the I-Thou experience. We will never know what occurred in Mary's mind and heart during the Annunciation. The Annunciation as presented does yield content and information, that the I-It world yields. All that can be revealed in the I-Thou meeting is the eternal revelation, I am that I am. One can only imagine if that is exactly how God revealed himself to Mary. Possibly the encounter with God could have been none other than that described by Buber:

“As only acceptance of the Presence is necessary for the approach to the meeting, so in a new sense is it so when we emerge from it. As we reach the meeting with the simple Thou on our lips, so with Thou on our lips we leave it and return to the world.”

In I and Thou Buber explored the role of man as an individual and as a social being who tries to communicate with a superior power. Mary did this in the most unique and startling fashion. Her communication with God in the Annunciation dialogue demonstrates that the I exists only in relation to Thou -- the Absolute Thou.

11 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 111. He continues, “We have come near to God...”
Although Buber never spoke of how each member of the I-Thou encounter was enriched, the Annunciation demonstrates in an observable manner how Mary was enriched. From the side of the Thou, we can only postulate that the Trinity was affected by one of the persons becoming man. A change that would remain for all eternity thereby "changing" the life of the Trinity as a result of the I-Thou relation of the Annunciation scene.

Mary’s uniqueness as an individual created by God was to be fulfilled in her role as mother of the Messiah. Her uniqueness, like every other created being, was a mystery conferred by God. If it can be said, Mary is a special "onetime miracle."\(^\text{12}\) She above all others has made perfect her likeness to God.\(^\text{13}\) She has perfected her nature that God has stamped upon her through living up to the mission, saying yes, and actualizing all of her potential of being "highly favored." Mary’s uniqueness reveals God’s infinite beauty in a manner surpassing all other creatures who likewise manifest God’s infinite variety and beauty. Each person’s potential is realized through the manifestation of their qualities and traits. Mary’s singular possession of unique graces and gifts is extraordinary and her manifestation of her gifts and traits is also extraordinary.

Buber espoused Hasidism’s definition of uniqueness, i.e., to be yourself as fully as you can be and to immerse yourself in the everyday life. Mary according to Buber now becomes whole in relation to the other, to God. Again the Annunciation is the paradigm

\(^\text{12}\)Ibid., 106.
\(^\text{13}\) *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 89.
of all dialogical encounters because it fulfills what Buber said was possible for the two members of the dialogical process -- they can experience the unlimited and unconditional.¹⁴

Through the relation, direction and fulfillment proceed. The wholeness of any individual cannot be achieved in isolation but only in relation to the other. All that Mary was possible of becoming resulted from the I-Thou relation with her creator. All that lies “dormant potentiality” became realized actuality. Uniqueness is found only in relationship. One’s utmost uniqueness is called forth, recognized and confirmed in the most open accepting, wholesome relationship. Man exists for the sake of this relation through which one becomes a unique person.¹⁵ These thoughts address the purpose of individual existence. Man exists for the relation through which he becomes a unique person and then as person he is to do something, achieve a task, complete the mission, thereby living up to his potentiality.¹⁶ Ultimately, utilizing and fulfilling our potential is not to purify oneself for terrestrial or heavenly bliss. Instead our potential is given for the sake of the work that everyone is to do in God’s world.¹⁷ Being unique, becoming a person through relation, and performing a task, all flow from one another and form a trilogy or triadic relationship that adequately summarizes the metamorphosis of the individual into a unique person who lives for the sake of the work that must be done. This brings about the Buberian “unity of his being” as the person accepts responsibility.

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¹⁴ Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, 168.
¹⁵ The Writings of Martin Buber, edited by Will Herberg, 72-73.
¹⁶ Werner Manheim, Martin Buber, 84.
¹⁷ Ibid.
Although approaching the topic from a different angle, Buber is very close to Christian thinking which speaks of dying to self, abandoning your own will to God, and doing the mission that he has in mind for you. The saintly person renounces the very choices that Buber eschews, personal earthly happiness and heavenly bliss, and instead opts for Buber's ultimate choice -- the doing of God's work in this world. Some of the saints are willing to forget their own heavenly reward to better serve the king's (God) preferences in missionary lands.  

The special way to God is not through pious prayers and devotions, but through the person's relation with the world and men. This awareness of a special direction or task comes only from within.

Trust, _emunah_, is given each person to help understand and believe in the goal that is placed before him. Man must trust that God has equipped him to do the task. It is not a known or perceived task, but an inner awareness received in dialogue that must be trusted. This path of trust, accepting talents and tasks, is the "unique way to God that lies at the very center of our awareness of oneself as I." The dialogue provides uniqueness, personhood and task to the individual. The dialogue must be trusted for it is all that is needed to lead a good life. It hallows all of life, thereby meeting God.

The Annunciation scene provides the best possible example of "holy insecurity," since the meeting does not occur in the typical larger-than-life biblical fashion. The simplicity

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18 Sts. Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila
20 Martin Buber, _I and Thou_, 79.
of the setting and the matter of factness gives rise to insecurity. "Finding" God in the ordinariness of her life illustrates another aspect of the dialogical character, i.e., meeting God in each concrete relation that reveals the presentness of God and the uniqueness of each encounter. God was present and had Gabriel announce it: "The Lord is with you." Presence is one of Buber’s favorite aspects of dialogical existence. God promises Mary that he will be there to help her as he has helped others to whom the same words were spoken. In the Annunciation scene the fullness of the dialogue’s goal, as envisioned by Buber, is accomplished: the recognition of otherness, the acceptance of full relationship, and the power of the word that connects the two partners. The power of the word in this dialogue is apparent, since the words produce immediate action (this will be pursued in greater detail in the von Balthasar section). If Judaic thought stated that man’s destiny is to relate to God who desires relation, Mary’s destiny was fulfilled and serves as a model for all others, as she relates in humility and love to the God who called her. She related to him in a very unique way in this scene. On the one hand, she believed like others chosen in a "call narrative" in the Scriptures. On the other hand, no one was ever before been so named, and no one would relate to God in such a manner and have such an effect on God himself.

How does Buber describe this belief in man’s relation to God? He certainly shies away from a mystical description eschewing every form of mystical absorption or melting into

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22 "I shall be there as I shall be there."
23 "God needs you." Martin Buber, I and Thou, 82.
God. Man’s relation is best described as being present to God and God being present to man. He believed in a direct presence of God as shown in Biblical passages. Mary’s encountering God in the I-Thou relation would of course defy conceptualization and verbalization. She could never have explained fully what transpired nor would she have known fully to what she was assenting. The Annunciation portrays Mary as sensing, knowing, and loving, stressing all the while the habitual approach one employs in meeting any Thou, including God. It is a scene that captures some ordinary events (albeit an angel and the Incarnation of God do not fall into this category) of conversation, ordinary sensing and ordinary consciousness that Buber held as essential in the dialogic event.

The idea that man’s religious situation was synonymous with “being there in the Presence” comprises a central issue of the dialogical principle. Being present to the Eternal or Absolute Thou was the means to become what the person is meant to become. Mary was in the presence of God who was in relation to her by His presence. Although Mary could not touch absoluteness in this encounter, she could be in relation to absoluteness in the dialogical I-Thou relationship. It is a solution to the distance experienced in the Old Testament. The dialogue begins, just as it did for Mary, through “the calling of the infinite and the answer of the finite.” The calling to each finite creature requests that the partner enter into the presence of the other, thereby bringing

24 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 85.
25 Werner Manheim, Martin Buber, 5.
forth uniqueness. Every man is to fulfill his own uniqueness by being whole, by being fully himself.

Let us look closer at the Annunciation in Buberian terms. There is a great distance between God and his creatures. No one knows the distance, but Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth. This primal setting of a distance is the pre-supposition for every relation.\(^{26}\) Now that Gabriel stands over against Mary in reality, she can enter into relation with him. Stepping into relationship makes creatures aware of the otherness of fellow human beings and creatures. Mary, like all human beings, can achieve a distance even within herself (non-spatial) which tells her of an independent world that exists for her.\(^{27}\) This sense of distance is a state of being. It is this concept of distance that allows for the separation and distinction of I-Thou, of God and Mary. The meeting between God and Mary during the I-Thou relation of the Annunciation depends on this concept of distance. For Buber this relationship with God is absolutely relative, since God is not a substance but a relation, pure relation. Therefore during the Annunciation, God and Mary were nothing but relation for each other, totally present to each other. They were in a meeting or encounter.

As Mary enters into relation with God she becomes whole and experiences unity. Real dialogue can exist only between genuine persons. Buber,

\[ \text{"accentuates the idea that a real relation begins when the solitude imposed by the distance is broken and the barriers of the individual being are, as it were, breached} \]

\(^{26}\) Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, 21.

so that one life opens to another, each becoming present to the other and experiencing the mystery of the other in the mystery of one's own [being]."^{28}

Buber's mechanism of how distance (between God and Mary) yields to relation is the *between*. The *between* simply is, it does not happen.^{29} Its importance is seen in relation to dialogue, since all thought is monologic and unexamined until the person engages in the concreteness of the *between* of I and Thou.

The *between* is a Buberian creation, a tool of his thought system that can serve a useful purpose here. It is a sphere beyond the fixed and determined boundary of each partner.^{30} This concept allows the partner of dialogue to experience in some fashion, the other side of the relationship. This *between* even deepens the relation idea of man being with man. It goes beyond. The *between* is not spatial, but is always present when individuals encounter each other. What Buber would see in the Annunciation relation is something occurring between God and Mary and not in them. With the encounter comes a new knowing bringing a new dimension beyond that of subject and object relationship. As a result man is changed by knowledge, truth and direction. As a Jew of the Old Testament, Buber is attempting to work out how an almighty but personal God would communicate with modern day creatures. His anthropology is steeped in religious thought and places man in the center of a God-run universe. Man is centered in being. "Man can become

^{28} Pedro C. Sevilla, S.J., *God as Person in the Writings of Martin Buber*, 147, a citation from Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 170.

^{29} Werner Manheim, *Martin Buber* 38.

^{30} *Between Man and Man*, Martin Buber, 203.
whole not by virtue of relation to himself but only by virtue of a relation to another self."  

The *between* and the I-Thou relationship are partial solutions to how God communicates and how man becomes truly man, a person. It will be noted below, in speaking about Buber’s concept of the Absolute Thou, that some of his thoughts are naturally limited by his Old Testament thinking and will affect some of our attempts at applying his ideas fully to the Annunciation.

Although his concept of spirit is not shared by the majority of Christians, it highlights the ideas of responsibility and transformation. The spirit does not dwell within persons but in the *between*. The job of spirit is to prompt a person to transform the world by allowing himself to be transformed. Spirit means “living life” and being transformed by entering into relations. Such a presentation of spirit as an event and as a response to the Thou can add a new perspective to the Annunciation dialogue. What happens in the between of God and Mary leads to a transformation of both. Mary is transformed by becoming pregnant immediately at her *fiat*, and God too is “transformed,” in that one of the persons of the Trinity now resides in the womb of a virgin enfleshed. As Mary entered into this relation with her whole being and as God did, as he always does without restriction or reservation, totally present, both are fulfilled in the relation and live in the spirit, according to Buber. This is in opposition to union or the spirit as a presence dwelling

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31 Ibid., 168, 181.
within the person. The contribution here, although it cannot be applied analogously to God, regards a person being transformed in the dialogic encounter. As will be shown in the next section, Mary has been the most transformed, on so many levels, of all God’s creatures.

Mary said her yes to the unique task God fashioned for her. Made in his image and likeness, Mary was the closest God could come to making a perfect human person. All that remained was for her to say yes to the mission. Buber sees being made in God’s image or likeness as deed, development, as task.33 Buber would quote this passage from Judaic thought about man’s task,

"...Since in Judaism every human soul is a useful link in God’s creation which through man’s word, is supposed to become God’s empire, each soul should purify itself, not for terrestrial happiness or for heavenly bliss, but for the sake of the work that everyone is to do in God’s world."34

Mary would be the epitome of God’s creature speaking the word (fiat) linking God’s creation to his empire that is built by those pure souls who live to do God’s work. Her piety, dutifulness, obedience to God’s mission, make her the perfect man (person, woman).35 Mary said yes for God’s sake and not for her own sake.36

33 Martin Buber, Hasidism and Modern Man, 59.
34 Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, edited by Maurice Friedman, 84.
35 Martin Buber, Hasidism and Modern Man, 59.
36 Buber discovered that religion and its outward form tend to separate the devotee from the divine will. Cited in Martin Buber, Jewish Existentialist, Malcolm L. Diamond, 127
Mary’s yes is the archetypal response that epitomizes another Buberian term - “holy insecurity.” This term, which he coined, is a daring aspect of the dialogical principle that conveys the ideas of encountering God in each situation or relation as ever new. One does not take refuge in a static relationship with God but lives in the “Face of God.”

Mary did this to the utmost. There was no precedent in what was being asked of her, never was any person so addressed. She knew or sensed something of import was going to happen and that she was going to be asked to carry out an important task. Finally she was told, that as a virgin, she would conceive by the power of the Most High and bear a son. Saying yes to all of this is the height of holy insecurity! Open to the fullness of God, she had no surety as to the result of this encounter.

Mary’s yes at the Annunciation literally fulfilled one of Buber’s themes that is typically Judaic according to Buber, “letting God into the world.” Of course the Judaic concept differs from the Christian’ view of “letting God into the world.” However there are some parallels. As part of his rejection of a form of “absorption mysticism,” Buber thought that God comes into the world when one lets him in. God allows Himself to be let in, thereby placing Himself in man’s hands. He wishes to enter this world through man. Mary fulfilled this letting God in when he, through her as God-man, entered into this world. Buber would see that the Annunciation is portrayed as a “non-mystical,” somewhat natural event, in which Mary converses with an angel bearing an announcement of great import to which she listens, questions and promptly assents. This

38 Franz Rosenzweig, The Star of Redemption, 15.
scene, in some ways, would meet Buber’s criteria for the mysticism of everyday, since it is rooted in the lived concrete without the suggestion of unity or losing oneself in the transcendent.

Another important contribution is Buber’s concept of freedom. There is no compulsion or imposition of God’s task upon the creature. Even though there is divine meaning in life it is not imposed. Freedom is a reality and not just a feeling. God desires our free choice. Therefore in the case of the Virgin Mary, God desired Mary’s unqualified yes to save mankind. It is the best example of Buber’s dictum, “Destiny goes hand in hand with freedom.” Again it is the perfect example of freedom inspiring creativity (literally) and both being present through and only through relation. Mary exercised her freedom creatively by accepting divine “destiny” in the dialogic relation. Such open relation allows Mary to have no purposes or self-will, but only to become aware of destiny in the encounter. Mary would exercise the greatest degree of freedom by assenting to the necessity that was presented to her by an all sovereign God. Necessity and freedom become one to the truly free person.

Man is the focal point at which freedom and necessity meet. If he handles them well he is a being in unity. Freedom is a part of man’s very existence, and responsibility cannot be separated from freedom. Each person’s direction and responsibility well up from within

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39 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 82.
40 Pamela Vennes, Buber, 50.
41 Martin Buber, I and Thou, 61.
42 Ibid., 95.
the person. The voice speaks from within. The Eternal Thou freely hands over to the creature the freedom to choose responsibility and redemption. Freedom is given so that man can redeem the world and fulfill its needs. Buber, of course, means something different in speaking of redemption than the usual Christian connotation. To him it means hallowing the world with your life of good works done piously in your everyday activities. The Virgin Mary adequately fulfills both connotations of freedom and redemption. In Buberian terms she would be a person of unity holding within herself freedom and necessity with no conflict or contradiction. She did the correct thing in her fiat. She accomplished what she had been created for, she utilized her potentiality. She hallowed this life by living a very ordinary life immersed in the everydayness of reality. In Christian terms she exercised her God-given gift of finite freedom, saying yes to the weighty responsibility for which she had been created to accept. There was a definite choice to accept or decline.

Another aspect of the dialogic event that illuminates the Annunciation scene is potentiality. Each creature holds within itself its essence. Over time it becomes more of itself and what it was made to be. Buber states that in the encounter (the relation), the individual becomes something new. With each encounter he becomes someone through the mutual openness in the dialogic process. Confirmation of these potentialities promotes self-becoming. As the highly favored one, immaculate from her conception, Mary’s potentiality was the greatest of all creatures. By being totally open to God, he

43 Lowell D. Streiker, *The Promise of Buber*, 58.
confirmed her in all of her goodness, humility and obedience, and extended a miraculous invitation to this virginal girl. God confirmed everything in her entire being by conferring upon her highest praise and entrusting her with the Son of God. Mary’s very essence, the very reason for her existence, was confirmed by her loving God. This confirmation took place in an I-Thou dialogic event. Words were spoken, predictions and promises made, and assent and fulfillment accomplished; all occurred in one dialogic event. Self-realization was achieved for Mary through the encounter. This single encounter enabled Mary to become what she was meant to become.\textsuperscript{44} It might be said that Martin Buber has taken us as far as he could in understanding who man is and what is his task in life. The Old Testament is often referred to as foreshadowing the new and the old is completed in the new. The New Testament presents the coming of Jesus, the God-man who changes and renews all things. These familiar phrases of “old and new” may hold the same truth for our discussion of the contribution of Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

CONCLUSION

Mary did in a superior fashion what other mortals aspire to do in freely embracing the necessities of life, that lead to the world’s redemption. She was the most instrumental of all the Jews in leading a life of trust and piety. She, among the most faithful, kept the

\textsuperscript{44} Martin Buber, \textit{The Knowledge of Man}, 28.
Law in spirit and truth. Mary, by her life and yes to God, was the single most important person to hasten the world’s redemption.

The beauty of Martin Buber’s thinking is its originality and broad applicability. He not only believed in his richly nuanced and widely disseminated ideas of presence and dialogue, but he lived them. They contain a certain veracity that has appealed to thinkers in numberless countries. His purported ideas were not frozen into a monolithic system but were quite fluid, able to be poured into philosophical, anthropological and theological jars of many shapes and forms.

The author does not believe it is a misrepresentation of his thought to apply the richness and diversity of his thinking to Luke’s Annunciation dialogue. We have demonstrated in Chapter three in a rather straightforward manner that it is a dialogue. Therefore it seems appropriate to have utilized the Buberian dialogic principle in examining the Annunciation. This has been attempted by taking the major components of his “theory” and applying them directly to the events of the Annunciation. By not trying to force Buber’s Jewish ideas and approach into a typically Christian framework, the author was pleased to find so much material useful in explicating and proving that the Annunciation holds within itself so many elements of Buber’s dialogical principle. In capturing the picture of the Annunciation through the lens of Buber’s camera the viewer sees clearly, I-Thou and dialogue between God and Mary that highlights relation, concreteness of the
everyday, presence, obedience, freedom, potentiality, responsibility, direction, and becoming a unique and fulfilled person.

The author has attempted to “stay true” to Buber’s intellectual and philosophical approach to how an individual becomes a person through the dialogic principle. Hopefully his life-long motif of “response,” situated at the heart of the I-Thou relation, is given due respect. The Annunciation scene, like no other, reflects Buber’s major motif by demonstrating that since the Annunciation there has been an open channel between heaven and earth providing for an ongoing call and response. However there must be caution exercised in even suggesting that some of his ideas are directly related or entirely applicable to certain New Testament passages or ideas.

H.U. VON BALTHASAR

The prolific literary and the theological work of von Balthasar spans both the Old and New Testaments. As a Catholic theologian, he wrote extensively about the Trinity, Jesus and Mary (main characters of this study). This final section of the study will focus on the application of his ideas about the dialogic event as they relate to and elucidate the Annunciation.
The narration of Luke in the Annunciation scene employs a **dialogue** form. Lyonnet’s 1939 article, *Chârié Kecharitoméne*\(^{45}\) and Klemens Stock’s 1980 article, *“Die Berufung Marias (Lk 1,26-38)”*,\(^{46}\) have been instrumental in illuminating the Annunciation passage as a dialogic event even if neither addressed the dialogical principle or its elements by name. Many of the articles cited in chapter three have also assisted in understanding the dialogal elements’ importance in the Annunciation. It is interesting to note that von Balthasar’s insight in considering the Annunciation scene as a dialogic event, carrying with it theological personhood for Mary as she accepts her mission, is a singular insight. Up until his development of Theo-drama which contains the dialogic event at its heart, neither theologians nor exegetes considered the Annunciation as a dialogic event.\(^{47}\) Nor were the Old and New Covenants viewed as dialogic events insuring personhood for those figures of salvation history. Even Buber, as was mentioned earlier, did not speak of covenant and its relationship to the dialogic principle. As was also stated earlier, dialogue is not listed in Catholic encyclopedias and dictionaries as a theological entry or entity; when it is mentioned at all, it is exclusively mentioned as a literary genre. Finally, in several well respected biblical encyclopedias, there is no discussion of dialogue in the articles on covenant.\(^{48}\) This observation helps to highlight the importance of von Balthasar’s work.

\(^{45}\) “Chârié, Kecharitoméne,” *Biblica* 20, 1939.
\(^{46}\) “La vocazione di Maria: Lc 1, 26-38” is the Italian version first published in *Biblica* in 1980 and in *Marianum* in 1983.
\(^{47}\) This means, of course, that the dialogic event is more than just a dialogue but includes those elements discussed throughout this study.

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The first part of this chapter laid out an application of Buber's dialogical principle as an aid to re-read the Annunciation. This second part will take up where Buber had to leave off -- at the coming of Christ, at the beginning of the New Covenant, where philosophical anthropology gives way and grows into philosophical/theological anthropology.

This suggested re-reading which occurs through von Balthasar's Theo-drama, reflects the fullness of truth (spoken of in chapter one) that can only come with the arrival of Truth itself. In addition to examining particular verses, there will be some discussion and elaboration of the content that may articulate further theological discussion, e.g., growth in personhood, maturing of mission, freedom's relation to mediation, relation's growing importance to being, and obedience as it relates to freedom.

Verses 26 and 27

En de to mēni to hekō apestalẹi ho aggelos Gabriēl apo tou theou eis polin tēs Galilaias hé onoma Nazareth pros parthenon emnēsteumenēn andri ho onoma Joseph ex oikou David kai to onoma tēs parthenou Mariam.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

An essential and obvious element of this proposed re-reading is the consideration that the entire Annunciation message is a dialogue. Some of the exegetes cited in chapter three do not even mention the dialogue in their articles or if they do mention it, they refer to it only as a literary genre or device.

Von Balthasar would point out that it is a dialogue between heaven and earth in a concrete literal way. Soares-Prabhu envisions the scene as tranquil, undramatic, almost domestic in tone, similar to Fra Angelico’s rendering. He comments on the surprising naturalness of the event. The dialogue between God (Gabriel) and Mary demonstrates a major point of von Balthasar -- God always takes the initiative in covenant-making and in dialogue. Yahweh is truly the absolute master who takes the initiative. Like all things that God does, dialogue bears a message. It is a revelation of God mediated by an angel. J.P. Audet sees the Annunciation carrying a message or that it is a message itself. There is a purpose to God’s intervention in the affairs of his creatures.

The first few verses serve to introduce the partners in the dialogue and to establish that a relationship is forming. Relation is one of the most salient features of the dialogic principle. We have seen how Mary’s covenantal relationship serves as a model for both

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50 O’Fearghail easily sees the words of the dialogue as suggesting its literary form that is a call narrative.
51 The following authors mention dialogue but with no discussion about the dialogue: K. Stock, G. Soares-Prabhu, W. Van Unnik, B. Prete, S. Lyonnet, E. Cole, M. Cambe, R. Brown, W. Vogels, and E. Corte. In Corte’s article he cites twenty-five articles by exegetes who wrote specifically on kecharitoméne but there is no discussion of dialogue in any of these articles. R. Meynet, and E. Delebecque do not mention the word dialogue in their articles.
54 L’annonce à Marie, 355.
the Old and New Covenant, which she filled in an exemplary way. Through the dialogue, relation, and all that it bears (friendship, love, freedom, responsibility), grows. The decision to create is purely gratuitous on God’s part. In a similar fashion, he decides to initiate a relation with particular persons. The Trinitarian conversation is to be reflected in God’s communication or conversation with creatures. “From all eternity the divine ‘conversation’ envisages the possibility of involving a non-divine world in the Trinity’s love.” God has decided to make his personal presence felt in the world. For von Balthasar this implies the notion of a “turning-toward,” a turning of the Other to the One and a turning of One to the Other. From such a relationship, reciprocity is born. In the fullness of time, God brings heaven and earth together in Jesus Christ. The same exchange of love that occurs in God is now open to the world. Now the creaturely ‘other-than-God” is plunged into the uncreated “Other-in-God” while maintaining that fundamental ‘distance’ which alone makes love possible. This all begins when God sends Gabriel to Mary. The divine conversation (heaven to earth) begins in their conversation. Looking at Mary, as a model, during this conversation with God (through Gabriel who speaks on behalf of God or speaks God’s “words,”) one rightfully can question how this occurs. Gabriel obviously is not God. He is a mediating agent. God had obviously decided to announce the birth of his Son by the message of an angel. Since so much of what occurs in the Annunciation serves as a model for all the following dialogues that entails joyful acceptance of mission through obedience to God’s will, the

56 Ibid., 509.
57 Ibid., 105.
58 Ibid.
decision to choose an angelophany may be part of that modeling. That is to say, mediation is the way that God chooses to reveal his presence and mission. In a later discussion this subject of mediation will be addressed again in connection with hearing one’s name called or listening to how God communicates the mission to the spiritual subject. She who receives the divine word becomes a word herself. The event that God chooses is the dialogue, interpersonal in nature, reflecting the Trinitarian dialogue. The dialogue closes the distance between God and creature and places them in relation. The Triune being of love places itself in relation in a I-Thou exchange. Man can exist only in relation to another human person because he repeats what is accomplished in the God-human relation. What occurs in this relation between God and Mary in the Annunciation is the self-revelation of God.

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High.”... “How shall this be, since I have no husband?”... “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God... For with God nothing will be impossible.” (cf Luke 1:31-37)

Through this dialogue Mary attains a union with God that exceeds all the expectations of the human spirit. Mary’s finiteness is open to God’s call and calls upon that infinity for completion.

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59 Ibid., 378.
61 Ibid., 17.
Here in this simple scene occurs the penultimate I-Thou relation. It is an encounter between God and humanity that occurs in the realm of the concrete and human senses where “flesh speaks to flesh.”\(^{63}\) Mary’s relation through the dialogue with God begins her fulfillment as a person and demonstrates the most personal and intimate relation upon which others can be modeled.\(^{64}\) Just as Mary’s I-Thou relation with God was based upon the I-Thou exchange between the Father and the Son, so all dialogues that follow will be an exchange between two persons in relation. Mary is the prototype of the I-Thou relation because she imitates the creativity of the Holy Spirit as he listened and received from the Father and the Son. She does likewise. She is other-centered, and open to be formed by the Word.\(^{65}\) Through von Balthasar’s understanding of the dialogic event as mirroring a Trinitarian conversation, he clearly points out how an individual subject comes into existence as a theological person through the dialogue. Scripture scholars and theologians make some connections between communion with God and mission or with relation with God and acceptance of task.\(^{66}\) Only a few have worked out a theory of dialogue that points to the I-Thou relation as a vehicle of personhood. Von Balthasar goes farther in pointing to Mary as the fulfillment of personhood and model of the I-Thou dialogue. Mary is the image, the figure, the total people of God in its relation with God.\(^{67}\)

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 313.

\(^{64}\) K. Stock states that the fundamental relationship with God that Mary enjoys is announced by Gabriel’s words.


\(^{66}\) Oliver Treanor, Mother of the Redeemer, Mother of the Redeemed, 28.

\(^{67}\) Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of Covenant, xii.
Verse 28

*Kai eisellthōn pros autēn eipen, Chaire, kecharitōmenē, ho kurios meta sou.*

He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you.'

Von Balthasar would see in this heavenly intervention the abrupt entrance of God into Mary's life (which will portend Christ's coming to act upon the stage of this world).[^68]

Situating the dialogue of the Annunciation in Theodrama and viewing Mary specifically in the dialogic event will support the hypothesis that the Virgin Mary is the prototype of the human person. The following sub-divisions of this final part of the study will address Mary as she is viewed in the covenant, as faithful disciple, as Daughter of Zion, in yes to mission, in obedience in freedom, as the stamped image borne by every person demonstrating that she is more than the pattern for all subsequent dialogic encounters with God, and in sharing in the salvific act.

The study began examining and demonstrating that the God-human relationship is first discovered through the biblical recounting of covenant. Through an exposition of biblical covenant stories and the form of covenants (secular and religious), the study introduced the idea that a dialogue was always a central ingredient, the very structure, of every covenantal God-human relationship. In the first chapter, Mary was portrayed as a

[^68]: "We find that always the initiative is God's." *The Gospel According to Saint Luke*. Introduction and Commentary by C.C. Martindale, S.J., 44. Not only abrupt but there is a connotation of a certain disruption that may change her life completely. Cf. Fearghus O’Fearghail, "The Literary Forms of Lk 1,5-25 and 1,26-38," 344.
model of personhood through her acceptance of God’s covenant, and her role and mission that resulted from that God-human relationship. Since the covenant is the primordial example of dialogic encounter by which an individual becomes a theological person, it follows that Mary, if she is a prototype, would have such a covenantal relation with God. Then it could be further hypothesized that her covenantal relationship would contain archetypal features that serve as a model for all the following covenantal and dialogic God-human relations. A human being is incapable of initiating and forming a relationship with God, nor could this human demand certain actions from God through stated terms or obligations. Only God by a sovereign, free decision can initiate a relationship. Such a covenant is gift produced by God’s love and built on reciprocity. God in relation to a creature is the “Utterly Other.”

The philosophical approach to covenant has been a legalistic one and is called *relatio.* This relation was asymmetric and non-reciprocal. A philosophical picture of God shows him to be immutable and incapable of entering a reciprocal relationship. The New Covenant, however, clearly reveals the demarcation implicit in the terms old and new. The New Covenant is rooted in the prophetic promise made by Jeremiah (31:31) that links the old and new. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel speak of the New Covenant engraved on the heart, a heart of flesh, that replaces the heart of stone of the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant refers to the descendants of Abraham, while the New Covenant, initiated

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70 Buber’s philosophical anthropology would follow this line of thinking which meant that relation was the key concept in the God-human relationship.
in the Annunciation by Mary’s yes, is a universal one extending to all nations. What was generic faith in the covenant with Abraham becomes specific faith with Mary. The Mosaic covenant made the Law the form of grace. The Law revealed God’s will. Jesus will become the form of grace in the New Covenant. A living fleshy heart replaces the stone tablets. In this New Covenant with Mary, God’s will is revealed not through the Law but through living flesh. Through Mary’s yes (fiat) a two-sided covenant is made. As the word suggests, God binds his own existence to the creature by taking on flesh himself. This forming of the New Covenant happens only through the I-Thou encounter between God and Mary.

Theology moved on beyond the monotheistic non-relational God of philosophy. It builds on the same philosophical concept of relatio. God reaches to man through a relationship (albeit asymmetric) of love. Mary in the Annunciation experiences a relational God who creates out of this God-human relation the concept of person. Theology baptized the philosophical concept of relatio. Cardinal Ratzinger points out that man who is made in the image of God means that our being is designed for being-in-relation. Covenant is the revelation of God’s self, “the splendor of his countenance.”

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72 Ibid., 647.
73 Ibid., 651.
74 Ibid.
All of Scripture rests on a “two-tiered testament” (old and new) addressed by God to man, a proclamation of God’s will to the world.\textsuperscript{75} The Annunciation is the most prominent of all of God’s addresses. Mary is, in a sense, the new Israel.\textsuperscript{76} As a devout Jewess, she follows the will of God presented by the Torah, now she will belong to a covenanted people of God through the faith-filled yes that inaugurates the New Covenant. Von Balthasar points out that Jesus drew the Old Covenant into the New to present it to the Father.\textsuperscript{77} Our connection to the world is Jesus. The Word, Jesus, exists before all dialogue and before any exercise of freedom on man’s part. The entire created world has come into existence through the Word, as Christian theology teaches. This Word is the foundation of being. Even if man refuses to speak to God, “This does not alter the fact that the ground of being the unalterable character of the creature, whether he wills it or not, is involved in a dialogue with God.”\textsuperscript{78}

Both covenants then were built on dialogue and involved dialogue with God. Mary now reveals this covenant of marital love, mentioned in the allusions to spousal relationship in the Old Testament. Yahweh of the New Testament is the same God whose heart was moved in Hosea’s vision. The marriage covenant that expressed fidelity between spouses is now an actual event in the Annunciation scene. The chosen Israel, the Daughter Zion, Mary is in a loving, spousal relation with God. Through a dialogic relation she becomes his partner, a personage of salvation history, in a new covenant. This Holy Spirit, that

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 635.  
\textsuperscript{76} Bertrand Buby, S.M., \textit{Mary, the Faithful Disciple}, 90.  
\textsuperscript{77} Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Theo-Drama}, Volume V, 106.  
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
will come upon Mary, this power of the Most High that will overshadow her will mediate God's mystery of the "paradigmatic covenant," the union of human nature and divine nature in the person of the incarnate Word." 79 Christ is the covenant in person, the mutual yes of God. The Holy Spirit is the "bond" of the New Covenant while Mary is the knot that ties the Old and New Covenant together.

Mary is the fulfillment of all that was promised in the prophets: Hosea (1:2, 2: 16-18), Jeremiah (2:2), Ezekiel (16:8), and Isaiah (50:1, 54: 5-8). God spoke in human language about a love that was divine. 80 The woman bride is Israel, God's chosen people. This covenant was cast in the mold of a spousal relation - a marriage. God is always faithful and Israel always unfaithful. Mary will be hailed as Israel, God's remnant and Daughter Zion. Through Mary, God begins a "new covenant with humanity." 81 Through Mary's virginal and maternal fiat, the New Covenant is fulfilled in "flesh and blood." If man is the image and likeness of God by his very nature as a person, then his greatness and his dignity are achieved in the covenant with God.... 82 Pope John Paul II in this statement directly supports the covenant as the setting for realizing or achieving personhood. In Mary's words, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, she expresses the spousal attitude that is fundamental in the New Covenant. By her fiat she is the model for every believer, man or woman, who henceforth welcomes the Spirit who gives substance to the Word in his or

79 Marc Ouellet, "The Spirit in the Life of the Trinity," Communio, 211.
80 Pope John Paul II, Mulieris Dignitatem, 81.
81 Ibid., 67.
82 Ibid., 36.
her own being and life. ("For to me to live is Christ," Ph. 1:21)\(^{83}\) These words reflect her frame of mind that testify to her openness of spirit. As a handmaid, she gives herself as a gift to God.\(^{84}\)

Mary’s faith\(^{85}\) expressed in these words serves as a model for God’s pilgrim people. As the Second Vatican Council asserts, “Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation... Hence when she is being preached and venerated, she summons the faithful to her Son and his sacrifice and to love for the Father.”\(^{86}\) It is her faith that calls others to faith. For Mary’s role in salvation history does not depend primarily on her physical motherhood but on the faith assent which made motherhood possible.\(^{87}\) At the Annunciation, Mary exercised this faith at the decisive moment when it was needed to prompt her to say yes through the Holy Spirit’s action. Mary’s faith can again be compared to Abraham’s. Abraham’s faith constituted the beginning of the Old Covenant; Mary’s faith at the Annunciation began the New Covenant. Abraham exercised faith in the face of the promise to be the father of nations when in his old age he had sired no children. Mary in the face of virginity, believed that through the power of the Holy Spirit she would become the mother of God’s son. Mary as exemplar exercised individual and communal faith. As representative of the Old she represents the faith of Israel as a people. Representing the New Covenant she received the call to discipleship as an

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\(^{83}\) Geneviève Honoré-Lainé, “La Femme et le Mystère de l’Alliance,” 43.

\(^{84}\) Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 55.

\(^{85}\) Faith highlights the dialogal elements of “yes” to mission and freedom.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 41.

individual. Both corporately and individually Mary is the image of a new humanity consenting to God, "the Spouse of the Lamb." Mary is a model of faith for both Old Testament and New Testament. She fulfills the prophetic promise of Jeremiah and Ezekiel of the Old by her "spousal" relation with God reflected in her fleshy heart of love and compassion. She is a model for all members of the New Testament as she forms a covenantal relation founded on faith that produces an intimate and personal relation with God not possible through the Old Covenant. Now she represents all of the people of God as the partner in the New Covenant as the "spouse" of God.

The previous discussion of Mary as the figure representing the people of the Old Testament and the spouse of God in the New reflects upon Mary’s role as bridge between the covenant, the symbol of both covenants, and the fulfillment of God’s covenant with his people. She is a communal figure and at the same time an individual of singular importance in salvation history. Mary is, at times, referred to as a corporate personality.

Her role as Daughter of Zion is important in the context of this study which proposes her as the fulfillment of person. Each time that it can be demonstrated that she has

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89 Geneviève Honoré-Lainé, La Femme et le Mystère de l’Alliance, 43.
90 Ibid., 11.
92 This role highlights dialogal element of mission and explicates covenant as an example of dialogue.
fulfilled one of her titles dear to either the people of the Old or New Testament, it lends support to Mary being the fulfillment of person and a model for personhood. Von Balthasar suggests that the highest anonymity generates the highest expression of personality which, in turn, leads to universality. As each title, ‘Servant of the Lord,’ ‘Faithful Disciple,’ ‘Daughter of Zion’ and ‘New Eve’ is adequately proven to be fulfilled in Mary there is a cumulative and convincing effect regarding the fullness of personhood and exemplar and prototype for the human person. This universality applies to all spiritual subjects.

Daughter of Zion comes to mind with Gabriel’s words in verse 28 “Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Modeled on Zephaniah 3:14-17: Mary is the Daughter of Zion addressed there. De la Potterie explains the significance of this title as it relates to the Covenant as portrayed in the Old Testament. This title and image is important in this study because it refers directly to the spousal theme. Mary is the “Favored One” because she is the mother of the Messiah. If she is truly the “Daughter of Zion,” it is because she is fully virginal. Mary is to represent all the people of the Old Testament whom God has chosen for himself and whom he loves as a jealous lover loves his spouse. Although some biblical scholars cannot agree with Mary being the Daughter of Zion, many do refer to her under this title and this belief has gained wide and popular

94 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Daughter Zion, 42. Cf. S. Lyonnet, Châiré, Kecharitoméne.
95 Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant, xxiv-xxx.
97 Those scholars that favor the interpretation of Mary as the Daughter of Zion are R. Laurentin, L. Deiss, J. McHugh, S. Lyonnet, E.G. Mori, B. Rigaux, P. Benoit, A. Serra and I. De la Potterie. A.G. Herbert, H.
acceptance as seen in the writings of Pope John Paul II and in the universal catechism of the Catholic Church. Mary is the True Israel in whom the Old and New Covenant, Israel and Church, are one. In verse 28, we see Mary totally transformed by God’s grace. Fr. Buby comments on the richness of the mysteries contained in this one verse: “Her virginity, her holiness, her divine maternity, and the symbolism of the Daughter of Zion are implied.” Mary, the Daughter of Zion is to rejoice, the Daughter of Jerusalem is not to fear. The abstract personification of Israel is actualized in the person of Mary. “The dwelling of Yahweh in the daughter of Zion is actualized in the mystery of the virginal conception.”

The connection of Mary with others here is found in kecharitoméne, her new name. Just as the word shows her election before all time, so every spiritual subject becomes a person and receives an identity through God’s election. God desires to save man through a sharing in his own life. Mary, because of being preserved from all sin and being transformed by grace, shares most deeply in this supernatural life. She is the pattern for all persons then. Her extraordinary uniqueness of an exalted singular call and being preserved from the taint of original sin serves simultaneously as a sign of similarity and dissimilarity. The dissimilarity is obvious. The similarity between Mary and all other

Sahlin, and M. Thurian are three Protestant scholars who see Mary as the personification of the Daughter of Zion. Cf. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Daughter of Zion, 12.

98 John Paul II, Redemptoris Mater, No. 47.
99 No. 489 “After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in her[Mary] the exalted Daughter of Sion, and the new plan of salvation is established.”
100 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Daughter Zion, 43.
101 Bertrand Buby, S.M., Mary of Galilee, Volume I, 73.
103 Ibid.
creatures emphasizes God’s election, similar love, and desire to be in relationship. Mankind remains undaunted by her being called “full of grace” because all mankind receives God himself and the fullness of his grace. She is a prototype for all persons, who though not full of grace, receive God’s similar spiritual blessings and gifts. This eternal gift, that all share in, is the “seed of holiness” first planted in Mary but also is deposited in each follower of Christ.

“In the eyes of the first generation of Christians, the Mother of Jesus was configured as the ideal incarnation of the Daughter of Zion. In her, an individual person, the vocation of Zion-Jerusalem and of all Israel as the People of the Covenant matured in an exemplary fashion. As the early Christians then discovered in Mary the embodiment of the vocation of Daughter Zion, modern day Christians discover in Mary the embodiment of personhood through vocation. Just as she, an individual person, could contain and bring to maturity in herself the vocation of all the people of God’s covenant, she can today be hailed as the fulfillment of personhood and an exemplary person of election and call.

_Châiré_ is related to the significant Old Testament passages proclaiming messianic joy to the Daughter of Zion. Here in verse 28 Gabriel calls Mary to rejoice as the eschatological Daughter of Zion. As the bridge between both Testaments or covenants, Mary is to

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104 Ibid.
105 This quote is from Aristide Serra’s _E C’era la Madre di Gesù_ as quoted in Bertrand Buby’s _Daughter of Zion: A Symbol for Jewish-Catholic Dialogue._
rejoice at the closing of one and the opening of the other that ushers in Messianic peace. She is to be joyful at the fulfillment of the Old Testament whom she represents. This is indeed a special call to joy for through this dialogue she becomes the “spouse” of God.

As with all of Theo-drama, we begin this sub-section on mission by referring to Christ. Christ has made himself the exemplar of our nature and it is in him that we possess this nature. Mary, as seen in the Annunciation, is the perfect example of that nature. She is the closest to approximating Christ as she fulfills her mission and becomes one with it in a singularly unique manner. In chapter three, the discussion points out how her new name, kecharitoméne reveals her mission. By saying that this name carries the “whole message” of the Annunciation means that this word captures all the necessary elements of personhood: to be in relation, to do God’s will, to be called or given a vocation, to be prepared in advance for the task. Hypothesis two speaks of the person receiving fulfillment of personhood through the dialogue which Mary does receive. The hallmark of von Balthasar’s dialogic event by which an individual subject becomes a theological person is saying yes to God’s mission. Mary’s yes in the face of impossibility is the best example of faith and trust that we possess. Mary’s fiat rings out not just for God but for all who follow, who are also unique and privileged. “In the Old Testament everyone was what he was by his own efforts; in the New Covenant we are what the Lord is…”

109 Ibid.
In this sentence von Balthasar captures how mission is to be viewed. In the Old, individuals decided and chose their direction (similar to Buber’s view). Not so in the New where we become what Jesus is -- a yes to whatever the Father asks. Mary imitates this being all “yes” for God. It is Christ who gives the strength to respond to our personal destiny. In Jesus there was perfect identity of person and mission. In Mary there is the closest approximation to this identity. *Kecharitoméne* refers to the mission for which she has been prepared in advance. Her entire life, then, has been in preparation for saying yes to the call and mission. Like Jeremiah, Mary has been equipped from the womb for mission. Both were fit for the mission at the time of their call. *Kecharitoméne* suggests that through God’s action, Mary is prepared and ready to accept the mission that is now to be given to her. It suggests that others who wish to follow in her footsteps might consider that parts of their lives have been in preparation for a mission or call. Theodrama engages the subject in dramatic dialogue to free one from self and one’s own plans and designs in order to say yes to what God has in store for each person. Mary is the perfect example of being freed from self. Through the dialogue God himself leads the person to a greater self-awareness and at the same time to those choices that lead to a God-chosen task. The person receives its specific and individualized dignity when it takes on the mission which carries a unique theological meaning.

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110 Fearghus O’Fearghail, “The Literary Forms of Lk 1,5-25 and 1,26-38,” 333.
111 Johann Roten, S.M., “Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Anthropology in Light of His Marian Thinking,” 327.
Johann Roten states, “In the human person there is no identity between election from eternity and the actual call and mission in time and space.”112 This statement holds many possibilities. It can refer to God’s ability to make adjustments to a person’s playing different roles since, by free will, the individual often decides on life direction and tasks that God had not selected. However, Mary, unlike all others who have fallen short of totally accepting the mission, has attained the highest degree of personhood (her unique mission). Of all the saints who live out the theodramatic existence, Mary has reached the fullness of personhood by her identifying completely with her mission. Through the dialogue Mary learns what God’s will is for her, her mission in life. Mary reaches the highest degree of personhood because she defines herself in accord with God’s will. She is named by God and she defines herself by reformulating God’s wishes. “I am the handmaid of the Lord” beautifully reflects Mary’s reformulation. In this brief dialogic encounter she sees herself in a new light as a person. In her humble acceptance mission and person come together. Going from being named by God to naming herself, Mary imitates Jesus in whom person and mission are one. It might also suggest that the mission is malleable - God allows the person to enter into the mission all the while becoming more and more who they should be, by a life of faith and charity. There is an approximation to the ideal mission or what some would say is what God prefers. One must be careful not to anthropomorphize God in these considerations. At best we see “through a glass darkly.” (1 Cor. 13:12)

112 Ibid., 329.
The topic of mission raises questions about God’s will. What does the Lord intend for each person? Each person desires to know so that he or she might acquiesce. One thing that is known is that God’s will is relational as the Holy Spirit is transcendentally relational. It is the Holy Spirit who distributes mission. When one looks at Mary in the Annunciation as she becomes a theological person in relationship with God through acceptance of her most unique mission, there is a tendency to view her as so far “above” the ordinary that she could not be imitated. The Holy Spirit, according to von Balthasar, calls everyone in some fashion, even if it is only to a personal identity. When God creates us he names us and tells us who we are for him. For many individuals there is no other strong call on their lives. For some, God’s will concerning a particular choice is more related to a general non-specific call. Dealing with mission and call in a practical manner, leads us to believe that some have major roles and clear direction and obvious calls (Moses, Abraham, David, Peter) while others are never aware of a specific call. Roles are the end point for some who never move on to proffered mission. Person is the new creation wrought in Theo-drama. Mary, in the Annunciation, is a model of transparency and availability that can be imitated as she gives herself over to the mission.

The dramatic tension witnessed in Mary’s consternation over the greeting and the promises made suggests the tension that most individuals experience in yielding to God’s challenge versus their own preferences and plans. Again she is the model of yielding immediately. Once she realized that she had been commissioned for the task, she assents. In doing so, Mary is constituted a person. Although the term model or exemplar applies
to Mary throughout this chapter, it is good to keep in mind that Mary relates to us as individual persons. She seeks a filial response to her motherly attention and love as the person she is, and not as a model.\textsuperscript{113} Since so much of God’s life is hidden, it is not surprising to find that one’s mission is often hidden. God’s grace is needed to discern God’s will, since it is beyond the spiritual and intellectual faculties of the soul to discern this divine process of mission.\textsuperscript{114}

We all share in the one single mission of Christ. In a somewhat ambiguous statement, von Balthasar speaks of God’s intention of achieving a specific purpose through a certain mission, but that he bestows the \textit{whole} mission and within this whole is contained the specific purpose.\textsuperscript{115} As Mary’s mission came from eternity, so does every mission. Instead of a mission that is highly scripted, to be received as a tidy package, von Balthasar instead speaks of the mission that allows for creativity, a mission arising out of Christ’s own center. This makes all missions important (not peripheral) and related to Christ’s anointed mission. All the elements of mission are permeated by potentiality.\textsuperscript{116} All missions are created for salvation history and are made in heaven.

Von Balthasar envisions these eternal missions to be of such import that even in heaven the personal mission will remain, expanded but not abolished.\textsuperscript{117} Since mission

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{113} Oliver Treanor, \textit{Mother of the Redeemer, Mother of the Redeemed}, 81.

\textsuperscript{114} Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Theo-Drama}, Volume V, 390.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 393.

\textsuperscript{116} Ignace de la Potterie refers to \textit{kecharitoméne} as the source of Mary’s potentiality. Cf. Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., \textit{“Kecharitoméne en Luc 1,28 Étude exégétique et théologique.”}

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 414.
\end{footnotes}
constitutes our very core as theological persons, it follows that these missions would continue to be part of us. Because the mission is ultimately Christological, there is another good reason why this heavenly appointed mission would remain associated with our person and personality. Mary is again the pattern and prototype since she reigns in heaven, interceding for her children, still exercising her ever-growing mission.

One final idea that von Balthasar develops in his last volume of Theo-drama is the willingness to give up personal uniqueness for the purpose of God’s mission. As always, von Balthasar looks to Trinitarian life as the model of what happens in this world. “There is a certain quality of ‘renunciation’ in the eternal Trinitarian life; it is seen in the very fact that ‘the Father, renouncing his uniqueness, generates the Son out of his own subsistence,’ which he designated a ‘presacrifice.’” Mary was willing in the Annunciation to place aside her uniqueness as a woman, living the virginal life and possibly believing that it might always be so (which would definitely make her unique in the history of Jewish women). She was willing to renounce it for the sake of the mission being offered to her by God. In doing so there is a universal message for all persons to set aside plans and personal wishes in order to choose what God has chosen for them, e.g., von Balthasar’s Black Forest experience when he realized that he had only to obey.

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118 This would certainly be an alien thought to Buber who considered uniqueness as the most singular contributor to personhood in the dialogic principle.
Von Balthasar’s insight in the Black Forest was an initial one that lead to other “yeses” regarding his own growth in personhood. Mary is an example in this area also, since her fiat was just the beginning of many such moments in her journey to the fullness of personhood. Through prayer and life events she heard the “muted mediation” speaking to her. Although the message of the angel may have been very clear, her subsequent dealings with God who communicates with his creatures may not have been so easy to discern. “Muted-mediation” refers to this indirect communication from God. The always interesting topic of discernment deals with this subject of how to hear God’s will in one’s own life. Our vocation is God’s will for us. By this time in the history of Christianity it is agreed upon that God is free to call individuals in specific ways (like the prophets and apostles) or in general ways (like so many others of seeming less importance). Von Balthasar sees that even Jesus’ mission left room for him to shape it himself. His followers have the same opportunity and God is responsive to individual’s wrong turns and poor choices. “Divine providence affects us every instant of our sojourn, each step along the way, in every facet of our lives.”

This does not mean that God wills specifically and absolutely everything that happens to us. This freedom that persons have in Christ allows for an interaction between them and divine providence. As an immanent God, he is personally interested in his creatures and reacts and responds to their plights, choices and prayers. Such responsiveness does not detract from the Lord’s transcendence. Uniqueness of each person continues to be manifested in each one’s growth in personhood.

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120 F. Nemeck and M. Coombs, Called By God: A Theology of Vocation and Lifelong Commitment, 21.
Verse 38

eipen de Mariam, Idou hē doule kuriou; genoito moi kata to réma sou. kai apelthen ap autēs ho aggelos.

'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her."

Mary exercises her freedom as recounted in this verse. She does so joyfully. "The joyous 'yes' of Mary to the angels message, which became exemplary of our salvation by bringing Christ into the world, thus sets the pattern (emphasis mine) for the creaturely cooperation in faith and fidelity..."121 She is freely choosing the mission that God as the director of the Theo-drama has chosen for her. Now that Gabriel has spoken, she puts her trust in this "muted-mediation" believing that it is God who invites her to choose. There is a readiness in Mary to accept the message.122

A great responsibility lies upon Mary as she hears the words.123 Although she is free to say no and to oppose God's will, she does not.124 God is perfectly free to create creatures who can exercise their free will in opposition to the divine will.125 Such is the greatness of God, and Mary rightfully bows before him in humility, realizing that it is this sovereign God, who is addressing her in this I-Thou dialogue. God makes room for the

123 Ibid., 29.
124 "Les récits de vocation des prophètes," 24. She keeps her full liberty and, as in the case of Jonah, could have refused.
exercise of the creature’s freedom. It is important to note that he sent Gabriel as a form of mediation so as not to unduly influence or overwhelm Mary by his presence. This allows for the greater exercise of freedom on Mary’s part. A purely philosophical anthropology would not be able to account for such a God who freely makes human beings with complete freedom. “The human person’s freedom is only fully illuminated when it is seen to be bound up with a divine and personal freedom that is at pains to promote man’s freedom.”

Von Balthasar sees personhood resulting from the I-Thou relationship and similarly he can only see human freedom as interpersonal or related to others. Finite freedom is communal. This is graphically shown in the Annunciation scene, since Mary’s yes had universal repercussions. Both mission and freedom have social dimensions.

This God who manifests himself as self-surrender, self-giving and reciprocal love expects the same from human persons. They, like him, are to do it freely, out of love. Mary’s yes shows this inter-relationship between infinite and finite freedom. God transformed her by his grace bestowing complete freedom and she returns herself to him in self-surrender. As the dialogue between Mary and God deepens, there is a greater intimacy which allows for the greatest exercise of liberty. “…From the theodramatic point of view, we cannot

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126 Ibid., 198.

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illuminate the structure of finite freedom without the light that radiates from Christ and falls on the divine freedom.”

Everything is viewed in a different light in Theo-drama. Through Jesus’ **obedience**, God the Father causes divine things to be understood in a human way. In the flesh of Jesus the divine attributes become visible to us in a positive manner. Obedience at any cost is the free way of choosing. Mary was obedient because of her faith. S. Lyonnet remarks that Mary’s words “be it done unto me according to your word” is an act of obedience in response to God’s order, a great act of faith in God’s word. Jesus’ obedience and all his acts of subjection gives freedom so all persons may exercise obedience and embrace subjection. Mary preserved from sin by the merits of the suffering, death and resurrection of her son is also marked with his sign as an obedient servant. Mary’s life is referred to as a way of the obedience of faith. Mary gives herself over in obedience to the mission offered by God. As seen in this scene it is not an uninformed obedience. She listened, questioned and then believed. As Mary grew in personhood, as her maturity increased by living out her mission, so did her obedient faith grow. Her faith found expression in obedience. In all these aspects Mary is a **model** for the human race. Whatever struggle she experienced inwardly during the exchange with Gabriel which would include her desire to be self-realized, gave way to obedience as a finite subject. There is never

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128 Ibid., 206.
131 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, No. 16.
compulsion on God’s side. In her freedom to choose, Mary becomes a genuine partner in
dialogue with God. Made in God’s image means made for God with his total freedom as
a gift. Mary was completely open to what God had in store for her, realizing that it is
God who is the giver of such free openness. Mary’s finite freedom was fulfilled only
within the context of infinite freedom. The Annunciation highlights this truth and holds
it up as a truth for all dialogic encounters. In the Annunciation, the dawn of the New
Testament, infinite freedom (in the sense of personal command of oneself) appears.¹³³
Infinite freedom appears on the stage in the person of Jesus Christ’s “lowliness” and
“obedience unto death.”¹³⁴

Mary’s openness is a result of her faith. Mary who is without child (barren in one sense)
is the blessed one who becomes a sign of grace. She is the sign of what is truly fruitful
and salvific: the “ready openness which submits itself to God’s will.”¹³⁵ God’s
fruitfulness and salvation are brought forth in the Word and for that reason in the human
realm, faith must be verbalized so that God’s salvific power might fully unfold.¹³⁶ The
cross is the ultimate language spoken in Theo-drama. It, too, had to be spoken and
accomplished to bring about salvation. The language of the cross is love. If Mary is both
the archetype of all persons in the God-human relation and the mark upon every facet of
anthropological activity, then her openness bringing forth fruitfulness means that every
person’s openness can bring forth fruitfulness, everyone’s openness is salvific. Faith is a

¹³⁴ Ibid., 250.
¹³⁵ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Daughter Zion, 48.
free, loving, trusting commitment of oneself to the word of another. Faith is relational and has social implications for we are to pass it onto others, that God’s testimony might be embraced by many and become even more fruitful. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains how each believer, having received the faith from others, has an obligation to hand it on. “I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith.”

Having faith, as Mary did, in God’s word concerning the mission of being the mother of the Lord, resulted in her being open to the word and mission which effected a salvific action. The Marian watermark is stamped upon all those who say yes to mission. Every theological person having said yes to God bears this Marian mark. Not only is she the model of the human person, but God places her “projecting design” upon each person.

*Kecharitoméne* connotes much of what has just been stated. It indicates the supernatural munificence from which Mary benefits by being chosen and designed to be the mother of Christ.

“If this election is fundamental for the accomplishment of God’s salvific designs for humanity, and if the eternal choice in Christ and the vocation to the dignity of adopted children is the destiny of everyone, then the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Hence also the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ.”

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138 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 166.
Mary shared in the “salvific and sanctifying grace” which had its beginning in the “Beloved.” She is a symbol to all, an encouragement that says that all can share in salvific action with Christ.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown with the exposition of each Balthasarian sub-section that theology is a participation in the knowledge that God has of himself. All theology involves the whole man Jesus through whom comes the knowledge of God. Theology impacts upon anthropology, making anthropology subordinate to God’s descending movement “which invites an adequate response from his creature a response of adoration and obedience within the context of the covenant.” This brief summary of von Balthasar’s theology helps to situate anthropology in relation to Christology. The phrase ‘context of the covenant’ might be considered an oblique reference to the relationship found in the I-Thou dialogue.

The Annunciation itself might be considered a Scriptural summarization containing the just mentioned elements of von Balthasar’s theology, i.e., God’s descending movement,

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140 Ibid., No. 10.
inviting adequate response from creature, a response of adoration and obedience, all of which occurs within the context of the covenant or dialogue. It reveals an anthropology based on the creature’s exercise of free will in the reception of grace situated in an I-Thou relationship in which God and Mary (representing all creatures) are free partners. All anthropology flows from the figure of Christ who is the objective evidence of God’s revelation as absolute love.\footnote{Ibid., 277.}

Because the Virgin Mary fulfills the above-mentioned elements of von Balthasar’s theology in an archetypal fashion, her response to God in the dialogic event is considered the exemplary event of the God-human relation. From the exemplary interplay between Trinitarian freedom and Mary’s human freedom, the theological person emerges. Jesus provides the stage upon which this sacred Theo-drama is played. He is the central actor and all anthropology looks to him as the center of revelation that reveals true identity of each person. This image of God is based on the analogy of being that allows for the distinction between God and creature while at the same time the analogy surpasses the distinction in that love which is the gift of grace and “which comes from the unity of the divine essence.”\footnote{Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Theo-Drama}, Volume V, 400.} Von Balthasar’s theology calls for the response of a human and personal subject to a word that descends from God. God as Source speaks to his creature in an eternal I-Thou relationship made possible by the analogy of being and a katalogy of love.\footnote{Marc Ouellet, “The Message of Balthasar’s Theology to Modern Theology,” \textit{Communio}, 287.} This I-Thou relationship, the God-human relation, allows theology to present
through theo-dramatic existence a personalist and liberating Trinitarian anthropology. Mary is the archetype at every level of understanding of von Balthasar's still unfolding theo-dramatic existence.

Looking at the Annunciation with eyes of faith, those who ponder Scripture in a renewed contemplation find truth in light of Trinitarian love. This study began in the pursuit of the truth about the human person. Hypothesis one and two showed that the dialogue helps to comprehend the truth as regards to the concept of person. The two hypotheses were substantially supported by chapters one and two by examining the dialogal structure of covenant relationship and the philosophical issues that relate to the essential dialogal elements found in all dialogic events. The extensive work of Buber and von Balthasar also supported hypothesis one and two and adequately demonstrated the appropriateness and usefulness of the dialogic principle as a vehicle of personhood.

Chapters three and four support the hypotheses claiming Mary as the fulfillment and prototype of the human person. The work of both Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar have provided the philosophical, theological and anthropological backdrop for the discovery of the dialogic principle as the bearer of personhood. This principle developed by Buber in ingenuity and brilliance was then built upon by von Balthasar who set the dialogic event within his all-encompassing Theo-drama. The combined influence of these two men's work has lead von Balthasar to believe that Mary is model and prototype for all persons. He moves even beyond that belief to express that her
interaction with God, as fulfilled in the Annunciation event, serves as the exemplary event of the God-human relation. The very essence of the God-human relation is best understood and reflected in Mary’s relationship as captured in the Annunciation. This study acknowledges Martin Buber’s work and Hans Urs von Balthasar’s advancement and development of all the elements of the dialogic principle that have supported this proposed re-reading of the Annunciation.

“When Mary received the angel’s announcement that the Spirit will overshadow her and she will bear a child, ‘her experience inundates her knowledge, with the result that she receives more insight, and at the same time everything becomes more mysterious than she thought. The mystery grows in her: it becomes brighter and yet accumulates into a store of knowledge that is undisclosed, a treasure from which all generations of the Church will draw sustenance in order to penetrate into her mystery. They will never come to an end. Every believer who sense that he has a mission to illuminate aspects of divine revelation needs to possess both a deeper knowledge and a deeper awareness of the mystery.’”145

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