

Word and Response: A Metaphor of Redemption

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Abstract

At the heart of the Christian faith and the Redemptorist charism is the promise and proclamation of redemption. The challenge for the Church and for theology has been to communicate and to share this Good News in an effective manner with the people of every time and culture.

However, the mysteries of faith can only be expressed through narratives and metaphors despite their limitations. The history of theology has offered many narratives and metaphors in an attempt to articulate the Christian experience of redemption. Today, however, some of these narratives no longer speak to the consciousness of people and every generation will need to comprehend the experience of redemption in a way that is meaningful to itself while remaining faithful to the Christian tradition.

What meaningful narrative can we propose for the world today? The writer proposes the word and response model and leitmotif of responsibility of Bernard Häring.

The Life and Work of Bernard Haring

The Redemptorist moral theologian Bernard Häring believed that an experience of God's redemption in Jesus Christ – and not moral imperatives – to be the foundation of the Christian faith. His word and response model believes that God calls us by the offer of redemption and our response of acceptance leads to genuine freedom and Christian maturity.

The new Christian [...] combines his sense of fidelity to the Church with a receptivity of new ways of making his faith something real and alive in the world in which he lives. Society today, the Church today, both in a stage of great transition, have therefore only one choice, there is no viable alternative: it is to risk everything by seeking out the mature citizen, to make room for individual responsibility.¹

¹ Bernard Häring, *Christian Maturity*, (London: Herder and Herder, 1967), 7.

Häring's service as an army medic during the Second World War, would have a huge impact in reshaping his understanding of faith and theology. The blind and absurd obedience of his fellow Germans to the Nazi regime led Haring to the conclusion that a responsible and mature faith, and not blind obedience, must be at the heart of Christianity. He said, 'After the war, I returned to moral theology with the firm decision to teach it so that its core concept would not be obedience but responsibility, the courage to be responsible.'²

²Bernard Häring, *My Witness for the Church*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), 23-24, Cf. Kathleen Cahalan, *Formed in the Image of Christ*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 4-5. Kathleen Cahalan's doctoral dissertation from the University of Chicago Divinity School was entitled, 'The Sacramental Moral Theology of Bernard Häring. A Study of the Virtue of Religion,' published as *Formed in the Image of Christ*. This work is a valuable and comprehensive contemporary resource in the study of Häring's thoughts, ideas and legacy in the Church. Cf. Ibid, vi.