

**The Sacrament of Confession as a "Sequela Christi" in
the Writings of A. von Speyr**

by
William Schmitt

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PONTIFICIUM INSTITUTUM JOANNES PAULUS II
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Thesis ad DOCTORATUM

William Schmitt

The Sacrament of Confession as a “*Sequela Christi*”
in the Writings of A. von Speyr

Moderator: Prof. J. Servais, S.J.

Romæ 1999

When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.

How light and portable my pain seems now,
When that which makes me bend, makes the king bow...

King Lear 3.4.102-3, 108-9

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Abbreviations of the Works of Adrienne von Speyr

- A* = *Das Angesicht des Vaters*
AA = *Aussagen Adriennes von Speyr über sich selbst*
AmL = *Aus meinem Leben*
Ap = *Die Apokalypse*
AuP = *Arzt und Patient*
B = *Bergpredigt*
Be = *Die Beichte*
Bi = *Das Licht und die Bilder*
Ep = *Der Epheserbrief*
3F = *Drei Frauen und der Herr*
F = *Sie folgten seinem Ruf*
G = *Der grenzenlose Gott*
Ge = *Gebetserfahrung*
Gh = *Das Buch vom Gehorsam*
Gl = *Gleichnisse des Herrn*
Hl = *Das Hohelied*
Ij = *Job*
Is = *Isaias*
Jo I = *Johannes I: Das Wort wird Fleisch*
Jo II = *Johannes II: Die Streitreden*
Jo III = *Johannes III: Die Abschiedsreden*
Jo IV = *Johannes IV: Geburt der Kirche*
K = *Der Kolosserbrief*
IK = *Korinther I*
Ka I = *Katholische Briefe I: Der Jakobusbrief, Die Petrusbriefe*
Ka II = *Katholische Briefe II: Die Johannesbriefe*
KW = *Kreuzeswort und Sakrament*
L = *Über die Liebe*
M = *Der Mensch vor Gott*
Ma = *Markus*
MH = *Magd des Herrn*
MP = *Passion nach Matthäus*
NB I/1 = *Das Allerheiligenbuch I*
NB I/2 = *Das Allerheiligenbuch II*
NB II = *Das Fischernetz*
NB III = *Kreuz und Hölle I*
NB IV = *Kreuz und Hölle II*
NB V = *Das Wort und die Mystik I: Subjektive Mystik*
NB VI = *Das Wort und die Mystik II: Objektive Mystik*
NB VII = *Geheimnis der Jugend*
NB VIII = *Erde und Himmel I*
NB IX = *Erde und Himmel II*
NB X = *Erde und Himmel III*
NB XI = *Ignatius von Loyola*
NB XII = *Theologie der Geschlechter*
Pa = *Passion von Innen*
Pf = *Die Pforten des ewigen Lebens*

Ph = *Der Philipperbrief (Dienst der Freude)*
Ps = *Achtzehn Psalmen*
Sc = *Die Schöpfung*
SL = *Sieg der Liebe*
St = *Christicher Stand*
T = *Geheimnis des Todes*
Th = *Das Themenheft*
W = *Welt des Gebets*

Abbreviations of Other Works

Magisterium:

ASS = *Acta Sanctae Sedis*
AAS = *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*
CCC = *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
CT = *Concilium Tridentinum, Diarorum, Actorum, Epistolarum, Tractatum nova collectio*, edidit societas Goerresiana, Freiburg i.B., 1901 ss.
DH = *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (H. Denzinger, 37th ed., edited by P. Hünermann)
DM = *Dives in misericordia*
DV = *Dominum et vivificantem*
GS = *Gaudium et spes*
LG = *Lumen gentium*
MD = *Mulieres dignitatem*
RH = *Redemptor hominis*
RM = *Redemptoris Mater*
RP = *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*
SC = *Sacrosanctum concilium*
SD = *Salvifici doloris*
VS = *Veritatis splendor*

Journals and Reference Works:

CC = *La Civiltà Cattolica*
DCT = *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*
DSAM = *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique*
EeV = *Esprit et vie*
GL = *Geist und Leben*
ICR = *International Catholic Review: Communio*
JBL = *Journal of Biblical Literature*
LThK = *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (2d rev. ed.)
MaD = *La Maison Dieu*
MTZ = *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift*
NBl = *New Blackfriars*
NkZ = *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*
NRT = *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*
PG = *Patrologia Graeca* (J.P. Migne, series graeca)

PL = Patrologia Latina (J.P. Migne, series latina)
RCI = La Rivista del Clero Italiano
RCIC = Revue catholique internationale Communio
RE = Revista di Espiritualidad
REAug = Revue des Études augustiniennes
RevSR = Revue des sciences religieuses
RITC = Rivista Internazionale di Teologia e Cultura: Communio
RSR = Recherches de science religieuse
RSV = Revised Standard Version
SchR = Schweizer Rundschau
SN = Sanctificatio nostra
STh = Summa Theologiae
TTQ = Theologische Quartalschrift

General Introduction

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents the sacraments as a continuation by the Church of the work that Christ performed during his earthly life. Even before his death and Resurrection, Christ, in his hidden and public life, began to reveal the mystery of the Father's divine saving love:

Jesus' words and actions during his hidden life and public ministry were already salvific, for they anticipated the power of his Paschal mystery. They announced and prepared what he was going to give the Church when all was accomplished. The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministers of his Church, for "what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries [*in sacramenta transivit*]." ¹

The mysteries of Christ's public life are the concrete deeds and the visible actions that find their center and culmination in the Paschal mystery. In these perceivable actions and sufferings, he reveals through the "sacrament" of his humanity "the invisible mystery of his divine sonship and redemptive mission."² The individual sacraments, through the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church, make this mystery present even after Christ's ascension into heaven.

The catechism's simple and profound presentation of the sacraments unites Christ, the Church, and the sacraments into an integrated whole. Theological reflection on the sacraments must seek to unfold the relationship between the Christological center and the sacramental action. Christ is the foundation and the sacraments are grounded in him. Following this line of thought, the purpose of our work is to show how, according to the theology of Adrienne von Speyr, confession is the sacramental encounter of the sinner with Christ in the Church and an occasion for discipleship. We will examine the sacrament of confession in order to see how it originates in Christ and the Paschal mystery. We will then seek to develop the implication of such a foundation, namely that sacramental confession is a participation in Christ's death and Resurrection.

¹ CCC, 1115. The catechism cites here St. Leo the Great, *Sermo*. 74, 2: *PL* 54, 398.

² CCC, 515.

According to Adrienne von Speyr, the believer's participation in the sacrament of confession is a *sequela Christi*, a way of following Christ.³ In the introduction to her book on confession, Hans Urs von Balthasar points this out when he describes the sacrament of confession as a "following of Christ in the strict sense."⁴ According to Balthasar, this is one of the most important intuitions of Adrienne.⁵ There are two steps to showing how the believer follows Christ in confession. The first is a reflection on how Christ goes forward and leads the way: he "confesses" on the Cross. The second step is to show how sacramental confession—as well as the attitude that animates the penitent who is ordered towards this moment and by the fruit of its grace—involves a following or an imitation of Christ.

It will be a challenge to order and clarify the theme of confession that is dispersed throughout the work of Adrienne. Characteristically, she integrates all of the aspects of theology but in an unsystematic unity. Balthasar when speaking of the totality, the universality, and the "catholicity" of the theological vision of Adrienne von Speyr, gives the image of a chain of realities which are intimately related: Trinity—Christ—Mary—Church—Christian. Each ring of the chain must be considered within the context of the whole.⁶

³ "Beichte ist . . . seine Nachfolge" (A. von Speyr, *Die Beichte*, ed. with a foreword by H.U. von Balthasar, 2d ed. [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1982], 160; hereafter cited as *Be*); "Der Schritt, den der Mensch noch tun muß, liegt bereits innerhalb der Gnade. Daß es diesen Schritt gibt, ist selbst Gnade und ist doch, wenn der Mensch ihn tut, sein Verdienst . . . Er [Jesus] nimmt des Menschen Verdemütigung auf sich und leidet sie bis in Kreuz und Tod hinein, er öffnet aber auch dem Sünder einen Weg der Nachfolge ins Leiden als Weg der gnadenvollen Rückkehr durch Bekenntnis und Absolution" (*Be*, 82).

⁴ "Das Kreuz (und darin die ganze Menschwerdung des Sohnes) ist die urbildliche Beichte; die christlich-sakramentale Beichte ist deshalb im strengen Sinne Nachfolge Christi" (Balthasar, foreword to *Be*, 7). Balthasar often made reference to confession as a following of Christ: idem, "Adriennes Charisma," in *Adrienne von Speyr und ihre kirchliche Sendung*, ed. H.U. von Balthasar, G. Chantraine, A. Scola (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986), 175; idem, introduction to *Die katholischen Briefe I: Der Jakobusbrief. Die Petrusbriefe*, by A. von Speyr (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), 21; idem, *Erster Blick auf Adrienne von Speyr*, 4th ed. (Einsiedeln-Trier: Johannes Verlag, 1989), 48-49; idem, *Theodramatik III: Die Handlung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1980), 360. Dietrich Bonhoeffer also speaks about confession as a following of Christ but without explicitly grounding this in the Cross: "Wie die ersten Jünger auf Jesu Ruf alles hinter sich ließen und ihm nachfolgten, so gibt der Christ in der Beichte alles hin und folgt nach. Beichte ist Nachfolge" (D. Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, vol. 5, *Gemeinsames Leben; Das Gebetbuch der Bibel*, ed. G.L. Müller and A. Schönher [Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1989], 96). References to the works of Adrienne von Speyr are exclusively from the German and all of the English translations of these texts are my own. Published English translations of these works are listed in the bibliography.

⁵ "Eine der großen Intuitionen Adriennes von Speyr war es, im Kreuz die Ur-Beichte der Weltstunde zu sehen . . . Im Gekreuzigten wurden wir gebeichtet; beichten wir, so treten wir in seine Haltung des Offenlegens ein, sind in der Nachfolge Christi" (H.U. von Balthasar, *Kennt uns Jesus—kennen wir ihn?* [Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 1980], 58).

⁶ H.U. von Balthasar, introduction to *Das Buch vom Gehorsam*, by A. von Speyr (Einsiedeln:

Likewise, one must see the whole in the part. It will be necessary to look more closely at the relationship between the Church and the sacraments as a prelude to understanding the broad vision of the sacrament of confession present in the theology of Adrienne von Speyr. This will aid in helping us to understand what she means by the affirmation that the Cross is the *Urbeichte*, the “originary confession.”⁷

The literary output of Adrienne von Speyr was enormous. The commentaries on Scripture alone include twenty-three volumes. Adrienne dictated an extended series of reflections on the entire Johannine corpus. She also commented on the Gospel of Mark, important scenes from Matthew (the Sermon on the Mount, scenes from the Passion), and a large number of the Pauline writings (1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, part of Romans). The Old Testament is not absent: there are shorter commentaries on the creation scenes, Job, the Psalms, the Song of Songs, and the episodes involving the mission of the prophets. In all of these works, a verse from Scripture is presented along with a reflection usually amounting to several pages. The thematic writings, on the other hand, revolve around a topic and approach it from various angles. These include twenty volumes on such diverse topics as prayer, Mary, confession, death, obedience, the states of life, and the Mass. Finally there are the charismatic posthumous works that make up thirteen separate volumes. All these, along with the published articles, a volume of letters, an autobiography, and a book of aphorisms, make up more than 15,000 pages.⁸

Adrienne never studied theology and her reflections are based upon her extraordinary life of prayer and her everyday experiences. Even her reading of spiritual authors was quite limited. Balthasar gave to her, the letters of Saint Ignatius and Saint Thérèse’s *The Story of a Soul*.⁹ The letters, she said, were the most “glorious” thing she ever read. She undertook the

Johannes Verlag, 1966), 7. Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, introduction to *Der Epheserbrief*, by A. von Speyr (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1949), 8-9.

⁷ The German prefix “Ur-“ means “original,” “primeval,” or “first.” Van Roo prefers to translate “Ur” as “prime” (W.A. Van Roo, *The Christian Sacrament*, Analecta Gregoriana (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1992), p. 82, n. 60). The German text of Adrienne usually does not have the word confession (*Beichte*) in quotation marks when it refers to Christ’s “confession.” Balthasar several times placed this word in quotation marks (*Be*, 60, 61, 191).

⁸ See H.U. von Balthasar, “Das literarische Werk Adriennes von Speyr,” *SN* 22 (1957): 20. Partial bibliographies of the author were published in *Erster Blick*, 89-97 and *Adrienne von Speyr and ihre kirchliche Sendung*, 185-88.

⁹ H.U. von Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag: Bericht und Entwurf* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1984), 49.

task of translating the autobiography of Saint Thérèse and wrote an introduction.¹⁰ She also read a little of Cardinal Newman, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Theresa of Avila.¹¹ Balthasar gave Adrienne instructions and catechism. She heard him preach and read some of the drafts for the publication of his books. Throughout her life, she also read literature: Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Victor Hugo, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Reinhold Schneider, Paul Claudel, Georges Bernanos, François Mauriac, Charles Péguy and many others.¹² Balthasar says that he never saw her read what could be considered a theological book.¹³

In 1948 Balthasar established a publishing house, the Johannes Verlag, with the initial scope of publishing the work of Adrienne.¹⁴ Her first books drew an enthusiastic response but were soon forgotten.¹⁵ Only with the publication of Balthasar's introduction to the life and writings of Adrienne (*Erster Blick auf Adrienne von Speyr*), which was published after her death, did the breadth of her mission as well as the influence that she had had on his writings become evident.¹⁶ The symposium in Rome in 1985, at the invitation of Pope John Paul II,¹⁷

¹⁰ *Theresia vom Kinde Jesu: Geschichte einer Seele*, trans. with an introduction by A. von Speyr, ed. with a foreword by H.U. von Balthasar (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1947). This edition was superseded by the critical edition.

¹¹ Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag*, 20-21, n. 16; Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 35-36. Before her conversion, Adrienne read Karl Adam's *Wesen des Katholizismus* (A. von Speyr, *Die Nachlasswerke*, vol. VII, *Geheimnis der Jugend*, ed. with an introduction and epilogue by H.U. von Balthasar [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1966], 303; hereafter cited as *NB VII*).

¹² Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 34; Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag*, 20-21, n. 16. Adrienne particularly liked detective stories, biographies of physicians, books by French woman authors, and books about nature and the ocean.

¹³ "Ein eigentlich theologisches Buch habe ich sie nie lesen sehen" (Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 36); "[. . .] sie gab mir oft Hinweise für Predigten, Vorträge usw., las aber nur selten—und mit fortschreitender Erblindung immer weniger—meine Bücher" (Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 11).

¹⁴ Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag*, 96, n. 31.

¹⁵ M. Gisi and C. Capol, "Experiencia trinitaria del cristiano. Adriana von Speyr (1902-1967)," *RE* 148 (1978): 462. See, for example, the following: T.S. Eliot, review of *The Word: A Meditation on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel* by A. von Speyr, on the dust jacket of *The Word: A Meditation on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel*, trans. A. Dru (London: Collins, 1953); R. Schneider, "Beichte im Sinne der Mystiker Adrienne von Speyr," *Der christliche Sonntag* [Freiburg I. Br.], 14 August 1949, 261; for a more critical position see J. Möllerfeld, review of *Die Beichte*, by A. von Speyr, in *GL* 35 (1962): 79.

¹⁶ "Im ganzen habe ich theologisch mehr von ihr erhalten als sie von mir, obwohl das genaue Verhältnis nicht aufgerechnet werden kann" (Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 11). Balthasar goes on in this text to say that he considers her work to be more far more important than his own. Some of the works that Balthasar mentions where the influence of Adrienne can be seen are, *Das Herz der Welt*, *Der Christ und die Angst*, *Theologie der drei Tage*, and the last volume of the *Theodramatik* (Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag*, 81-82; cf. Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 10-11).

as well as Balthasar's testimony (*Unser Auftrag*) helped to increase the interest in her writings. There have been several studies done on the theology of Adrienne von Speyr. The often cited work of Barbara Albrecht, as well as her accompanying anthology of texts, is a good introduction.¹⁸ Balthasar also composed an anthology of texts that were published after his death.¹⁹ The influence of Adrienne on Balthasar cannot be underestimated. Balthasar wrote *Unser Auftrag* specifically in order to prevent a separation of his mission and thought from that of Adrienne.²⁰ In this work, he repeatedly refers to the importance that the work of Adrienne has for his own.²¹

There have been several studies specifically directed towards the theme of confession in Adrienne von Speyr. Short articles by H.U. von Balthasar and R. Fisichella outline and introduce this theme.²² The book of Thierry de Roucy, which bears the subtitle "Essai sur le fondement christologique de la confession,"²³ attempts to draw out more clearly the Christological foundation of sacramental confession. De Roucy rightly points out that the

¹⁷ See H.U. von Balthasar, G. Chantraine, A. Scola, eds., *Adrienne von Speyr und ihre kirchliche Sendung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986). The contribution by Cardinal Danneels as well as the reflection of Balthasar on Adrienne's charisma are of particular significance for the theme of confession. See also G. Chantraine, "La missione ecclesiale di Adrienne von Speyr," *CC* 137 (1986): 54-63.

¹⁸ B. Albrecht, *Eine Theologie des Katholischen: Einführung in das Werk Adriennes von Speyr. Band 2: Darstellung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973); idem, ed., *Eine Theologie des Katholischen: Einführung in das Werk Adriennes von Speyr. Band 1: Durchblick in Texten*, with an introduction by B. Albrecht (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972). See also idem, "Speyr, (Adrienne von)," in *DSAM*, vol. XIV, cols. 1131-32.

¹⁹ *Kostet und Seht: Ein theologisches Lesebuch*, ed. with an introduction by H.U. von Balthasar (Einsiedeln-Trier: Johannes Verlag, 1988).

²⁰ Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag*, 11.

²¹ For example Balthasar says that what he was seeking in *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* (1937-1939) he found confirmed in Adrienne's theology of confession: "Wenn ich meinem Dissertationsthema und der daraus entwickelten *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* nachsinne, so war der Grundimpuls der Wunsch, die großen Gestalten der modernen deutschen Geistesgeschichte auf ihre letzte, oft verborgene religiöse Haltung hin zu 'enthüllen' (apokalyptein heißt ja enthüllen), sie gleichsam 'beichten' zu lassen" (Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag*, 32); "Daß das in *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* (1937-1939) Versuchte eine Bestätigung in der Beichttheologie Adriennes fand, wurde ebenfalls schon erwähnt" (ibid., p. 81, n. 1).

²² Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, "Adrienne von Speyr et le sacrement de pénitence," *NRT* 107 (1985): 394-403; R. Fisichella, "Adrienne von Speyr: un esempio di teologia mai scritta," in *Laici Teologi: Atti del colloquio teologi laici nelle chiese cristiane. Facoltà teologica di Sicilia 24-26 aprile 1987*, C. Militello and C. Valenziano eds., 242-52 (EDI Oftes, 1988). See also G. Chantraine, "Penitenza e pentimento. Loro Fondamento," *RCI* 64 (1983): 386-95; A. Nichols, "Adrienne von Speyr and the Mystery of the Atonement," *NBI* 73 (1992): 542-53.

²³ T. de Roucy, *Jésus, les chrétiens et la confession: Essai sur le fondement christologique de la confession* (Chiry-Ourcamp: Éditions du Serviteur, 1995).

words of institution make the sacrament possible but it is necessary to see that Jesus' attitude and actions precede this word.²⁴ He generally limits the horizon of his reflection to Adrienne's book on confession, *Die Beichte*, and as a result his study lacks a full development of the ecclesial dimension and the relationship between Christ's confession and the sacrament is limited to a parallel. There is a certain likeness between the attitude and actions of the Lord and the persons involved in the sacrament of confession. These illuminate each other in a mutual manner. But the Christological foundation, over and beyond this element of similarity, remains unexplored.

The small book of Martin Tiator is a valuable introduction to the topic of confession in Adrienne von Speyr.²⁵ It briefly summarizes the more important elements of *Die Beichte* and dedicates a final section to the practical implications. The scope of this compact work is pastoral but the choice of citations and the references indicate clearly that the author is very familiar with a number of the works of Adrienne. The sobriety of the presentation and the precision of language are invaluable. Most important for our theme of confession as a *sequela Christi*, Tiator dedicates several pages to Balthasar's affirmation of the "real presence of the event of the Cross in confession."²⁶ Tiator writes, "We confess not only on the Lord's instruction and to the Lord but even more 'in the Lord' who draws us with himself through the Cross, hell, and Resurrection. In this way, every confession leads to a deepened association with the Lord, whom we encounter directly as he who calls us to a following of the Cross."²⁷ What does it mean to confess "in the Lord"?²⁸ How is the Lord really present in the sacrament in such a way that the actions and the effects of confession are a call to follow Christ crucified? The works of Tiator and de Roucy are sympathetic presentations of the writings of Adrienne without an extended reflection on just how sacramental confession is grounded in Christ's confession. The analogies are developed but this book lacks a detailed consideration of the sacrament of confession as a Christian event in which the following of Christ is realized.

The point of view of Adrienne that Christ "confessed" our sins is the result of a living synthesis of a number of theological presuppositions. Necessarily, we will explore the

²⁴ Ibid., 10; cf. 212.

²⁵ M. Tiator, *Beichte–Gottes Liebesgeschenk: Zur Pastoral des vergessenen Sakraments* (Trier: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1988).

²⁶ Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 225.

²⁷ Tiator, *Beichte–Gottes Liebesgeschenk*, 77-78.

soteriological aspects of Adrienne’s understanding of the Paschal mystery. There are three fundamental elements that need to be unraveled and explored in order to situate the theology of Adrienne within the theological tradition. First of all, (1) the Cross is a Trinitarian event and does not merely express or proclaim God’s eternal forgiveness. Christ’s mission is dramatic²⁹ because it involves a task, something to be done and from this event stems the reconciliation of God and man. Secondly, (2) Christ’s suffering is an expression of his bearing universal sin. Christ not only suffers the effects of mankind’s sin but he takes sin itself upon himself. Finally, (3) Christ, motivated purely by love, actively and freely chooses to suffer in obedience and die on behalf of mankind (“*pro nobis*”). The fact that Christ is passive in his suffering does not point to necessity, in the strict sense of compulsion. This death is an expression of his love and praise towards the Father.³⁰

The idea that Christ “confessed” on the Cross is a concrete way of approaching the theology of Atonement that takes very seriously the devastation wrought by sin but without forgetting the divine person of the Son.³¹ To say that Christ “confessed” on the Cross is a concrete way of expressing his inclusive vicarious representation³² and involves a twofold affirmation concerning Christ’s role and the fruit of this: Christ stands before the Father, and “confesses” our sins in our name. His act of showing himself burdened with the “sin of the

²⁸ Tiator cites Adrienne here (*Be*, 165).

²⁹ A. von Speyr, *Das Wort wird Fleisch: Betrachtungen über das Johannesevangelium Kapitel 1-5* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1949), 66. (Hereafter cited as *Jo I*.)

³⁰ Balthasar points out the centrality of the Augustinian theme of confession for Adrienne as both avowal of sin as well as praise (H.U. von Balthasar, “Adriennes Charisma,” 174).

³¹ Luther, by developing a purely formal understanding of the exchange between Christ and the sinner, resorted to a dialectic that neglected the very person of the Son. Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, “Zwei Glaubensweisen,” chap. in *Spiritus Creator: Skizzen zur Theologie III* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1967), 86-87. Cf. idem, *Theologik II: Wahrheit Gottes* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985), 263-65. Balthasar presents the theology of Adrienne in the context of a response to Luther: “Auf die Abgründe, die Luther aufgerissen und die keine verharmlosende Theologie oder Ökumene geschlossen hat, wird erst in der Lehre Adriennes von Speyr, die wie niemand vorher diese Abgründe ausgelotet und ausgewortet hat, eine hinreichende Antwort erteilt” (H.U. von Balthasar, *Theologik II*, 314-15). The position of Luther results in contradictions: “Luther selbst erklärt nicht, wie seine radikalen Aussagen über den ‘sündlosen Sünder Christus’ konkret zu denken sind; er bemerkt aber einschränkend, daß Christus, der die Sünde aller Sünder auf sich nimmt, dennoch der Sündlose, Reine, Heilige bleibt” (K.-H. Menke, *Stellvertretung: Schlüsselbegriff christlichen Lebens und theologische Grundkategorie* [Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1991], 74).

³² Adrienne’s understanding of confession coincides with a Catholic understanding of Martin Luther’s “*simul iustus et peccator*” (cf. Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, 4th ed. [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976], 378-86). Luther also saw confession as an expression of the Christian life: “wenn ich zur Beichte vermähne, so vermähne ich dazu, ein Christ zu sein” (M. Luther, *Der große Katechismus, Vermahnung zur Beicht*. 1529 [Weimarer Ausgabe der Werke Martin Luthers, 30/I, 238,] quoted in Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, vol. 5, 99).

world” before the Father whom he loves is the essence of the “confession” on the Cross. In the sacrament, the Lord offers us the fruit of his Passion, death, and Resurrection.

There are notable objections to this theology of Atonement. The reservations are mostly directed towards the second point. One criticism is exegetical and revolves around the interpretation of 2 Cor 5:21 (“he made him to be sin”).³³ A second objection comes from the Anselmian view, later adopted by Thomas, of satisfaction that maintains that Christ by the *merits* of his sacrifice redeemed man.³⁴ Both of these positions question the position that Christ could have borne our guilt without placing in jeopardy his sanctity and his divinity. We will need to address these questions in the pages that follow.

The study of Adrienne von Speyr’s writings poses a particular problem of methodology. The best way of approaching the material needs to be established. We are not concerned here with the exterior aspects of Adrienne’s corpus—such as the time period in which they were written or the limitations of her style—but rather with the way in which they were composed and their source. T.S. Eliot vividly depicts the reader’s predicament when he writes about Adrienne’s first volume on St. John’s gospel:

Adrienne von Speyr’s book does not lend itself to any classification that I can think of. It is not dogmatic theology; still less is it exegesis. It cannot be properly described as mysticism, or a skeptical theology; nor is it, in any usual sense, a book of meditation . . . there is nothing to do but to submit oneself to it; if the reader emerges without having been crushed by it, he will find himself strengthened and exhilarated by a new experience of Christian sensibility.³⁵

The writings of Adrienne do not fall into any clear category: They are not a laywoman’s unlearned attempts at exegesis or dogmatic theology; they are not exercises in expressing the interior spiritual life of an ordinary believer. What they are needs to be clarified so that the approach of our study, which should correspond to its object, can be carefully grounded. It is not enough to simply ignore the question of the nature of her writings in the hope that the content will speak for itself.

There are two aspects of the nature of the writings of Adrienne that need to be addressed and clarified before an adequate methodology can be proposed. The first is the way

³³ See S. Lyonnet and L. Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970). The biblical citations are taken from the Revised Standard Version (*RSV*) unless specified otherwise.

³⁴ “Ille proprie satisfacit pro offensa qui exhibet offenso id quod aequè vel magis diligit quam oderit offensam. Christus autem, ex caritate et obedientia patiendo, maius aliquid Deo exhibuit quam exigeret recompensatio totius offensae humani generis” (*STh* III, 48, 2).

in which they were composed and the second is the particular nature of the relationship exhibited in the writings between subjective experience and the objective content.

Balthasar gives an account of the composition of the works of Adrienne von Speyr.³⁶ Almost all of her books were dictated to Balthasar, beginning in May 1944, and most of them were finished by 1953.³⁷ Every afternoon, Adrienne would read a verse from her French Second New Testament, close her eyes, reflect for a few seconds and then begin to dictate quickly for twenty minutes to half an hour. The early works were awkward in expression and they had to be slightly altered for greater coherence of expression. The later works were often ready for publication with the exception of slight stylistic changes.

According to Adrienne's own accounts, the dictated writings are not simply the subjective expression of a profound and articulate faith. She communicated what she had experienced in her prayer.³⁸ The experiences were varied. Sometimes she described what she saw; other times it was a matter of conveying the meaning of what she heard. The dictations then are not merely the occasion in which Adrienne was able to express what she understood in her everyday Christian life. Moreover, these are not "private" revelations in the sense of things that are revealed to her by God for her own edification or for those of a few.³⁹ Balthasar used the term "mysticism" to describe the nature of Adrienne's writings but with the caveat that the charism of genuine Christian mysticism is necessarily ecclesial. This understanding of mysticism must be distinguished carefully from the ordinary use of the term where religious experience becomes the ultimate criterion.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Balthasar develops more clearly what he means:

Adrienne's theory of mysticism, which she formulated, culminates in the one statement: Mysticism is a particular mission, a particular service for the Church which can only be properly carried out in a complete movement away from oneself, in self-forgetfulness (she loved the word "*éffacement*") and virginal readiness for the Word of God. Personal states as such are of no interest and ought not to be reflected upon, all psychologizing introspection becomes without fail a deviation from the main concern—God's Word—and therefore a distortion

³⁵ Eliot, review of *The Word*, by Adrienne von Speyr.

³⁶ See Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 86; idem, *Unser Auftrag*, 50–53.

³⁷ Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 39. The bibliography in *Erster Blick* (pp. 89–97) indicates which works were not dictated.

³⁸ See Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag*, 52, n. 26.

³⁹ Cf. Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 50.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 77.

of one's mission.⁴¹

Genuine mysticism is ordered towards the service of the Church. Since the everyday use of the term emphasizes the subjective experience of a personal communion with God, it would be better to avoid this term and speak instead of the charism of prophecy,⁴² where the content is truths about the faith, seen through the eyes of someone gifted with the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

The consequence of this clarification has repercussions for an assessment of the influence that the subjective experience has on the objective content. In the charism of prophecy, the subjective experience never becomes the ultimate criterion.⁴³ This does not mean that the role of Adrienne's subjective understanding—colored by all of the particulars of her personality—was unimportant. An opposition between subjective religious experience and the objective Word in pure faith does not correspond to the biblical experience of faith.⁴⁴ Likewise, the opposition between habitual grace and the charisms must also be overcome.⁴⁵ As a result, some background on the life of the author is necessary for an adequate assessment of her theology but it would not further our understanding to seek the *ultimate* explanation for the content in her psychology or personal history.

This leads to the conclusion that the focus of our attention should be on what is actually being said. Due to the large volume of Adrienne's writings and to its unsystematic nature, continual references to the entire corpus will be necessary in order to substantiate

⁴¹ Ibid., 32.

⁴² R. Fisichella sharply contrasts the everyday use of the term “mystic” with the charism of prophecy: “A nostro avviso, si comprende l’opera e la funzione della von Speyr se la si inserisce nell’orizzonte della profezia contemporanea. Adrienne von Speyr non è stata una mistica, ma ha vissuto il carisma profetico . . . la profezia, infatti, è data a ogni battezzato (cfr. At 2, 17). Ciò non toglie, comunque, che ci si possa accostare ai suoi scritti e alla sua testimonianza con interesse critico valutando e discernendo, di volta in volta, ciò che può essere coerente con una forma di profezia e ciò che appartiene ad altri campi di indagine” (R. Fisichella, “Hans Urs von Balthasar e Adrienne von Speyr: L’inseparabilità delle due opere” *RITC* 156 [1997]: 65). Balthasar confirms this: “Das Ganze steht auf einer von der Gründerin tief gelebten und in ihren Schriften auch einzigartig ausgeworteten Theologie; da schillernde Wort ‘Mystik’ wird hier besser vermieden, es geht um das Charisma der Prophetie im ursprünglichen Sinn: ‘Sagen können, was Gott ist und will—heute’” (H.U. Balthasar, “Die Johannesgemeinschaft,” *Pastoralblatt für die Diözesen Aachen, Berlin, Essen, Hildesheim, Köln, Osnabrück* 37 [1985]: 87).

⁴³ For a more detailed theological reflection on the important theme of mysticism as mission, see H.U. Balthasar, *Christlicher Stand* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1977), 216–25.

⁴⁴ Cf. Balthasar, *Erster Blick*, 88.

⁴⁵ Cf. H.U. Balthasar, *Thomas und die Charismatik: Kommentar zu Thomas von Aquin Summa Theologica Quaestiones II II 171–182. Besondere Gnadengaben und die zwei Wege menschlichen Lebens*, 2d ed. (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1996).

particular interpretations and conclusions. This is a lengthy, time consuming process. It is necessary that any initial skepticism about the truths presented must be moderated so that the reader is not prevented from seeing what is really there. This does not mean that he should avoid all critical assessment but only that he needs to first listen and then judge after he has understood what is actually being said. The style of the writing itself lends itself to this method: One can immediately see how affirmations can easily be misunderstood when taken out of their context. In a profound sense, the reader must be “crushed,” to use the term of Eliot, before he can make the second step of reflecting on the content’s value.

As a result of these clarifications concerning the nature of the work of Adrienne, our methodology will be primarily expository. It will not be that of presenting the material historically from the point of view of an unaffected bystander but will be a matter of ordering the material in a way in which the reader can see more clearly what the author wishes to say. An exposition of an author’s writing is not simply a summary. It is a setting forth of the meaning and logic of someone’s thought with order and clarity. Our exposition will be aided by constant references to Scripture and Tradition, with the view of showing whether what has been said is in consonance or at variance with these two criteria of theology as carried out within an ecclesial context. Continual references will be made to the writings of Balthasar because in his own work he often reflected on the same themes. An expository methodology presupposes a view of the whole and an ordering of the parts in a way that clearly brings out what the author has to say on a particular subject. This is not easy in our case because the theology of confession, for the most part, is dispersed throughout her entire work. At the end of our study, only after a careful exposition of the material has been made, we will draw some conclusions, show where further study needs to be done, and point out the weaknesses and strengths of the work of Adrienne von Speyr’s theology of confession.

Our work will proceed in the following manner. After an introduction to our theme (Part I) we shall set out by examining Adrienne’s understanding of “confession” in the Lord’s life (Part II) and in the Paschal mystery (Part III). Then, in a second moment, we shall turn to see the following of Christ’s “confession” by the Church (Part IV) and the believer (Part V).

Part I is comprised of two chapters. Chapter 1 will present the need for a theology of confession as the only way to respond to the current crisis. Ultimately, the loss of a sense of sin is also a loss of faith in Christ. A theology of confession would help to make the sacrament an occasion to turn back to the Lord and to understand the offense of sin within the context of this conversion. Chapter 2 will introduce the reader to the person and writings of

Adrienne von Speyr in order to see how her search for a more profound understanding of the sacrament of confession animated and formed her faith and writings.

Part II is divided into two chapters that show two complementary aspects of Christ's public ministry. On the one hand, Christ proclaims the coming of the Kingdom with authority and reveals his Lordship by forgiving sin in God's name (Chapter 3). On the other hand, Christ identifies himself with sinners and by drawing near to them, shares in their suffering and pleads to the Father on their behalf (Chapter 4). As the God-man, Christ renews the covenant by representing the Father and by uniting himself to all men.

Part III is dedicated to the Paschal mystery and its three chapters correspond to the three days of the Tridium. Here we will explore how the crucifixion is the "originary confession" (Chapter 5), Holy Saturday is the moment of the objective avowal and exhortation (Chapter 6), and the Resurrection of Christ is the Father's absolution for the world (Chapter 7).

The next two chapters, which explore the ecclesial aspect of confession, make up Part IV. Chapter 7 will examine the intrinsically ecclesial nature of the sacrament and how this is embodied in the person and the mission of Mary. Confession is the fruit of the unity between Christ and his Bride and is oriented towards reconciliation and the building up of the Body of Christ. Chapter 8 presents the institution of the sacrament, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the participation of the ministry of the Church.

Finally, Part V is concerned with the sacrament as it is practiced, the persons involved and the actions they perform (Chapter 10). In our final chapter, we address the varying factors that determine how the sacrament corresponds to every form and moment of Christian life and opens up the believer to embrace a life of mission for others (Chapter 11).

Part I: Toward a Theology of Confession

In the first part of our work, we shall introduce the reader to what is meant by a theology of confession. Theological reflection on the sacrament of confession is generally limited either to a justification of the actual practice of the sacrament through historical and anthropological studies or to an attempt to deepen the praxis by encouraging a more meticulous and frequent recourse to the grace of the sacrament. A theological grounding of the sacrament, a theology of confession, necessitates a more profound query into the specifically Christian nature of the sacrament.

As a first step (Chapter 1), we shall examine the status of the theology of confession in contemporary theology, recognizing the need to respond to the current crisis in the sacrament with a deeper theological reflection and the progress that has been achieved so far. Within this context, the efforts of Adrienne von Speyr can be appreciated. A precursory glance at her life (Chapter 2) indicates how central and enduring the question of confession's ultimate significance was for her. By introducing her writings, we shall have indicated the initial groundwork necessary for establishing our thesis that the sacrament of confession, as the fruit of Christ's Paschal mystery,¹ is a *sequela Christi*.

¹ Cf. A. von Speyr, *Die Streitreden: Betrachtungen über das Johannesevangelium Kapitel 6-12*, with a Foreword by H.U. von Balthasar (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1949), 516. Hereafter cited as *Jo II*.

Chapter 1: The *Status Quaestionis* of the Theology of Confession

1.1 Introduction

Before introducing the specific object of our study—the theme of confession as a *sequela Christi* in the writings of Adrienne von Speyr—it will be profitable in this chapter to set out the context and the environment in which theology addresses the sacrament of confession. This will provide a horizon, a framework within which our work will show itself to be a timely response to a contemporary question. We proceed in two steps. First, the crisis of confession, which touches its practice, its theology, and the ecclesial response, is briefly reported. In a second section, various attempts from contemporary theology that seek to overcome this crisis are touched upon. Their valuable insights as well as their incompleteness point towards a greater fullness of what needs to be developed further.

1.2 The Crisis in the Practice of Confession

There is a growing consensus, which has also found its way into magisterial documents, that there is a crisis in the sacrament of confession. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, Pope John Paul II emphatically states that the sacrament of confession is in crisis.¹ A crisis, in the general sense, indicates a decisive moment, a turning point. It is provoked by something or someone and necessitates a decision or a response. In the case of a sick person, the crisis is the moment in which he either moves towards recovery or towards death. To say that the sacrament of confession is in crisis is to affirm that it must be renewed and its value rediscovered or its practice will decline and its meaning will lose relevancy. The simple fact that fewer people actually go to confession could be an exterior indication of the crisis, but the causes are difficult to articulate and more profound. In this section we will briefly develop an assessment of the practice of confession in the years immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council. We shall then look more closely at the changes that have taken place in the rite since the Council. This will help to determine the

¹ *RP*, 28.

relationship between these events and the crisis itself and will make clear the need for further theological reflection.

1.2.1 Conciliar Renewal

The sacrament of confession underwent various transformations in the early Church but the rite remained substantially unchanged for over 750 years, from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) until the revision of the rite after the Second Vatican Council (1973). In the early stages of the latter Council, proposals were made to renew the various sacraments. In the first drafts for the document *Sacrosanctum concilium*, confession was the only sacrament in which no reforming changes were foreseen. As the Council went forward, consensus gathered on the need to review the rite for this sacrament as well.²

The realization of the need to renew confession was not a product of the Council. Rather, it reflected a growing awareness within the Church. Several years before the Council, Karl Rahner had spoken clearly of the problems that existed in the practice of confession. At a conference on the pastoral ministry in 1954, he strongly criticized the abuses and the superficiality of the practice in confession. He referred to the “magical” and “legalistic” tendencies in the pastoral praxis of the sacrament:

Who has not innumerable times experienced “babbling” confessions [*Plapperbeichten*] which simply go through the list of sins mechanically? Confessions where underneath a personally perhaps quite innocent but terribly legalistic and magical manner, the only thing that seems to matter is the sacramental occurrence as such; confessions in which, if necessary, sins are invented so that there may be something to confess; confessions in which objective sins are thrown in the same pot as subjective sins and where the serious and ridiculous are confessed with the same intonation; confessions where without glancing back at one’s attitude, one presupposes in the accusation a pure ethic of results [*Erfolgsethik*] and one confesses, for instance, having missed Mass even though one had been ill in bed and could not go to Mass; confessions where the person believes he is making a good confession, even though he is out to pull the wool over the confessor’s eyes or to confess when there is as much noise in the church as possible.³

Father Rahner made clear that the problem of confession was not to be solved merely by reiterating the Church’s moral teaching. Nor could he have imagined a renewal in the rite.

² J. Jungmann, “Konstitution über die heilige Liturgie (*Constitutio de Sacra Liturgia*): Einleitung und Kommentar,” in *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Konstitutionen, Dekrete und Erklärungen*, vol. 1, supplement to *LThK*, 2d rev. ed. (Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 1967), 69.

³ K. Rahner, “Beichtprobleme,” chap. in *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. 3 (Einsiedeln–Zürich–