

THE DISTORTION OF THE DIALOGUE

When Man Becomes the Beginning



INTRODUCTION

If the order of the Divine Dialogue is given, if God speaks first, if man is revealed, if Christ mediates and fulfils, then it follows that this order may also be **distorted**.

The distortion does not ordinarily appear as denial. It appears as **displacement**.

The language of faith remains: God is named, prayer is encouraged, Scripture is invoked. And yet the structure is altered.

What is given in Scripture as:

God speaks
Man is revealed
Christ mediates and fulfils

is quietly reconfigured as:

man speaks → God receives → (Christ assumed)

This inversion is rarely declared. It is **felt**. And because it is felt rather than examined, it is often accepted as natural. What bypasses the intellect also bypasses the intellect's capacity for self-correction. The disorder persists precisely because it does not present itself as disorder.



I. THE INVERSION OF BEGINNING

A great deal of contemporary religious expression begins not with God, but with the condition of man. It begins with experience, with struggle, with interior state. From there, it turns toward God.

This movement appears reasonable. It is not without truth. But it reverses the order.

For Scripture does not begin with man's condition, but with God's act:

"In the beginning God created..." (Genesis 1:1, DR)

And not only created but **spoke**.

"God said..." (Genesis 1, DR)

The difference is decisive. When man begins, God becomes the answer to a question, the fulfilment of a need, the response to an initiative. He is answerable to the question that produced

Him. But when God begins, man is addressed, summoned, placed within a word not his own. He does not discover; he is found. The first distortion is simply the reversal of this: man installs himself at the origin of what should begin elsewhere.



II. THE REPLACEMENT OF TRUTH WITH SINCERITY

From this inversion follows a second movement. If man begins, then the emphasis falls naturally upon sincerity, authenticity, interior disposition. The call becomes: “Come as you are.”

This is not false. But it is incomplete.

For Scripture does not begin with man presenting himself, but with God calling him forth:

“Adam, where art thou?” (Genesis 3:9, DR)

This question is not answered by sincerity alone. Adam speaks. He speaks truth in part. But he remains concealed.

“I was afraid... and I hid myself.” (Genesis 3:10, DR)

Thus sincerity, even when real, does not yet constitute truth. Adam is present, but concealed. He speaks, but remains hidden. This is the shape of the second distortion: man is permitted to remain in the place he has chosen, to offer what he wishes to offer, and to call it response. Confession becomes partial; prayer becomes self-expression; encounter becomes interior rather than real.



III. NEARNESS WITHOUT EXPOSURE

A third development follows. God is presented as always near, always accessible, always ready to receive. This too is grounded in Scripture:

“The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him...” (Psalm 144:18, DR)

Yet in Scripture, nearness is never neutral. When God draws near, Adam is exposed; Isaiah cries “Woe is me...” (Isaiah 6:5, DR); Peter falls: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man...” (Luke 5:8, DR). The divine approach does not comfort before it discloses. It discloses, and the

comfort, where it comes, comes after. In the distorted form, this sequence is reversed: God is near, but man is not brought into the light of that nearness. Presence is affirmed; transformation is absent.



IV. CHRIST WITHOUT MEDIATION

At this point, the distortion reaches its most serious form. Christ is not denied. He may be named, honoured, assumed. But His function is altered.

He is no longer the necessary mediator of the dialogue. He becomes instead example, companion, reassurance. The relationship appears immediate: man speaks, God receives, God responds. But Scripture declares:

“No man cometh to the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6, DR)

“One mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5, DR)

Christ does not merely assist man’s approach. He **is the approach**. He does not improve the response. He **makes the response possible**.

And not only in the Cross, but in the Resurrection. The response He offers is not only sufficient, but also **vindicated, living, and enduring**. It does not remain in the past as a completed act that man must reach across time to appropriate. The Risen Christ continues to mediate, not as memory, not as ideal, but as one who lives to intercede, as the Letter to the Hebrews insists (Hebrews 7:25, DR). This means that the distortion of Christ’s role is not merely a historical misreading. It is a present one. To reduce Him to example or companion is to misunderstand not only what He did but what He does, now, in every prayer, every reading of Scripture, every act of worship. He is not a figure one looks back to for inspiration. He is the living mediator into whom man is, by grace, incorporated: the vine whose life the branches receive not as memory but as present nourishment.

What this means in practice is that Christ is retained in language but removed from structure. He is named in the prayer, but the prayer does not pass through Him. He is honoured in the sermon, but the sermon does not depend on His mediation. Grace, so understood, becomes assistance rather than necessity; prayer becomes expression rather than participation in something already accomplished.



V. A CASE STUDY IN DISTORTION

Consider the structure implicit in much contemporary devotional address, the kind encountered in pastoral letters, popular spirituality, and informal catechesis across many traditions. Its individual claims are often true. Its structural movement is not.

The content runs something like this: God is near; whatever we face, we may seek Him; we must trust Him sincerely; we come as we are; we need not be ready, only honest; God receives us as we are.

There is truth in every line. And yet the structure reveals something else. The movement is: man's condition, man's sincerity, man's approach, God's response.

What is absent? The divine summons. The exposure of man. The necessity of mediation.

God is near but does not call. Man speaks but is not revealed. Christ is not denied but not required. This is not false religion. It is **misordered religion**. And because it retains the language of truth, it is more difficult to detect.

Note what the same content looks like when rightly ordered. "God has called you, and that call has found you here in your condition. Come as you are, not because your condition is where the story ends, but because it is where God's address has reached you. He does not receive you in spite of the truth about you; He receives you into it. And the way to the Father is through the one who has already made the answer: Christ, whose offering has accomplished what no sincerity could achieve." The individual elements are not so different. The order is everything.



VI. THE RESULTING FORM

When these distortions converge, what emerges is a form of religion that is genuinely pursuing real goods. The desire for accessibility is not wrong; the instinct that faith must connect with lived experience is not wrong; the sense that God is near and that the heart must be moved as well as the mind is not wrong. These goods are real. The error is not in pursuing them but in pursuing them outside the order that alone makes them available.

And so what emerges is a form of religion that is not false in its individual elements but disordered in its structure. It is accessible because it begins where man is and does not insist that he move. It is affirming because it does not press the question of what he is being affirmed toward. It is emotionally resonant because the emotions it reaches are those man already has,

not those that encounter with truth would produce. Experience precedes revelation; sincerity stands in for truth; nearness arrives without the cost of being known.

What this form cannot do is restore the Divine Dialogue, because it does not begin where the dialogue begins. It comforts, but comfort that does not first confront is not comfort in the scriptural sense; it is insulation. It invites, but the invitation arrives without the summons that would make it urgent. It speaks of God's presence, but a presence that costs nothing to enter is not the presence that Scripture describes. Something is being offered. It is not nothing. But it is not enough.



VII. THE RESTORATION OF ORDER

The correction is not rejection, but **reordering**. What is true must be retained but placed rightly.

The correction does not require discarding what the distorted form has preserved. It requires placing it rightly. That man may come as he is: true, and necessary. But the reason he may come is that he has been called, and the call precedes the coming. That God is near: true, and the ground of all prayer. But nearness in Scripture is never without disclosure; the God who draws near is the God who asks "Where art thou?" and waits for an honest answer. That sincerity matters: true, and not to be scorned. But sincerity is the quality of an approach, not the measure of its sufficiency; it must yield to truth or remain a better-furnished form of concealment. That Christ is present: true, and the centre of everything. But present as mediator, not as companion alongside a dialogue that would proceed without Him.

Thus, the order is restored:

God speaks
Man is revealed
Christ mediates and fulfils

Only within this order is nearness real, is prayer true, is encounter transformative.

It is worth noting, finally, that this reordering is not a burden disguised as good news. It is good news disguised, at first, as a demand. To be told that God speaks first is to be relieved of the unbearable weight of having to initiate contact with the infinite. To be told that man is called out of hiding is to be told that the hiding need not be permanent, that what has been concealed since the fall can stand in the open without being destroyed. To be told that Christ makes the response is to be told that what was impossible has been accomplished, and that what is required now is not achievement but reception. The misordered form of religion asks much of man at the level of effort and gives him little at the level of ground to stand on. The restored order asks something harder, the relinquishment of the self as origin, and in return gives him

something he could not have given himself: a place within the dialogue that God has already fulfilled.



CONCLUSION

The distortion of the Divine Dialogue does not consist in removing God, but in **repositioning Him**.

It begins by placing man first. It continues by softening truth into sincerity. It culminates by rendering Christ unnecessary in practice.

The language remains. And where the structure is altered, the dialogue is no longer true.

Restoration requires not new expression, but right order.

God must speak.

Man must be revealed.

Christ must mediate.

Only then does man truly speak.

