

DIALOGALES COLLECTION — 1

The Sacrament of Reconciliation as an Event of Interpellation

A Reading of Confession through the Mahoukou Law

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Introduction — The Name That Changed and What It Reveals

There is in the change of name a philosophical signal that pastoral theology has perhaps not entirely measured. For centuries, the sacrament was called confession — from the Latin *confiteri*, to say together, to avow, to acknowledge aloud. Since the Second Vatican Council and its liturgical reform, it is called the sacrament of reconciliation — from the Latin *reconciliatio*, the restoration of a broken relationship, the recovery of a shattered communion. This is not a simple pastoral nuance designed to soften a practice considered excessively guilt-inducing. It is a philosophical and theological displacement of considerable significance.

For *confession* places the emphasis on the first and second moments of the triad Call–Response–Resonance: someone is called, someone responds by speaking, someone listens. *Reconciliation* places the emphasis on the third moment — the Resonance: something is transformed, restored, recreated in both parties and between them. This displacement does not invalidate the old name — it completes it by revealing what the tradition had always known without always being able to formulate it with this precision: that the avowal is not the end of the sacrament but its midpoint, and that what ultimately matters is not what is said but what is produced by what is said.

The Mahoukou Law — the phenomenological law of interpellation formalized around the triad Call–Response–Resonance — allows us to read this terminological displacement as a sign of the tradition's progressive awareness of its own structural depth. By naming *reconciliation* what it had named *confession*, the Church said, without formulating it as such: this sacrament is, in its deepest nature, an act of Resonance — a transformation that touches not only what the penitent has said but what they are, not only their relationship to themselves but their being before God and within the community.

The thesis of this essay is simple in its formulation and vertiginous in its implications: the sacrament of reconciliation is the most dense phenomenological act of interpellation that human existence can undergo. Not because it is the most dramatic or the most spectacular. But because the Mahoukou Law enables us to show that it simultaneously engages four nested levels of interpellation — a triad of triads — in which the Call is divine, the Response is human and fragile, and the Resonance is *ontological*, meaning that it transforms not only the subject's relationship to themselves but their very being before God.

To unfold this thesis, we shall analyze in turn what the Mahoukou Law reveals about the Call within the sacrament (Part I), about the Response (Part II), about the Resonance (Part III), before formalizing the nested structure of the four triads and what it reveals about the nature of the sacrament and about the Mahoukou Law itself (Part IV).

Part I — The Call in the Sacrament: Being Summoned Before Speaking

§ 1.1 — Prevenient Grace as Originary Call

Catholic theology has always known that God is first. Not first in the sense of a chronological anteriority. But first in the sense of a structural and permanent priority: at every moment, in every situation, it is God who calls before the human being responds. *Gratia praeveniens* — prevenient grace — is the theological name for this priority. It designates the movement by which God always anticipates the human decision, renders possible what the human being alone could not accomplish, and keeps open the possibility of return even where the sinner believes themselves definitively closed to any conversion.

The Mahoukou Law enables us to read this doctrine with a phenomenological precision that theology alone could not produce: prevenient grace is a Call. Not a blind force that pushes the penitent toward the confessional. But a Call in the rigorous sense of the A2R triad: addressed to this singular existence in this precise situation, in excess of itself — bearing a demand that overflows what the penitent can formulate —, and opening a dialogal space in which the Response remains possible as a free act and not as a conditioned reflex.

John Chrysostom, in his *Homilies on Repentance*, had described this preliminary movement with remarkable acuity. He returned again and again to the image of God who waits, who is patient, who does not weary of knocking at the door of the soul even when it appears hermetically sealed. Chrysostom's insistence on the permanence of the divine Call is phenomenologically decisive: the Call is not a punctual event that takes place once and for all and is thereafter past. It is structurally permanent — it precedes every moment of the penitent's existence, accompanies them in their fall, follows them in their withdrawal, and is never withdrawn.

What the Mahoukou Law enables us to add is decisive: this permanent divine Call is not an orphaned Call. It is the gesture of an existence — divine life itself — that addresses itself to another existence from the engagement of all that it is. And it is precisely for this reason that this Call can produce a Resonance that no natural or therapeutic process can produce: because it bears the existential signature of a divine freedom committed in the act of address.

§ 1.2 — Conscience as the Site of the Interior Call: Augustine and Ricoeur

There is in Augustine's *Confessions* a sentence that perhaps contains the most dense phenomenology of interpellation in the entire Christian tradition. It appears in the very first lines, before the narrative even begins: *You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.* This sentence is not first and foremost a doctrinal affirmation — it is a phenomenological description of remarkable precision. It says that lack, restlessness, the impossibility of being self-sufficient are not accidents of human existence but its very structure. The human subject is always already called toward what exceeds them.

Paul Ricoeur, in *Oneself as Another*, had shown that moral conscience is not a simple interior monologue. It presents itself as an otherness within: a voice that comes from deeper than my own conscious deliberation, that precedes and judges me from an interiority I have not constituted. This Ricoeurian interior otherness is precisely what theology names 'moral conscience' — and what the Mahoukou Law identifies as the site of the intra-psychic Call in the sacrament. In the sacrament of reconciliation, this intra-psychic triad is the first to unfold — and the longest. It begins well before the penitent crosses the threshold of the confessional, and it continues long after the absolution.

§ 1.3 — The Fault as a Hollowed-Out Call

There is in this sacrament something paradoxical and deeply phenomenological that classical moral theology had not sufficiently thematized: it is the fault itself that calls. Not as an accusation that condemns and closes off, but as a dissonance that insists — an impossibility of being self-sufficient, a weight that refuses to dissolve into forgetfulness, a sign that continues to signify despite attempts to silence it.

The Mahoukou Law enables us to name this dimension with a new precision. The fault is not simply a moral content recorded in memory. It is a hollowed-out Call: a Call that arises not from the exterior but from the very depths of the accomplished act, that says 'you cannot remain here,' that opens in spite of everything a space toward which a Response becomes possible. John Paul II, in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (1984), had insisted on this dimension with particular force: sin is not only a transgression of a rule. It is a wound — to the relationship with God, to the relationship with others, to the relationship with oneself. And it is precisely as a wound that sin calls: because a wound does not close by itself, because it demands an external intervention, because it keeps open a pain that is at the same time a plea.

§ 1.4 — The Perichoretic Call: The Trinity as the Originary Structure of Interpellation

The most philosophically vertiginous moment of the sacrament is precisely the one that the liturgy formulates with the greatest simplicity. When the priest says: 'I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,' he is not reciting an accompanying formula — he is summoning a structure. The Trinitarian invocation is not a decorative frame added to the essential act of absolution: it reveals its source and its nature.

The Mahoukou Law enables us to read this Trinitarian structure in all its phenomenological and theological depth, producing thereby its most original theological contribution. The Trinity is itself an originary A2R triad. The Father is the source of the Call: the origin without origin of every address, the absolute freedom of a love that gives itself without calculation and without reserve. The Son is the Response: the Incarnation is the Response of the Son to the Call of the Father, and this Response takes the form of an offered existence, a vulnerability carried all the way to death and to the silence of the tomb. The Spirit is the Resonance: it returns retroactively upon the Father and the Son to constitute them in their eternal relationship, and it acts in the soul of the penitent as the living Resonance of the absolution received — transforming from within what the priest's word has decided from without.

This reading of the Trinity as an originary A2R triad is not a philosophical reduction of Trinitarian theology — it is a re-reading that reveals the deep dialogal structure that the tradition had always intuited without being able to formalize it with this precision.

Part II — The Response in the Sacrament: Speaking in Truth Under the Gaze of Another

§ 2.1 — Why Must One Speak? The Response as Self-Exposure

Catholic theology has always insisted on the necessity of oral avowal — and this insistence has often been misunderstood or poorly received. It has been seen as a humiliating requirement, a device of ecclesial control, a juridical procedure designed to establish guilt before pronouncing the verdict. The Mahoukou Law enables us to offer an entirely different reading — one that reveals the existential depth of this requirement and shows why it is not arbitrary but structurally necessary.

Speaking is not, in the sacrament, the transmission of information. It is not a matter of informing the priest of what the penitent has done. Speaking is an act of a radically different

order: it is *self-exposure*. It is letting the truth arrive in the register of speech addressed to another, accepting that one is no longer alone before what one has done, responding to the Call that said from the depths of conscience: *speak yourself in truth, emerge from the silence of the unspoken fault*. Thomas Aquinas had grasped something essential about this dimension. In his theology of the sacrament of penance, he noted that the acts of the penitent are *quasi-matter* of this sacrament. This philosophically remarkable formula says precisely what the Mahoukou Law formalizes: the human Response is not a mere accessory of the sacrament — it is its very substance.

§ 2.2 — The Fragile Response: Jean-Louis Chrétien and Constitutive Inadequacy

Jean-Louis Chrétien had formulated, in *The Call and the Response*, something essential about the structure of all human speech addressed to what exceeds it: to respond to a call is always to respond inadequately. Always to be late in relation to what has been addressed to us. Always to seek one's words in a space that precedes and exceeds us. This constitutive inadequacy is not a failure — it is the very mark of the authenticity of the Response.

In the confessional, this inadequacy is manifest — and the liturgy of the sacrament has always institutionally recognized it. The penitent hesitates, simplifies, forgets, reformulates, circles around what they wish to say without ever saying it entirely. The Mahoukou Law enables us to name this fragility with precision: it is the existential signature of the Response. The authentic Response always bears the trace of the particular existence of the one who formulates it — their hesitations and certainties, their own way of searching for words, the silences they leave and the formulations they risk. And it is precisely this existential signature — this irreducible imperfection — that renders the confessing Response capable of producing a Resonance that no standardized formula could trigger.

§ 2.3 — The Priest: Figure of Mediation of the Call and Witness to the Response

The priest occupies in this sacrament a phenomenologically unique and theologically irreducible position. He is neither simply a human interlocutor — an attentive friend, a benevolent therapist —, nor simply a functionary of the divine who mechanically executes a ritual act. He is the figure in which two irreducible dimensions hold together without merging.

Theologically, he acts *in persona Christi*. This formula receives in the light of the Mahoukou Law a precise phenomenological illumination: to act *in persona Christi* is to be the one who renders the divine Call audible, locatable, incarnate. John Chrysostom, in his homilies *On the*

Priesthood, had described the priest as one whose mission infinitely exceeds his personal condition — which is exactly the phenomenological structure of the mediator in the A2R triad: he is in excess of himself, bearer of a word that surpasses him and that acts through him without erasing him. The seal of confession — that absolute secret the priest is bound to maintain at the cost of his own life — is the structural condition for the freedom of the Response: the penitent can expose themselves without calculation, say what they have said to no one, because the space is guaranteed in its absolute sacredness.

§ 2.4 — Confession and Psychoanalysis: Two Radically Distinct Regimes of Response

The two practices share a genuine formal structure: someone speaks about themselves before another who listens, in a space of protected confidentiality. In both cases, speech is the site where something transforms. Freud himself noted this resemblance — before vigorously rejecting it.

But the difference is radical — and it is situated precisely at the level of Resonance. In psychoanalysis, the patient's Response produces a *psychic* Resonance: it reorganizes the subject's relationship to themselves, brings unconscious dynamics to light, displaces guilt. In Lacan, analytic speech is structured by lack: the divided subject can never coincide with themselves, the chain of signifiers never closes upon a final meaning. In the sacrament of reconciliation, the Response opens the possibility of a Resonance of an entirely different order: not psychic but *ontological* — touching not only the subject's relationship to themselves but their very being before God. Psychoanalysis cannot give absolution — not for lack of goodwill on the analyst's part, but by structural impossibility: no analyst acts *in persona Christi*, no analytic speech is *signum efficax* in the Thomistic sense.

Part III — The Resonance in the Sacrament: Being Re-Created by a Received Word

§ 3.1 — Absolution as Performative Resonance: Thomas Aquinas Re-Read through the Mahoukou Law

There is in the theology of Thomas Aquinas a formula that has been awaiting for centuries to be read at its proper phenomenological depth: *signum efficax* — effective sign, a sign that produces what it signifies. The word of absolution is not an informative declaration nor even

a conditional promise whose efficacy depends on external conditions. It is an operative word: it does what it says. It does not announce forgiveness — it produces it.

The Mahoukou Law enables us to read this Thomistic formula in all its phenomenological depth by situating it precisely within the structure of the triad. The sacramental Resonance is the most radical and concentrated form of Resonance the triad can produce. It does not merely transform the way the penitent relates to themselves — it transforms what they are before God. It is an ontological Resonance: the being of the penitent is really modified by the word received. The notion of *ex opere operato* (meaning 'by the very fact that the act is performed' — in other words, the efficacy of a sacrament depends not on the holiness of the one who gives or receives it, but on the fact that the rite is correctly performed) receives here an original phenomenological reading: sacramental Resonance is guaranteed not by the human quality of the penitent's Response nor by the personal virtue of the priest, but by the divine source of the Call.

§ 3.2 — Resonance as a Closure that Re-Opens: Confession as Anti-Lacan

Lacan had built his entire theory of the subject around a fundamental intuition: the subject is divided, structured by a constitutive lack, never coincident with themselves. Analytic speech does not aim to fill this lack. The chain of signifiers never closes upon a final meaning, and the end of analysis is not an ontological reconciliation but a form of lucidity assumed about the fundamental impossibility of coinciding with oneself.

Confession is, in this sense, radically anti-Lacan — and this designation is not a critique of Lacan but the precise recognition of a difference in phenomenological nature. In the sacrament of reconciliation, there exists a word that decides: *I absolve you*. This word does not refer to another word. It does not indefinitely relaunch the chain of signifiers. It rules, it decides, it produces a real before and after in the being of the penitent. John Paul II, in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, had insisted on this decisive dimension: reconciliation is not an indefinite process of which one could not say when it begins or when it ends. It is an event. The sacramental Resonance is a closure that re-opens: it closes the fault by forgiving it, and it re-opens the future by restoring to the penitent the freedom of a future not determined by what they have done.

§ 3.3 — The Transfiguration of Lack: From Augustine to the Mahoukou Law

The sacramental Resonance does not suppress all lack — and it is here that theology is at its most subtle. One must distinguish with Thomas Aquinas between two radically different

levels. Sin — the deliberate rupture with God, the freely consented moral disorder — is really erased by the absolution. But finitude remains. Fragility remains. The inclination to sin — what the tradition names concupiscence — likewise remains. The penitent leaves the confessional forgiven, but they leave with the same body, the same history, the same vulnerabilities.

The Mahoukou Law enables us to name with precision what the sacrament does to this residual lack. It does not suppress it — but it transfigures it. Before confession, lack is experienced as guilt, closure, self-withdrawal. After confession, this same lack — the same finitude, the same fragility — can become oriented desire, openness, movement toward. The sacramental Resonance converts the nature of the Call that follows: the penitent who leaves the confessional enters a world where the Calls addressed to them can once again be heard from a reconciled existence rather than from an existence weighed down by the unforgiven fault.

§ 3.4 — Sisyphus, the Edenic Fall, and the Temporality of Grace

We must now confront the question that ordinary pastoral care often avoids out of delicacy or embarrassment: the question of the relapse. The penitent leaves the confessional forgiven, transformed, reconciled. And then they fall again. Sometimes quickly. Sometimes into the same faults. The temptation is then to read this relapse as a failure of the sacrament, or worse, as proof that the forgiveness received was not sincere.

The Mahoukou Law enables us to refuse this reading — and to propose in its place a radically different understanding of the temporality within which the believer's relapse is inscribed. The first error is to read this temporality on the model of Sisyphus. Sisyphus is condemned to repetition without memory and without horizon: the boulder falls again, and the movement begins again identically, in a circular temporality closed upon itself, without any Call exceeding it and giving it direction.

The temporality of the believer who relapses is of an entirely different nature. It is inhabited by the memory of a received absolution — that existential trace which the absolution has left in the being of the penitent and which the fall itself cannot erase. And it unfolds within the horizon of a permanent Call that does not withdraw — the Call of God that, as Chrysostom had seen, never ceases to knock at the door even of the soul that has closed itself off. This is not Sisyphus. It is someone who advances, sometimes falling, within a temporality inhabited by a Call that surpasses them and that does not grow weary.

And it is here that a formula produced in our dialogue says something irreplaceable: *sin lived as a new Edenic fall that renews the hunger for God*. The relapse is not simply a repeated

moral failure — it is, in the dynamic of grace, a moment when the absence of God makes itself felt once more in all its burning depth. The sinner who falls again does not fall into nothingness: they fall into their humanity, into their constitutive finitude, into their irreducible dependence upon a Call that precedes and exceeds them. And this fall — lived in the memory of the forgiveness received and in the horizon of the forgiveness possible — can become the site of a renewed hunger for God, perhaps deepened by the very experience of the fall. Augustine had understood this from his own experience: the *Confessions* are the testimony not of a man who never stumbled, but of a man whose successive falls carved within him a hunger for God of a depth that a blameless existence might perhaps never have attained.

Part IV — The Triad of Triads: The Perichoretic Architecture of the Sacrament

§ 4.1 — The Four Nested Levels of the A2R Triad

What makes the sacrament of reconciliation philosophically exceptional — and what the Mahoukou Law enables us to see with a clarity that no other approach had yet produced — is that it does not engage a single Call–Response–Resonance triad but four simultaneous and nested triads, each of which conditions the others and is conditioned by them.

The intra-psychic triad is the most silent and the longest. The Call within it is the voice of conscience — that otherness within oneself that Ricœur had described, that Augustinian restlessness that refuses to be stifled. The Response within it is contrition. The Resonance within it is the progressive transformation of the relationship to oneself that grace initiates and that an entire lifetime must accomplish.

The interpersonal triad is the most visible. The Call within it is the presence of the priest who makes speech possible. The Response within it is the oral confession — the fragile and exposed word of the penitent. The Resonance within it is ecclesial reconciliation: not only is the penitent reconciled with God, but they are reintegrated into the communion of the Church from which sin had partially estranged them.

The theological triad is the most profound. The Call within it is prevenient grace. The Response within it is the whole of the penitent's sacramental gesture. The Resonance within it is the absolution in its deepest ontological effect: the restoration of sanctifying grace, the real reconciliation with God, the transformation of the penitent's being in their relationship to their creator and savior.

The perichoretic triad is the most originary — the one in which all the others are rooted and find their source. The Call within it is the Father — the eternal source of every address. The Response within it is the Son — whose entire Incarnation is the perfect and definitive Response to the Call of the Father, offered once for all and made present in each sacramental celebration. The Resonance within it is the Spirit — who returns retroactively upon the Father and the Son to constitute them in their eternal relationship, and who acts in the soul of the penitent as the living and interior Resonance of the word of absolution.

§ 4.2 — What the Mahoukou Law Contributes to Sacramental Theology

Classical sacramental theology has accomplished considerable and irreplaceable work. It identified with precision the constitutive elements of the sacrament. It developed with remarkable rigor the notion of effective word, of *ex opere operato*, of ontological transformation by grace. But it did not possess a tool capable of formalizing the nested structure of the levels of interpellation — of showing how the four triads mutually condition one another and form a coherent phenomenological unity.

This is precisely what the Mahoukou Law contributes: not a revision of sacramental theology, but an analytical tool that reveals its structural depth and enables us to understand why this sacrament is irreducible to any other speech act. The sacramental Resonance is unique not because it would be magical or arbitrary, but because it is the product of a triad of triads in which the originary Call comes from God himself.

§ 4.3 — What Sacramental Theology Contributes to the Mahoukou Law

The reciprocity is real — and it is this that makes this essay a contribution to the Dialogales collection rather than simply the application of a philosophical tool to a theological object. The sacrament of reconciliation brings to the Mahoukou Law the demonstration that the A2R triad can function at levels of ontological and perichoretic depth that surpass ordinary human interpellation. The Mahoukou Law had been formalized on the basis of human interpellation. The sacrament shows that this structure can extend to the theological and perichoretic level — that the A2R triad is not merely a law of human interpellation but perhaps a law of all authentic relation, including the Trinitarian relation itself.

The sacrament also brings to the Mahoukou Law the notion of Resonance guaranteed by the divine source of the Call, and the category of eschatologically oriented Resonance — stretched toward a fulfillment that surpasses the time of existence. These are genuine conceptual enrichments that broaden the scope of the Mahoukou Law well beyond what its founding texts

had anticipated — and that confirm once more its heuristic fruitfulness as a central criterion of its epistemological validity.

§ 4.4 — The Seal, Silence, and the Sacredness of the Space of Interpellation

One element of the sacrament remains that the Mahoukou Law enables us to illuminate in a particularly original manner: the seal of confession. The priest is bound to absolute secrecy regarding everything he hears in the confessional. Not a relative secrecy, nuanced according to circumstances. An absolute secrecy — at the cost of his own life if necessary. John Chrysostom had described this secrecy as one of the deepest marks of the difference between the Christian priest and every other custodian of human confidences.

The Mahoukou Law enables us to understand why this requirement is structurally necessary and not simply disciplinarily convenient. The seal of confession is the condition of possibility for the authentic Response. For the authentic Response in the A2R triad supposes that something is at stake for the one who responds — that they take a risk, that they expose themselves, that they consent to the vulnerability of truly speaking themselves. Now vulnerability cannot be total if the penitent must calculate the consequences of what they say. The seal creates the space within which vulnerability can be total. And it is this total vulnerability that makes possible a Response of a depth that other spaces of speech cannot attain.

Conclusion — The Sacrament as Interpellation par Excellence: Reconciliation, Resurrection, and Hunger for God

What the Journey Has Revealed

At the end of this journey, something has been revealed that was present from the beginning but that neither sacramental theology nor classical phenomenology could formulate with this precision: the sacrament of reconciliation is the most dense phenomenological act of interpellation that human existence can undergo — not because it is the most dramatic or the most visible, but because it simultaneously engages four nested levels of interpellation whose structural coherence constitutes a phenomenological unity without equivalent in the order of human existence.

At the level of the Call: prevenient grace is an originary Call — permanent, addressed, in excess of itself, opening a space that human freedom can always refuse but that God never closes. Conscience is the site of the interior Call. The fault itself is a hollowed-out Call. And the Trinitarian formula of the absolution summons the originary perichoretic triad in which every authentic Call is rooted. At the level of the Response: the confessing word is a self-exposure irreducible to any other speech act — it bears the existential signature of the one who formulates it in all their constitutive inadequacy. At the level of Resonance: the absolution is a *signum efficax* — a word that produces an ontological Resonance irreducible to any psychic Resonance, guaranteed by the divine source of the Call, and eschatologically oriented toward a fullness that only definitive communion with God can accomplish.

What the Mahoukou Law and Sacramental Theology Have Mutually Contributed

This dialogue has not been one-directional. The Mahoukou Law has brought to sacramental theology the formalization of the nested structure of the four triads, a precise understanding of why sacramental Resonance is irreducible to all other Resonance, and a phenomenological reading of the seal of confession as the structural condition for the freedom of the Response. And sacramental theology has brought to the Mahoukou Law the demonstration that the A2R triad can function at levels of ontological and perichoretic depth that surpass ordinary human interpellation, the notion of Resonance guaranteed by the divine source of the Call, and the category of eschatologically oriented Resonance. These are genuine conceptual enrichments that broaden the scope of the Mahoukou Law well beyond what its founding texts had anticipated.

The Final Synthetic Formula

The sacrament of reconciliation is the act in which human existence enters most completely into the structure of Trinitarian life. The Call of the Father summons it from its finitude and its fault. The Response of the Son redeems it from the cross and renders it present in the word of the priest. The Resonance of the Spirit transforms it from within by restoring grace and converting lack into oriented desire. And each received absolution is a small resurrection — real, decisive, ontologically transformative — and yet still unfinished, still stretched toward the fullness that only definitive communion with God can give.

The name of reconciliation is right. For reconciliation is precisely the name of the Resonance when it touches not only two human existences but human existence and its God — a Resonance that begins in the confessional, that continues through the time of life, and that

will be completed in the final resurrection where lack will be definitively transfigured into fullness, hunger into satiation, and the Call into face-to-face encounter.

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