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THEME

Anthropology of Hope

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INTRODUCTION

The first articles in this issue of *AUC Theologica* had their origins in a conference held as part of the University Centre of Excellence programme, Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective.[1] This conference, which took place in May 2023 in Prague, was entitled 'Anthropology of Hope', and was the final conference of the six-year project.

2024 will mark the sixtieth anniversary of the first publication of Jürgen Moltmann's ground-breaking book *Theology of Hope*, and since that time eschatological hope has come to occupy an important place in the theological lexicon. Faced with so many intractable and violent events around the world, there is certainly a need to continue to search for a hope that is life-giving and engaged. But most fundamentally, hope is an integral part of what it is to be human. To lose hope is in an important way to lose the heart of one's humanity, the motivation to keep going even in the darkest of times.

For this reason, it is an anthropological reality, and as an anthropological reality, a part of what it is to be human, it demands theological reflection. This was the task that the conference set itself and a selection of responses to this task can be found in this issue of the journal. We begin with a contribution on hope and truth-telling from Professor

[1] Charles University Research Centre program No. 204052. This introduction and the subsequent articles on the theme form part of this project. For more on this project and the previous conferences held under its auspices, see Tim Noble, A Conference Report: 'The Role of Beauty in Being and Becoming Human: An Interdisciplinary Perspective' (19–22 May 2022, Fortna monastery, Prague), *AUC Theologica* 12, no. 1 (2022): 131–134, doi: https://doi.org/10.14712/23363398.2023.10.

Aristotle Papanikolaou, who is one of the leading theologians in the USA today, chair of Orthodox theology at Fordham University in New York.

Normally, it is not the policy of *AUC Theologica* to publish more or less unchanged conference presentations, since the demands and stylistic qualities of a conference paper and of an academic article differ considerably. However, on this occasion, we have decided to publish Professor Papanikolaou's paper more or less as it was delivered. This exception is being made for several reasons. It acknowledges, first, the quality and insightfulness of the reflection. It is also a way of thanking Professor Papanikolaou for his long-standing support of the project, including being willing to take the trip to Prague to deliver the paper in the midst of other pressing engagements. Third, it also serves as the basis for the subsequent two articles, which respond and develop the ideas expressed in the paper.

The first response to the paper comes from Dr Greg Ryan, a British Roman Catholic theologian from the University of Durham and an important contributor to the Receptive Ecumenism movement. Dr Ryan focuses on three areas where the combination of hope and truth-telling as complementary rather than at the expense of each other have a key role. First, he looks at the ongoing revelations of sexual abuse in the church, and the need to search for some kind of structural virtue to react against the all too frequent manifestations of structural sin in the church that has permitted so much abuse for so long. The second area is that of ecumenical relations, learning to listen to each other and the truths that we tell, including the less pleasant truths about our traditions. Third, he focuses on the synodal movement in the Roman Catholic Church, that led to the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2024.

The second response to Professor Papanikolaou's paper comes from Dr Pavol Bargár, lecturer in Religious Studies at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, who has worked on narrative and embodied theologies. Bargár's paper focuses on ways in which truth and truth-telling can be embodied, seeing truth as an embodied reality, and demonstrating this with reference to an episode from a television series.

The final article from the conference in this issue is from Dr Petr Jandejsek, director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies and a lecturer at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University and at Jabok Institute of Social Pedagogy and Theology in Prague. In his paper, he

looks at the contribution of Johann Baptist Metz in making the move from dangerous memory to dangerous hope. Focusing on the transformational possibilities for humankind found in Metz's work, Jandejsek analyses the contribution of the German political theologian, showing how his writings remain deeply relevant for our world today.

Tim Noble

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THEME

Anthropology of Hope

TRUTH-TELLING AND HOPE

ARISTOTLE PAPANIKOLAOU

ABSTRACT

Why else would one speak the truth if not out of and for hope? This hope is, indeed, a passion 'for the possible' and in Christian anthropology, this possible has something to do with eschatological flourishing that has already been inaugurated and which is never simply a private affair but has public effects and implications. We are created for communion with God – this is our hope; but there can be no communion with God – either individually or politically – when there is no truth-telling.

Keywords

Truth-telling; Confession; Theosis; Deification; Communion; Hope; Martyrdom; Politics

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I was asked to speak about truth-telling and hope. I have written on truth-telling for the past two decades,[1] and I feel compelled to begin with describing here the basic building blocks of my thinking on truth-telling, and then to discern how it relates to the concept of hope. I have never really thought about truth-telling in relation to the human experience of hope, although, as I will soon explain, I think hope was always my implicit motivation for exploring the dynamics or phenomenology of truth-telling as an experience, and, as I will soon argue, I also

[1] 'Liberating Eros: Confession and Desire,' *The Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 115–36.

believe hope has always been a constitutive part of truth-telling. Why else would some speak the truth if not out of and for hope?

The first thing to say about truth-telling is that there are many different kinds. I could tell you the truth about where I come from – for example, I am from Chicago. This particular type of truth-telling in most cases would be incidental, without much emotional impact. Perhaps there may be a certain pride that one feels when speaking about where they come from – a city that is well-known, with a great tradition for food, architecture, or culture. In some cases, someone may be afraid to be honest about their place of origin or their heritage, as is often the case if someone is from a poorer section of a city or from a region of a country that is known for poverty or violence. There are also situations where we say where we are from and it is simply incidental information. With this example of simply telling the truth of where we are from, we already see how hope can often be attached to a simple piece of information, how hope is somehow woven very tightly with our feelings or emotions, that is, our affectivity, and how hope has something to do with the way we relate to others, with the way others perceive us, with how we matter in the world.

The kind of truth-telling on which I focus is that which is bound up with some kind of affectivity. I am not so much interested in truth-telling as an incidental, non-affective piece of information, although I think attention to that specific experience can help us illuminate something about affective forms of truth-telling. My interest is in affective forms of truth-telling and, more specifically, those forms of truth-telling that are surrounded by the emotion of fear and the feelings of anxiety. It is quite easy, and there is often a very strong desire to tell the truth about something good in our lives, and we need to go no farther than social media to see evidence of this desire. Even truth-telling associated with fear needs to be nuanced a bit. For example, we may feel fear about the fact that we have been diagnosed with cancer, but we are not necessarily afraid to tell others about that diagnosis, unless, of course, it may threaten our job or a relationship. We may want to tell others about our diagnosis for support, prayers, sympathy, and even attention, but that truth-telling does not necessarily mitigate the fear surrounding the cancer diagnosis.

There are other forms of truth-telling in which the content itself is what we fear to be known. In short, there are certain things we are afraid to say, and we are afraid to say these things for fear of what they

might mean for how we perceive ourselves, how others perceive us; for fear of what it might mean for our ability to relate to others, and for how others might relate to us. The content of these fearful things could be things that we have done intentionally or unintentionally, such as betraying a friend or killing innocents in military combat;[2] it could be things that have been done to us, such as being raped; or things that we have neither done or have been done directly to us but to which we are somehow associated, such as being a relative of someone who commits a mass shooting, an all-too-common occurrence in the United States, or having a parent or sibling who is in prison.

We see how hope is inextricably tied to our *not* saying these things about ourselves to others, as we hope that in keeping these particular things secret, it will affect our relations with ourselves positively, and, perhaps, even our relations with ourselves, although, in terms of our relations with ourselves, there is the risk that in not revealing things we are most afraid to say to others, it will eventually impact us in a negative way affectively. Sometimes we are not even aware of how it is we feel about an event that happens to us, only for it to manifest itself in destructive patterns of relationship later in life. I just saw a beautifully done documentary by a program in the US called 'Independent Lens', and it was of a boy whose mother just simply left him and his brother when they were in their early teens.[3] After 3 years, he tracked her down. They have since had a relationship over the past 20 years. When his mother first left him, he had thought he was fine, continued with school, was an excellent athlete. Later in his 20s, he had two relationships in which he treated his partners, who were women, very badly. He started to drink heavily. Through truth-telling, he was able to realize that he had not really been honest as a teenager about how he felt about his mother's abandonment and that, even though they have a relationship now, he still has lingering feelings of resentment and anger at being abandoned, which was, of course, affecting how he was relating to others.

This story, as well as countless others, reveals a couple of things. First, a young, teenage boy, naturally, found it difficult to be honest

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[2] 'The Ascetics of War: The Undoing and Redoing of Virtue,' *Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War*, ed. Perry T. Hamalis and Valerie A. Karras (University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 13–36.

[3] 'Independent Lens', Season 24 Episode 14, last modified August 5, 2023, https://www.pbs.org/video/sam-now-bgzszf/.

about his real feelings about his mother's abandonment, for fear, of course, of what such honesty might mean – that his mother really did not want him, that he did not matter to his mother, that he was unlovable, that he may never see her again, that he may never experience the safety, fun, laughter, joy that he experienced when she was with them. This lack of truth-telling to the self, this form of self-deception, helped him cope, go on, and achieve, in other words, in some sense it allowed him to maintain hope in a certain image of himself and in the relationships he was able to form. Later in life, the self-deception caught up with him and affected both his relationship to himself and to others, especially with those with whom he had hoped to be most intimate.

Insofar as not recognizing or willfully concealing the truth can help us establish relationships we think we want, or the kind of self-image and perception by others we think will foster good relationships, there is a potential link between truth-telling and intimacy. In a relationship of friendship, for example, one could conceal a deep, dark secret that they are afraid to reveal to a friend, and this non-telling could form the relationship in a particular way, but what would not be possible is the degree of intimacy possible if one were to share this deep, dark secret. But there is, of course, a risk. Because on hearing this deep, dark secret, the result could be rejection and the end of the friendship; or, another result could be prudence, compassion, wisdom, and acceptance – in short, greater intimacy. Once the truth is spoken, it cannot be taken back; it hovers in the middle of the relationship either as a wall that divides or a magnet that draws the friends closer to each other. Once the truth is spoken, the relationship will change based on this articulated truth, and, of course, attached to the articulation is hope both of self and the relationship itself. We see here, however, that for the realization of this hope, much depends on the listener.

One would think that the listener is simply a neutral observer in truth-telling, but when we speak about hope and truth-telling, we do not simply point to the transformative potential of truth-telling in the telling itself; that hope has something to do with the listener, who receives this articulation and, in receiving, has the power to actualize this articulation in a particular way. What do I mean by 'actualize this articulation in a particular way'? Once the articulation is given, nothing will be the same; a new event, state of being or 'existential how' will emerge that depends both on what is articulated but also

on its response. If someone reveals something that they are afraid to articulate, and if the listener uses this articulation in such a way as to manipulate, demean, or abuse the listener, then this articulation will realize something that resembles the demonic; if, however, the listener receives this articulation with, as we mentioned, prudence, compassion, wisdom, and acceptance, then something more akin to the theotic will be manifested, which is that in which our hope lies. The listener has the power to iconize either the demonic or the theotic, depending on how they respond.

But it is not simply the listener as a listener that matters in the actualization of the event of truth-telling; it matters who the listener is. The particularity of the listener affects the affective and existential impact of the truth-telling. In plain words, the rebound effect of the listener on truth-telling will be different if the listener is a stranger, friend, sibling, parent, therapist, talk-show host, or priest. As an example, I once asked my students whether it was easier to admit a wrong done to someone in private or on a popular TV talk show. Even though the popular TV talk show may be watched by millions of people, they astutely said that it would be easier to admit a wrong on this TV talk show, to the audience in the attendance and to the audience watching. Why? Because if the response from the person wronged is not what was hoped for, then they could get the support of the audience against the response of the person who was wronged. In other words, it is much more vulnerable and riskier to admit a wrong to someone in private, because we may not get the response we were hoping for; because we have no one else to shield us from the disappointment, hurt, sadness, and anger of the person wronged.

This dynamic of truth-telling, what is articulated, the response of the listener, and who the listener is, helps explain why in the Orthodox and Catholic churches confession is a sacrament.[4] Of course, there are historical reasons, but theologically it makes sense if one believes in an incarnational understanding of the God-world relation, which means a theotic understanding of the God-world relation. If one understands forgiveness as an event rather than a cognitively willed action, where one faces the forgiver in the hope of being forgiven, then the invisibility

[4] See my essay, 'Honest to God: Confession and Desire,' in *Thinking through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Scholars*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth Prodromou (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 219–246.

of God would make that impossible if not for the iconic role of the priest (who does not have to be a man). Sure, it is possible to ask God for forgiveness in the privacy of one's own room, and such a confession may prove difficult affectively to articulate; or one could write in a journal, which also could prove difficult affectively; but one could never receive in those articulations an iconicized response of forgiveness, the closest we can actually get to a face-to-face event of forgiveness with God. For better or for worse, even though all of creation is sacramental, and even though all humans are made in the image of God, the priest iconizes God in a way that is distinct from all other iconizations. The priest becomes a conduit for the hoped-for event of forgiveness that we hope to experience in and from God, in a way and to a degree not readily available if when we truth-tell to a stranger, friend, sibling, parent, therapist, or TV talk show.

The importance of the listener is also evident when thinking about truth-telling in the political context. I have written on how the degree of truth-telling possible within a given society is a marker for measuring the degree to which a society is democratically pluralistic and committed to freedom and equality.[5] One could point to any number of authoritarian regimes throughout history, but we need not look farther than the kind of totalitarianism emerging in Russia, Hungary, Turkey, and Serbia, not to mention so many other regimes in the world. In these particular kinds of regimes, truth-telling is feared; the listener automatically becomes suspect and feared, even when such a listener is a friend, sibling, parent, or priest. In short, truth-telling is severely restricted, and as a result, political communion is stunted. In a space where truth-telling is allowed to the greatest possible degree for a society that values freedom and equality, then such a society allows for more pluralistic forms of openness, honesty, and intimacy not possible within restrictive totalitarian regimes. One sees the link between truth-telling and authentic relationship especially clearly in the contrast between totalitarian regimes and democratic societies. It is true that liberal democratic societies can veer toward a hyper-individualism and a hyper-consumerism, in a way that is the flip side of totalitarian regimes veering toward extreme forms of homogeneity and sameness. The irony is that in a society where truth-telling is feared, isolation

[5] *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 163–194.

is inevitable. In a society where truth-telling is not feared, where the listener is not feared, then multiple forms of political communion are possible. Even in a political context, the forms of political communion for which we hope depend on the conditions of the possibility for truth-telling, and on a political listener that is not threatening. More could be said here, especially in the era of 'fake news'. Perhaps what we are seeing is that the less truth-telling in politics, either by force or willfully, the more hopelessness there is in a political society. Is this what is happening in our current situation?

I want to end by engaging very briefly an important recent contribution to theological anthropology in which hope plays a constitutive role. It is by David Kelsey, emeritus professor of Yale Divinity School, who writes:

> Like faith, hope involves a commitment to an array of diverse practices in public. They are practices celebratory of the quotidian's eschatological flourishing; they are, after all, joyously hopeful practices. They include practices of forming and enacting intentions. They include practices expressive of certain emotions, passions, and feelings. And, because both cooperative human actions and human feelings are conceptually formed, some of them are practices of learning relevant concepts and ways in which to think. In short, they are practices that engage the full range of personal bodies' powers.

A little later, he adds:

> A passion is a conceptually formed, intense, and persisting desire for some thing or some state of affairs in the public space of a shared lived world such that it organizes a personal body's energies and time and constitutes one way in which she is engaged in that world. It is in this sense of a 'passion' that we may say, following Kierkegaard at a distance, that hope is a passion 'for the possible' in the sense of a passion for the eschatological flourishing of our proximate contexts that is possible precisely because, and only because, God has already inaugurated such flourishing in our lived worlds.[6]

[6] *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, vol. 1 (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 503 and 523.

There are several points here that connect to my comments on truth-telling and hope. First, one of the 'joyful hopeful practices' that are 'celebratory of the quotidian's eschatological flourishing' must be truth-telling, for why else would one speak the truth if not out of and for hope? This hope is, indeed, a passion 'for the possible' and in Christian anthropology, this possible has something to do with eschatological flourishing that has already been inaugurated and which is never simply a private affair but has public effects and implications. This hope in the eschatological promise must have something to do with 'love', since, as St. Paul tells us, 'these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love' (1 Cor. 13:13). In the end, the possible for which we are passionate, that is hopeful, is love; it is a theotic possibility, to love as God loves – to love God, neighbor, and ourselves. It is for this reason that we hope in the promise that, as St. Paul tells us, 'nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below – there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord' (1 Rom 8:38–39).

We are created for communion with God – this is our hope; but there can be no communion with God – either individually or politically – when there is no truth-telling. God does not respond to false images, even the false images we have of ourselves; God shatters them as God did the golden calf; or, rather, God remains concealed amidst the fragmentation caused by these false images. The death of the old self as a result of truth-telling to the other who receives it in truth and love is a form of martyrdom that enables communion because it breaks through the mask that prevents communion with the other. In the public realm, self-assertion is not the same as martyrdom, especially when it fosters a politics of demonization. A real politics of martyrdom would be the visible manifestations of political communion, of forms of relationality across deep and abiding differences that constitute human beings as unique. This is the great gift of the martyrs to the world – that there can be no communion without martyrdom. What the world needs now more than ever in an age of globalization, which is an age of increased encounter across difference, is more martyrs; it needs a politics of martyrdom; it needs death – hopefully more spiritual than physical – that results from truth-telling in the face of the other. It is only through martyrdom – a form of truth-telling in which we get 'rid

of [the] old self' and 'put on the new self' (Eph 4:22–24) – that love will conquer fear.

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HOPE AND TRUTH-TELLING: A RESPONSE TO ARISTOTLE PAPANIKOLAOU

GREGORY A. RYAN

ABSTRACT

This article is a revised version of the paper given at the Anthropology of Hope conference in Prague, May 2023, in response to Professor Aristotle Papanikolaou's presentation on 'Hope and Truth-telling'. The first part responds briefly to the affective nature of truth-telling which was presented, and queries the use of martyrial language. The second part looks at three sites on hope and truth-telling in the contemporary Catholic Church: (i) responding to the abuse crisis; (ii) ecumenical relationships, through the lens of 'Receptive Ecumenism'; and, (iii) communal discernment, taking note of the current movement of synodality. A proposal is made to consider structures of (or structural) virtue as well as structural (or structures of) sin.

Keywords

Hope; Truth; Virtue; Synodality; Receptive Ecumenism; Catholic Church

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I would like to respond to Professor Papanikolaou's stimulating paper in two parts: first, a brief observation on how the paper situates truth-telling within the horizon of Christian hope, and second by noting some resonance, applications, and challenges in my own context.

I was struck by the decision to focus on truth-telling which has an *affective* quality. The implication of this is that truth-telling, even with reference to objective truth, is not a neutral act of specifying

correspondence, accurate or otherwise, which leaves the participants unmoved, but a self-involving act with repercussions for the formation of character. The 20th Century Catholic writer Romano Guardini recognised this, understanding the will for truth as necessary for true selfhood, while more recently Wendy Farley has argued that 'the desire for truth is always a practice and never an accomplishment'.[1] So too, hope – if it is to be more that simple wishing – appears as equally involving of the person. It 'shapes how we lie and act in the midst of a suffering and unjust world', and 'functions to reorientate how we live in the world',[2] whilst conversely, 'hopelessness is an attack on the very possibility of action'[3] as the behaviour of totalitarian states demonstrates. Both truth-telling and hope, then, have effects beyond the interior life of an individual and are situated in fields of *relationship* and of *action*. While space does not allow a fuller exploration here, these wider effects do inform the second part of my response.

Before moving to explore this relationship of truth-telling and hope in some contemporary Catholic contexts, however, I would like to pose a question. Is the language of dying and martyrdom which we heard an entirely appropriate register in which to address the cost of truth-telling in a horizon of hope? Certainly, we must die to sin and put foolish ways behind us, but I think a distinction can be made between, on the one hand, jettisoning such undesirable elements, and, on the other hand, embracing the risks and costs of truth-telling which form the currency of martyrdom, as generally understood. The cost of truth-telling for the martyr is surely the loss of some *good* – perhaps social standing, damage to a relationship, even life itself, not just the loss of bad habits.[4] I would not want to lose this language altogether, only to recall the

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1 Wendy Farley, *Gathering those Driven Away: A Theology of Incarnation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 207, cited in Jan-Olav Henriksen 'Taking Responsibility for Truth: Ecclesial Practices in an Age of Hypocrisy,' in *Truth-telling and Other Ecclesial Practices of Resistance*, ed. Christine Helmer (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), 11–20, 16.

2 Elaine A. Robinson, 'Faith, Hope, and Love in an Age of Terror,' in *Faith, Hope, Love, and Justice: The Theological Virtues Today*, ed. Anselm K. Min (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London: Lexington Books, 2018), 163–184, 175.

3 Min, 'Transcendence and Solidarity: Conditions of Faith, Hope, and Love Today' in *Faith, Hope, Love, and Justice: The Theological Virtues Today*, ed. Anselm K. Min (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London: Lexington Books, 2018), 197–218, 217.

4 Nonetheless, it is not the loss itself that constitutes martyrdom, but disposition: 'endurance of death is not praiseworthy in itself, but only in so far as it is directed to some good consisting in an act of virtue,' Thomas Aquinas *ST* II.2, Q.124, art. 3.

difference as well as similarity in making an analogy between a 'death of the old self' and physical death, or real deprivation of goods (freedom, prestige, money, etc.). Nevertheless, the truth-teller is indeed a 'martyr' in so far as they are a witness to truth, although the transaction is much more costly for some than for others, not only in degree but in essence. The language of virtue formation and self-transformation, which Papanikolaou also engages, however, seems highly appropriate on many levels, especially if one understands possession of virtue as a continuum, capable of progression, and not a binary state which one either possesses or does not. Our appropriation of hope, therefore, existing on a scale rather than a range, offers space to grow in the way akin to that which Papanikolaou has demonstrated for truth-telling.

In the main, the discussion so far has focussed on *individuals* as agents in truth-telling – whether as teller or listener – and how that might relate to the theme of hope. However, I was pleased to read this paper not just because of its interesting observations and arguments but also because of the light it casts on my situation (British, Catholic, ecumenical) where I am concerned with the truth-teller and the listener as *ecclesial* – that is corporate – entities. I would like to sketch three sites of ecclesial truth-telling and hope in this context.

The most visible and traumatic site of truth-telling in the Catholic Church at the present time is undoubtedly the ongoing wound of abuse by clergy and church institutions. In naming this as my first site of truth-telling I do not presume to speak for survivors, let alone make any presumption of hope, but simply note the imperative arising from this systemic failure for growth in virtue on the part of the church as listener. For the church to truly listen not only requires individuals involved in listening to be non-manipulative and humble but demands that this virtuous practice be encoded into ecclesial structures and processes such that the church becomes a habitual site of iconic listening. Not only select individuals have a calling to be iconic of Christ, but the church precisely as the Body of Christ, has this challenge *a fortiori*.

The Catholic Church has become familiar with the concept of 'structural sin' emerging from Latin American liberation theology and has at the very least acknowledged the existence of 'structures of sin'.[5] This has proved an essential component of ecclesial truth-telling regarding the systemic dysfunction and evil of perpetration, downplaying, and

[5] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1869.

cover-up of abuse (as also other systemic failings, regarding race and gender, for example). To situate such truth-telling in the horizon of Christian hope, perhaps the church needs a complementary theology of *structural virtue:* What habits, structures, processes, and cultures create the conditions for a systemic reinforcement of growth in virtue?[6]

But truth-telling in situations of clerical abuse does not stop in *listening* well (in what may be a private, indeed confidential space). There is a reciprocal truth-telling expected in which the church is the one speaking truthfully – or *confessing*. Returning to my earlier point – for the church to be a 'martyr' in witnessing to the truth here, it must do more than abandon self-interest and abuse of power, and be exposed to genuine loss of prestige, material goods, and privilege, some of which may never be recovered in this life: 'death' is generally permanent.

A second, rather different site of truth-telling and hope can be found in ecumenical relations. There is an ever-present fundamental temptation to imagine one's own tradition as the possessor of objective truths – attested to in doctrine and order, with which we can correct our ecumenical interlocutors and defend our position. But there is another perspective on truth, more attuned to the kind of truth-telling we have been discussing, which is truth considered in relation to the subject. The growing literature and praxis of Receptive Ecumenism seems to have some useful contribution to make to virtuous practice here.[7] This approach does not ask us to abandon claims to truth in our traditions (which would be irrational)[8] but it does require us to not dissociate that 'objective' truth-telling from a more subjective (but not relativistic) truth-telling about our tradition's dysfunctions, wounds, and limitations (not an ideal). It is explicitly rooted in Christian hope, making a case

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[6] A similar point is made by Elaine Robinson who argues that incarnation and ministry must be as strong a symbol for us as the cross. Human hope is not limited to hope in the drama of Christ's death and resurrection, and perhaps the down-to-earth hope symbolised in the incarnation and life of Jesus needs recovering in our current post-truth hopelessness. See Robinson, 'Faith, Hope, and Love in an Age of Terror,' 168–174.

[7] See Paul D. Murray, Gregory A. Ryan, and Paul Lakeland (eds.), *Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning: Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) and Murray (ed). *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For a comprehensive bibliography, https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/catholic-studies/research/constructive-catholic-theology-/receptive-ecumenism-/.

[8] Underpinning this notion of rationality is Paul Murray's adoption of some ideas from Nicholas Rescher's philosophy. See Murray, *Reason, Truth, and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

that if churches can learn from each other how to conform more closely to the gospel and address internal and relational dysfunctions, then new things, hardly conceivable now, might become possible. The hope in Receptive Ecumenism is that *practice changes the landscape*. It is a transformative pattern of ecclesial and ecumenical virtue formation.[9]

Practices of truth-telling and nurturing hope are of course also necessary for internal dialogue within a church. This leads to my third and final site of truth-telling and hope in the contemporary Catholic Church: *communal listening and decision making*. In England, as elsewhere there has been a burst of activity in diocesan reorganisations over recent years, largely in response to reducing numbers of clergy and churchgoers, including *Forward Together in Hope* (Hexham and Newcastle); *Future Full of Hope* (Clifton); and *Sharing the Hope* (Salford) – you can see the common theme! By way of a thought experiment, what would we make of diocesan renewal projects called 'Forward together in Truth', 'Future Full of Truth', 'Sharing the Truth'? With a moment's theological reflection, they do all make sense, but nonetheless sound like slogans from George Orwell's *1984* (in which 'Truth' means nothing of the sort). What then are we to make of instinctive reactions to slogans of Hope, which seem to be pleas for healing, as opposed to slogans of Truth which can so easily sound like confident battle-cries in a culture war?

In Orwell's dystopian future, of course, the powerful use oppression to destroy hope. In contrast, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* imagines a world where distraction lulls truth to sleep. Here are two genuine temptations for the church if Hope and Truth-telling are separated. In the sociology of science, decisions to be made between continuing with research into a hitherto unsuccessful treatment or redeploying the resources elsewhere have been described as a clash of involved (not neutral) actors aligning with 'regimes of hope', which look towards the future for the good of the individual's wholeness, or 'regimes of truth' which look at the facts which are known, for the good use of common

[9] On Receptive Ecumenism and virtue, see Pizzey, 'Receptive Ecumenism and the Virtues,' in *Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning*, ed. Murray, Ryan, and Lakeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 448–462 and Ryan, 'A Total Ethic for a Broken Body: Receptive Ecumenism's Hermeneutical Virtue,' in *Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning*, ed. Murray, Ryan, and Lakeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 321–333.

resources (time, money, expertise, etc.).[10] Walter Brueggemann offers a theological and ecclesiological parallel to this dichotomy. He identifies hope and truth as the antidotes to, respectively, *despair* and *denial* in the world. But he also accuses the church of mis-prescribing, of presenting cold, brutal, truth into situations already lacking hope (aligning with the regime of truth where hope is needed),[11] and conversely prescribing comforting opportunities for inaction, in the form of denying anything is wrong, or that we can change it, into situations where truth is lacking (aligning with the regime of hope where truth is needed).[12]

Our church programmes often include grim projections of numbers of clergy and laity over the coming decades, yet the espoused theology seen in the programme titles is one of hope – for the church, for the individual, for the local community, and for the world. What is the range and quality of this hope? Is it open to eschatological newness? Or are we fearful that even what we have will be taken from us? Learning from Papanikolaou's presentation has made me realise just how essential it is to weave truth-telling into any such programme of hopeful renewal. Truth and hope together might allow churches to address complex – and costly – truth-telling about traumas of lost identity, the lure of nostalgia, grieving for the loss of genuine but unrepeatable goods and moving on, confessing and confronting attachments that are not of the gospel. A virtuous path will steer a path between extremes. It will avoid presumption – that hope will be realised through a programme modelled on secular business. It must also avoid despair that shuts out newness because of an absence of genuine hope for the future glories. And it must go beyond denial which manifests in proposing the need only for superficial changes such as merging parishes, shuffling priests around, or rearranging mass times. Brueggemann offers a scriptural countermodel to worldly thinking which can apply here. In the psalms, genuine lament is sounded but there is no victim-blaming, but rather

[10] See Nik Brown, 'Shifting Tenses: Reconnecting Regimes of Truth and Hope,' *Configurations* 13, no. 3 (2005): 331–355, doi:10.1353/con.2007.0019.

[11] Pope Francis recently addressed this particular danger, emphasising that the Church needs 'prophets of hope as well as truth', and that a prophet is not simply a critic but rather someone who 'corrects when needed and opens wide the doors looking to the horizon of hope … [who] restores the roots, restores one's belonging to the people of God in order to go forward': https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/38218/the-church-needs-prophets-of-truth-and-hope-pope-francis-says.

[12] Brueggemann, 'Full of Truth and Hope,' in *Truth and Hope: Essays for a Perilous Age* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 114–138.

a realisation of the sinful structures in the world, whilst the constancy of the Lord is named in old glories remembered and lost, and in new glories promised and impatiently desired, yet unseen.[13]

As we speak, the Catholic Church is four years into a worldwide synodal process, one which has been influenced by the kind of ecumenical learning proposed by Receptive Ecumenism.[14] It has embarked on a process of listening and discerning at every level from parish to diocese to bishops' conference to continent on the subject of synodality.[15] This has become a site of both hope and lament writ large, and it has incorporated a form of truth-telling into its process. Despite pressures from some quarters, the temptation to close down difficult topics has largely been avoided, often with the formula that not all issues can be resolved at the local level, or in this synod, but will be heard and noted (at least in the initial listening phase). The Church has shown it can be a good listener – and here I mean not just the bishops, as if they are 'the Church' listening to the voice of the other, but that parishioners have been able to hear other voices, and if they wish, can hear voices from other communities, cultures and theological or spiritual traditions. The 'truth' being told is of course complex, and mixed with all kinds of human impurities, opinions, and agendas but can it ever be otherwise? But it seems to me that it is precisely the act of truth-telling, of being a more Christlike, iconic, non-manipulative listener that gives the emerging Catholic understanding of synodality a genuinely hopeful quality. This invitation to truth-telling offers hope for growth in 'structural virtue' for the church, through adopting and nurturing a 'synodal style' and synodal dispositions as its 'ordinary way of living and working', realising that style in structures and processes which facilitate and encourage the practice of further truth-telling. In becoming a more

[13] Brueggemann, 'Truth-Telling as Well-Making,' in *Truth and Hope*, 215–223.

[14] See ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be Church – Local, Regional, Universal* (London: SPCK, 2018). See also Ryan, 'Receptive Ecumenism in a Synodal Catholic Church,' in *Proceedings of the 21st Academic Consultation of Societas Oecumenica 'Living Tradition: Continuity and Change as Challenges to Churches and Theologies'*, ed. V. Coman and J. Berry (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2024).

[15] There is a rapidly-growing literature on synodality in the Catholic Church. An excellent place to start is with two books which complement each other in providing both theological and pastoral perspectives (and which are published in a single volume in Spanish and Italian editions): Raphael Luciani, *Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding in the Church* (New York: Paulist, 2022); and Serena Noceti, *Reforming the Church: A Synodal Way of Proceeding* (New York: Paulist Press, 2023). See also resources at www.synod.va.

synodal church, it will – *hopefully* – be better equipped to embrace the costly, challenging truth-telling demanded *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and live as an icon of hope for the People of God in a suffering world.

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BEYOND TRUTH-TELLING: EMBODYING AND DWELLING IN TRUTH AND HOPE*

PAVOL BARGÁR

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to argue that truth is not something that relates to telling/speaking only. Its main aim is to show that in their quest for communion with God, other human beings – and one should add – the entire creation, humans need to go beyond truth-telling toward the ways of embodying and dwelling in truth and hope. To introduce its argument, the paper proceeds in the following steps. First, it expounds a Christian perspective on truth, employing notions such as sacrament, desire, and relationality. Through the image of communion with God, a link between truth-telling and hope is outlined. Second, it tries to show that truth-telling is not only an affective but also an existential category. As such, it involves the whole of human being. Therefore, it makes sense to turn to the concept of body and embodiment when reflecting on the human pursuits of truth. The paper then, third, examines various constellations of this central claim by exploring a specific case from popular culture, namely, 'Crocodile', an episode from the Netflix series, *Black Mirror*. In particular, a proposal is made for the significance of embodying and dwelling in truth for Christian theology and practice. Finally, in the last step, this embodying and dwelling is given more concrete contours with respect to hope by probing into the images of home and feast.

Keywords

Truth; Truth-Telling; Confession; Embodiment, Hope; Feast; *Black Mirror* (Netflix series); Theological Anthropology

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In this paper, I would like to suggest that truth is not something that relates to telling/speaking only. Writing from a particularly Christian theological perspective, my main aim is to show that in our quest for communion with God, human beings – and one should add – the entire creation, we need to go beyond truth-telling toward the ways of embodying and dwelling in truth and hope. To proceed with my argument, I will take the following steps. First, I will expound a Christian perspective on truth, employing notions such as sacrament, desire, and relationality. Through the image of communion with God, a link between truth-telling and hope will be outlined. Second, I will try to show that truth-telling is not only an affective but also an existential category. As such, it involves the whole of human being. Therefore, it makes sense to turn to the concept of body and embodiment when reflecting on the human pursuits of truth. I will then, third, examine various constellations of this claim by using a specific example from popular culture, namely, 'Crocodile', an episode from the Netflix series, *Black Mirror*. In particular, the significance for Christian theology and practice of embodying truth and dwelling in truth will be proposed. In the last step, this embodying and dwelling will be given more concrete contours with respect to hope by probing into the images of home and feast.

1. Truth and Truth-Telling

In the Hebrew Bible, truth (*emet*) has links to faithfulness, stability, and firmness. Importantly, firmness and stability in the biblical imagination do not represent static categories but rather imply reliability and desirability.[1] They are fundamentally rooted in God's fidelity; the fidelity of a God 'abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' (Exod 34:6). As scriptural witnesses attest (see, for example, Wis 11:24–26), this 'fidelity is not just to Israel, not just to humanity but to the whole creation'.[2] The universal dimension, however, does not preclude the attention to the personal. When we read in the gospel about Jesus telling his Jewish followers that 'the truth will make them free' (John 8:32), the original

[1] See Pavol Bargár, 'And Beauty Will Make You Free: On the Transformative Power of Beauty,' *AUC Theologica* 12, no. 2 (2022): 41–56, 42, doi: 10.14712/23363398.2023.4.

[2] Margaret Daly-Denton, *John: An Earth Bible Commentary: Supposing Him To Be the Gardener* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2017), 183.

context to which these words are addressed is that of a small community that feels isolated from an antagonistic world. The gospel provides this community with the reassurance of God's presence and loving care; it gives them a sense of identity and purpose.[3] However, this is not to be understood in a negative sense, as a way to escape reality or to deal with uncomfortable rivals. For the Johannine community, instead, (the word of) truth becomes a source of hope and a driver for change. Thus, in biblical understanding, truth ultimately refers to visions of how 'things ought to be', both presently and eschatologically.[4]

While this understanding of truth has never been lost in Christian theology,[5] more 'verbalist' approaches have often seemed to gain the upper hand. My objective of this paper is not to explicitly argue against the latter. Rather, I will seek to further elaborate on the relational understanding of truth in conversation with various interlocutors, most importantly Aristotle Papanikolaou. With much theological acumen, Papanikolaou discusses truth and truth-telling in the context of sacramentality, and, particularly, the sacrament of confession. He intends to recover what he believes to be a lost understanding of this sacrament, namely, one rooted in the 'transformative power of the spoken word of truth'.[6] Papanikolaou writes from the Orthodox Christian tradition for which it is essential to maintain that an object or an event is sacramental when it serves as a vehicle through which one can experience the presence of God. The sacramentality of confession, then, consists in the very act of telling one's story honestly, truth-fully: 'In this act of being honest to God one experiences God's love and forgiveness, and by so doing, grows closer to God and progresses in *theosis*, which means to participate in the life of God.'[7] When speaking honestly, truth-fully, about oneself, one's deeds and experiences, the spoken word of truth is charged with an immense power – and this applies not only to the sacrament of confession but also interpersonal relationships in general.

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[3] See Robert E. Goss, 'John,' in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 548–565, 550.

[4] See Bargár, 'And Beauty Will Make You Free,' 43 and 42.

[5] For various examples, see Ivana Noble, *Essays in Ecumenical Theology I: Aims, Methods, Themes, and Contexts* (Boston: Brill, 2019), passim.

[6] Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God: Confession and Desire,' in *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth H. Prodromou (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 219–245, 219.

[7] Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 220.

It is the power to 'reconfigure irrevocably' the dynamic of the relationship between one and the other: 'for the worse, if used to denigrate and humiliate, but for the better, if received in the spirit of trust and love.'[8]

Papanikolaou highlights yet another important link – one between truth-telling and desire. When one speaks honestly, truth-fully, about oneself, one's desires can potentially be liberated from destructive undertones and overtones and steered toward being fulfilled through loving and nurturing relationships.[9] Willie James Jennings provides us with a view of desire from a different, albeit complementary, angle. In a sermon on the story of Peter explaining his actions of eating in the houses of the uncircumcised (Acts 11:1–3), Jennings suggests that the apostle was 'compelled by the Spirit to follow the Spirit's desire, divine desire'.[10] It was a transformation of desire that gave birth to something new, authentic, and, ultimately, lasting. 'God is about desire before God is about demand. God is about aesthetics before God is about ethics.'[11] These, admittedly, provocative words succinctly express two theologically salient points: first, the primacy of God's grace; and, second, the centrality of our desires, our very selves, for our relationship to God – and others. Human desire needs to be harnessed to turn toward God. In Christian liturgical practice, the means of such harnessing include, as Papanikolaou reminds us, confession, prayer, and fasting. Their purpose is to incite a 'deeper, more inflamed desire for [the] living, personal God'.[12] However, the transformation of one's desire by and for God transcends the area of mere individual piety. This transformation has implications for the Christian understanding of the relation between the love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. As such, confession is a kind of truth-telling that is oriented toward refining one's desire for God and, by implication, for the other.[13]

The discussion so far leads me to maintain that a Christian understanding of truth cannot be divorced from relationality. It seems to me that, for Papanikolaou, as for Jennings, relationality is of crucial

[8] Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 225.
[9] See Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 235 and 238.
[10] Willie James Jennings, 'A Revolutionary Intimacy,' a sermon preached at Hope College, 2014, https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/faculty/A-Revolutionary-Intimacy.pdf.
[11] Jennings, 'A Revolutionary Intimacy.'
[12] Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Liberating Eros: Confession and Desire,' *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26, no. 1 (2006): 115–136, 134.
[13] See Papanikolaou, 'Liberating Eros,' 134.

importance. Little wonder, the image of the human being in the Christian imagination is profoundly relational. First of all, each person is at each phase of their life involved in a rich and multidimensional 'web of relationships' with other people and the world they live in.[14] The study document by the Faith and Order commission entitled *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* asserts that these relationships are established and maintained through 'provisional, embodied, contingent, meaning-producing interactions with significant others'.[15] Contextualized in a particular historical setting, one's identity, story, and place within a tradition are necessarily formed in relation to the identity, story, and tradition of the other.[16]

However, there is more to human relationality in Christian tradition than the categories of contextuality and contingency can encompass. There is also a significant theological aspect to be considered in this regard. Such relational image is rooted in the understanding of the triune God as 'the perfect fellowship of love, acceptance, inclusion, and creativity'.[17] Moreover, this divine fellowship is like a fountain of meaning and potentiality that springs forth onto God's creation inviting it 'to join a fellowship of souls and bodies on a journey toward joyful consummation'.[18] The triune God is fundamentally relational, and so people as bearers of the image of this God too are relational beings. And yet, one must go deeper still. The already cited Faith and Order document points out that human existence bearing the image of God takes place within the twofold dynamic of both 'dignity, potentiality, and creativity' and 'creatureliness, finitude, and vulnerability'.[19] Being human, a bearer of the image of God (*imago Dei*), therefore, means pursuing life in fullness through authentic interpersonal relationships, despite the losses, wounds, and traumas that continue to be real and present in

[14] See Pavol Bargár, *Embodied Existence: Our Common Life in God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), 107.

[15] Faith and Order Commission, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology: A Faith and Order Study Document*, Faith and Order paper no. 199 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), art. 70.

[16] See also Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Religious Pluralism and Pragmatist Theology: Openness and Resistance* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2019), 36–37.

[17] Bargár, *Embodied Existence*, 108.

[18] Pavol Bargár, 'Toward Comm/unity amidst Brokenness: Christian Mission as (a Pursuit of) Theological Anthropology,' *International Review of Mission* 110, no. 2 (2021): 231–245, 236.

[19] Faith and Order Commission, *Christian Perspectives*, art. 81.

the context of the world we live in. Daniela Augustine formulates this idea very powerfully:

> Each human being stands in the face of the other, imprinted with the same ontological origin and telos – Christ himself – the beginning and the end of creation (Rev 21:16). In this sanctified/deified perspective, the face of the other meets us as the future of the world – as the full potentiality of the fullness of life more abundant in, with, and through God. Therefore, there is no future, no salvation, no world without the other.[20]

Coming back to our question of truth and truth-telling, if truth is to be told, established or recovered (or, as I will seek to show, embodied), a relationship between the teller and the listener needs to be at the center. Such a relationship always involves a human being and his or her other. There is, therefore, a relational, we could even say, a communal, aspect to truth-telling. To put it negatively, without truth-telling there can be no communion with God or other people since one remains incurvated in one's own delusion of self-sufficiency. Indeed, the ideal of the 'white self-sufficient man' has taken deep roots in our imagination and everyday life, both within and beyond the church. Essentially, this ideal is about seeking to master knowledge in order to control the world and become independent from others.[21] In contrast to the ideal of the 'white self-sufficient man', we are called to pursue relational formation as 'the art of cultivating belonging'.[22] Being fundamentally theological, Jennings's argument is founded on the dream of a God who comes to the world (through the people of Israel and through Jesus) to offer people a share in divine life.[23] Papanikolaou expresses the same point from the Orthodox Christian perspective through the notion of *theosis* which, as he underlines, means 'to participate in the life of God'.[24] It is from this position that he can argue that heaven is not a place but 'God-union with God's very life'; God does not want to put us in a place but wants to be in fellowship with us.[25] I take Papanikolaou and Jennings

[20] Daniela Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 138.
[21] See Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 6.
[22] See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 10.
[23] See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 152.
[24] Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 220.
[25] See Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 222.

as saying that our hope lies in the belief that we are created to be in communion with God and this presupposes a truth-telling. That is the link between truth-telling and hope which is also vital for this paper as will become evident especially toward its end.

2. Beyond Telling, toward Embodying

I declared that my aim in this paper is to go beyond truth-telling toward the ways of embodying truth and hope. In a sense, Aristotle Papanikolaou points in this direction himself when he says that his interest is in 'affective forms of truth-telling', namely those surrounded by the emotion of fear and the feelings of anxiety.[26] Why is that? For Papanikolaou, feelings and emotions make confession real. 'Only in experiencing emotions and feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and fear can we experience real forgiveness.'[27] Extending this claim to a more general level, this is actually the presupposition on which rests not only the Christian sacrament of confession but really the foundations of any interpersonal relationship: one opens oneself to the other and tells them the truth about oneself, despite and amidst one's fears and anxieties. A risky endeavor indeed, but one that is necessary, as Papanikolaou maintains, if the hope for an authentic relationship and communion is to emerge.[28]

I concur with this emphasis. However, I believe we should expand our theological radars to explore additional emotions to those of fear and anxiety. Rather than fear and anxiety, intimacy appears to be a more helpful category here as it refers to something that is at the core of one's being. In feminist theological discourse, this intimacy is apprehended through the image of *eros*. In eros, emotions are tied together with relationships since 'erotic power is the power of our primal interrelatedness'.[29] Rita Nakashima Brock characterizes the power that exists within eros as follows:

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[26] See Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Truth-Telling and Hope,' *AUC Theologica* 13, no. 2 (2023): 11–19, 12. See also Papanikolaou, 'Liberating Eros,' 116.

[27] Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 226.

[28] See Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 224.

[29] Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 26.

> Erotic power, as it creates and connects hearts, involves the whole person in relationships of self-awareness, vulnerability, openness, and caring. Erotic power as an ontic category, as a fundamentally ultimate reality in human existence, is a more inclusive and accurate understanding of the dynamics of power within which dominance and willful assertion can be explained. (…) Hence all other forms of power emerge from the reality of erotic power.[30]

Now, admittedly, this power needs to be navigated in order to work toward transformation. One way of such navigation that we find in the biblical witness is the work toward peace and justice (*shalom*).[31] Alternatively, the harnessing of this power of primal interrelatedness can be rendered via the symbol of God's dream for God's creation, as we have already suggested above. It is the dream of the God who aims for 'ecstasy in the body of the creature', striving, ultimately, for communion of all God's creation.[32]

Furthermore, the notions of intimacy and/or eros help us avoid the negative connotations that fear and anxiety imply, and open venues for a more constructive understanding of one's inner world (self). To be true, I suggest that we should include more than mere emotions and feelings, whether negative or positive. Rather than speaking of *affective* forms of truth-telling, I therefore prefer speaking of *existential* forms. And, actually, I invite us to go beyond truth-*telling* for the very reason that it might happen that one is not only afraid but also unable to express a truth about oneself/others/the world in words. To put it differently, the deepest level of human existence can be (or, should we say, is) inexpressible verbally. Ivana Noble's observations on the subtle, yet important difference between the *via negativa* and the apophatic way in theology are helpful in this respect. While the *via negativa* has its origins in speculative thinking and is primarily interested in what cannot be expressed through words, especially with regard to the divine, the apophatic way comes from the contemplative tradition and accentuates the importance of the pursuit of such a conversion that enables us to 'move from living in a lie to living in truth, from forgetting our roots to rediscovering them in our memory, from being separated

[30] Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 25 and 26.
[31] See also Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 142.
[32] See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 143 and 152.

from communion with God and with other people to being included'.[33] The negative – that which cannot be put in words, or which can only be rendered in symbols and images, and thus calls for permanent reinterpretation – has liberating aspects as it subverts our established schemes and ways of looking at the world and God.[34]

For such an approach to truth in theological discourse, the notions of embodiment and corporeality are of utmost significance. The body plays an irreplaceable and ultimate role for human existence in the world, including the pursuit of knowledge, and truth, about the world, oneself, others, and God. In twentieth-century thinking, this recognition came to be elaborated in what has become known as the 'corporeal turn', becoming of increased importance in Western philosophical thought from the 1940s onward.[35] In this line of thought, one should highlight especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty who asserted that the human body is 'our anchorage in the world'.[36] As far as Christian theology is concerned, the accent on the importance of the body has surfaced throughout the history of Christianity, though intensity and intentionality have varied. For instance, while Augustine of Hippo regarded the human existence in/of a body as a 'race toward death', he also appreciated the unique place that the body takes. Despite different frailties and, ultimately, its mortality, the human body represented, for Augustine, a way of bearing testimony to the divine providence, thanks to the body's functionality and beauty.[37] Much more recently, it was James Nelson who made an important contribution to Christian theological thinking on the body by developing the project of body theology. Bringing forth a robust case against any dichotomy between the body and the spirit, he suggests that Christian theology must undeniably start by seriously exploring 'the fleshly experience of life – with our hungers and our passions, our bodily aliveness and deadness'.[38]

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[33] Ivana Noble, 'Apophatic Aspects of Theological Conversation,' in *Essays in Ecumenical Theology I*, 36–52, at 36–37.

[34] See Noble, 'Apophatic Aspects,' 37.

[35] See Jacob Meiring, 'Theology in the Flesh: A Model for Theological Anthropology as Embodied Sensing,' *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): art. 2858, doi:10.4102/hts.v71i3.2858.

[36] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 128.

[37] See Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1999), XXII: 24.

[38] James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 43.

In Nelson's understanding, then, one's pursuit of truth and knowledge (about oneself, the world, God) is inextricably linked to a commitment to praxis. Moreover, the body stands at the center as a locus of both reflection and action.[39]

The Faith and Order study document *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* also acknowledges the epistemological significance of the human body as it argues that 'the body is the source of our knowledge not only of ourselves but also of the world and everything in it'.[40] Furthermore, the document also underlines the importance of the role of the senses in the process of producing knowledge and establishing truth. It gives an example of a blind person for whom the world is very much different from the way it is experienced by sighted people. That difference is so significant that one can even speak of a plurality of 'constructed' worlds: 'Blindness is not just something that happens to one's eyes; it is something that happens to one's world.'[41] The insights, such as these from James Nelson or the Faith and Order document, lead me to maintain that the notions of the body and truth are inextricably linked in theological discourse.

3. Embodiment, the Pursuit of Truth, and Popular Culture: A Case of 'Crocodile'

As we have seen in the previous section, the body and senses play a central role in the pursuit of truth. To further support my case, I am going to turn to popular culture.[42] I will explore 'Crocodile', the third episode from the fourth season of *Black Mirror*. *Black Mirror* is a British anthology TV series available on Netflix.[43] Using a variety of genres,

[39] See Bargár, *Embodied Existence*, 26.

[40] Faith and Order Commission, *Christian Perspectives*, art. 47.

[41] Faith and Order Commission, *Christian Perspectives*, art. 48.

[42] I assert that 'cultural products', including popular culture, are important for theological reflection, even if they do not explicitly address religion or themes traditionally associated with religion, such as God or salvation. It is vital to explore whether and in which ways these products present issues, such as guilt, evil, fear, repentance, remorse, justice, forgiveness, mercy, or reconciliation. Meaning then emerges from an interaction between the cultural product (and its broader context, including the history of its interpretation) and the interpreter (including the hermeneutic tradition in which this interpreter is situated). On the method in theologies of culture, see Clive Marsh, *A Cultural Theology of Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 36–43.

[43] Until now six seasons have been produced between 2011 and 2023, with the total of twenty-seven episodes. For further information on the series, see 'Black Mirror,' IMDb, accessed August 21, 2023, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2085059/?ref_=ttep_ep_tt.

the individual episodes are usually set in future dystopias decisively shaped by advanced technology. The series explores this scenario, driven by existential themes, to reflect not only on contemporary social issues but also, more broadly, on what it means to be human.[44] 'Crocodile' opens with two young people, Rob and Mia, driving through a deserted Scottish countryside after a night of partying and drugs.[45] Still intoxicated, Rob hits and kills a cyclist. They both agree on hiding the truth, burying the dead body in the nearby lake. The plot continues fifteen years later when Rob, driven by guilt, comes to visit Mia, who is now a wife, a mother, and a famous architect. Rob tells Mia that he has decided to write an anonymous letter to the widow of the victim, after having seen a news article about her case. Not knowing the truth about her husband, the poor woman never was able to move on with her life. And, actually, neither was Rob whose whole life has been negatively impacted by the hidden truth. For him, therefore, guilt has become both a consequence and a mode of living in un-truth. To put it positively, one can say that truth is an important, and necessary, presupposition for living a full life.

Rob hopes that by revealing the truth about the incident (though not necessarily revealing his identity as the perpetrator), he will engender liberation not only for the cyclist's widow but also for himself. However, the now successful Mia is afraid that Rob's revealing of the truth might potentially have a negative influence on her life and career. An argument breaks between them and Mia kills Rob. By being his confessor, ironically, she does not foster Rob's absolution and liberation but deprives him of his life. Papanikolaou speaks about the 'iconic role of the listener',[46] or confessor, in the process of enabling truth to become a constructive and healing factor shaping not only the relationship between two people but also one's inner self. Through her response, Mia iconizes the *demonic*, rather than the *theotic*, to Rob.[47] Indeed, she is Rob's 'anti-confessor'. Thus, the truth that would set them free (cf. John 8:32) cannot prevail.

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[44] For explorations on the series from the critical media theory perspective, see Angela M. Cirucci and Barry Vacker (eds.), *Black Mirror and Critical Media Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

[45] For further information on the episode, see 'Crocodile,' IMDb, accessed August 21, 2023, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5710976/?ref_=ttep_ep3.

[46] Papanikolaou, 'Liberating Eros,' 115.

[47] See Papanikolaou, 'Truth-Telling and Hope,' 15.

An additional plotline spins off in the story when Shazia, an insurance investigator, follows the case of a pedestrian, a young musician, hit over by a self-driving pizza delivery van. The incident is witnessed by Mia out of her hotel room shortly after she murders Rob. Eventually, therefore, Shazia in her investigation also interrogates Mia, which costs her life and, subsequently, also the life of her husband and baby son. It is worth going back to the point on the importance of the role of the listener, or confessor, here. After Mia holds her captive, Shazia is begging Mia to let her go, promising she will never tell anyone about what she has learnt and experienced. Shazia reassures Mia that there is even a law specifying how insurance investigators must proceed when interviewing their respondents, saying 'it is like a Catholic confession'. Shazia effectively becomes an involuntary confessor for Mia. However, this kind of confession, like in Rob's case, does not lead to absolution and the hope for liberation and a new beginning. There is a negative potentiality in this act of truth-telling. Tragically, Mia does not want to be liberated.

My main objective for narrating the story of 'Crocodile' here, however, is that it features an important element for understanding the link between corporeality and the quest for truth. In her investigation, Shazia employs the technology called 'Recaller' to establish the truth. The 'Recaller' enables visualizing one's memories, as best as one can picture them, on a screen. In this process, senses help awaken memories so that truth can be established. That is the reason why Shazia gives her respondents, including Mia, an opened bottle with beer from the nearby brewery to have a sniff and plays them the music that they heard during the time of the incident. While this example illustrates the importance of the senses of smell and hearing, respectively, for the recovery of truth, yet another sense, the sense of vision, is explored in a different scene. As I have already indicated, after having murdered Shazia, Mia also kills her husband and infant son because she is afraid of the possibility that someone could perhaps have seen her commit the crimes. Ironically, it turns out that the baby was blind. Again, corporeality plays an instrumental role in the quest for truth – or, else in the attempts to hide the truth.[48]

[48] Another ironic point is that it is not even a human being that helps the police to eventually arrest Mia. There is a hamster as a pet in Shazia's house that witnessed how Mia murdered the baby. The police plug the animal on to the 'Recaller', that they, like Shazia, use, and thus come to know the truth.

Shifting our focus from the senses onto the deeper dimension of human existence, it is of relevance that, when interviewed by Shazia, Mia is trying to 'trick' her own self by modifying her memories in order to adjust the truth.[49] Truth-telling is here subjected to the whole self, including one's will, intellect, and imagination. Yet, Mia's memories refuse to cooperate with her. Even as she is trying to reinvent the truth about what happened on the night of the incident, her memories work against her. We can see that Mia is not being true to herself. The question then arises, of what happens to oneself if one is trying to modify the truth about oneself. In his paper, Papanikolaou points out some negative possibilities of this tendency, such as lingering feelings of resentment and anger, or rejection and the end of a friendship.[50]

Drawing from these insights, I would therefore like to make an observation based on my discussion so far that a helpful way to understand truth is in terms of the space that one inhabits. Truth represents the space in which one can relate to human and non-human others and, theologically speaking, also relate to God. If one seeks to live a meaningful existence, one is called to abide in truth. In secular discourse, this can be interpreted as a call to be truth-ful, or authentic, to oneself. In other words, one is summoned to live a life that would not lead to alienation from oneself but rather enable a fulfilling existence. From a Christian perspective, and with reference to John 14:6, one can recognize in this call Jesus's invitation addressed to his disciples to abide in him who is the *truth*, and the way and the life. In her commentary on the Gospel of John, Margaret Daly-Denton affirms that Jesus as 'the truth' represents 'the embodiment of God's faithfulness to the whole creation' so that 'everything entrusted to him by his Father' can 'flourish in abundant liveliness'.[51] The disciples of Jesus, in biblical times as today, are called to follow the example of their Master by also embodying the truth that they have come to see as the compass for their lives. Furthermore, in the imagery and imagination of the gospel,

[49] Some critics have commented on the title of the episode and a possible link with the idiom 'crying crocodile tears'. Though Mia first appears as a sensitive and emotional person, much more than Rob, and she is shown crying at one point, she eventually becomes a 'completely ruthless and cold killer'. Her tears of remorse and sorrow are therefore seen as insincere. See Rosie Fletcher, 'What Does the Title of *Black Mirror* Episode "Crocodile" Mean?,' *Digital Spy*, January 2, 2018, https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/ustv/a846493/black-mirror-crocodile-episode-title-explained/.

[50] See Papanikolaou, 'Truth-Telling and Hope,' 13–14.

[51] Daly-Denton, *John*, 183.

then, the dwelling in truth is rooted in a dynamic of being close to God, similar to the closeness experienced by Jesus. Abiding in truth implies a sense of belonging, 'at-home-ness' with and in God.[52]

Importantly, Ivana Noble interprets the abiding in and embodying of truth in terms of a call to permanent conversion that is addressed to each individual:

> As in the New Testament, also here the conversion – *metanoia* – is more than a single movement or single action. It is a part of the whole of our communication with God as well as with people and with the whole of creation. Such communication includes all human activities, their glory, as well as their subjection to a falling away from what they could be, their subjection in short to *hamartia*, sin, a failure to hit their target, to achieve their objectives.[53]

We can therefore see, I suggest, a two-fold dynamic here. First, one is called to *embody* truth, that is, truth should become part of one's own existence. At the same time, however, one is summoned to *dwell in* truth, that is, truth ought to become one's environment; indeed, the space in which one lives and moves and has one's being (cf. Acts 17:28).

4. Invited to a Feast in the Home of God: Truth Giving Rise to Hope

In the final section of this paper, I would like to explore the claim that I just made by turning our attention to the biblical book of Revelation. In a sense, and very broadly speaking, Revelation is about truth. The truth disclosed to the Seer by the Lamb (Rev 1:13.17–18) is offered as two images representing two alternative visions for the ultimate destiny of humankind and creation. The first image is that of 'Babylon' that stands for injustice, oppression, exploitation, and various types of tyrannies. The Babylonian way of life is in the biblical imagery envisioned as one of a 'great whore' who engages in 'fornication' (Rev 17:1–2). Rather than sexual implications, this imagery is concerned with economic, political, and spiritual issues.[54] In their book, *The Home of God*,

[52] See Daly-Denton, *John*, 181 and 182.
[53] Noble, 'Apophatic Aspects,' 51.
[54] See Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God: A Brief Story of Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 195.

Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz describe Babylon as a paradigmatic *dysoikos*, that is, a 'non-home', an uninhabitable place, a space of no hope.[55]

The other, contrasting, image is that of the 'New Jerusalem'. Revelation provides an account of this symbolism in chapter 21. For our purposes, Rev 21:3–4 is of particular relevance:

> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' (NRSV)

In line with the biblical understanding of truth as discussed in the first part of the present paper, these words bear a robust witness to that which is lasting, meaningful, and – ultimately – truthful. With its emphasis on restoration and transformation, the image of the New Jerusalem, the 'home of God', gives rise to hope. Truth and hope are brought together here. Together, they refer to a new reality ('a new heaven and a new earth') in which people participate together with God. Moreover, people dwell in there together with God (cf. Rev 21:3). Volf and McAnnally-Linz assert that the New Jerusalem is a perpetual gift, 'a joyfully given and joyfully shared social and material space of resonance, attachment, and belonging'.[56] The legitimacy and relevance of the 'home of God' metaphor is also argued by Jürgen Moltmann who maintains that 'if the creative God himself dwells in his creation, then he is making his own home'.[57] Interpreting Moltmann, Ivana Noble draws upon his eschatological perspective when explaining the dwelling of God in creation: 'It is a vision inbreaking as purpose to the whole creation – to become and to be the home of God, in which creatures live in symbiosis, are at home with each other and also with nature.'[58]

One possible point of criticism addressed to the metaphor of 'home' can be made on the grounds of it being a domesticated image, one that

[55] See Volf and McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God*, 194.
[56] Volf and McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God*, 209.
[57] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 5.
[58] Ivana Noble, 'The Common Home,' in *Essays in Ecumenical Theology II: Conversations with Orthodoxy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022), 272–300, 273.

seeks to make sense of the whole reality and to put things in order. With its push toward tameness, the metaphor leaves little room open for all the fragmentation, unruliness, messiness, and wild beauty that can be found in both human life and creation.[59] Human beings and creation are surprises to themselves, and, indeed, we are called to be open to such surprise.[60] And being open to the possibility of surprise within oneself also implies, I would suggest, being open to a surprise within the other, both human, non-human, and divine; it means leaving space for a 'strange God'.[61]

To respond to this objection, I would like to consider the biblical image of a feast to bring some unchained beauty to the all-too-tame symbol of home. A polysemantic notion, feast unambiguously accentuates God's inclusive approach to various kinds of people, including those who one would not normally like to invite to one's home. Interpreting the gospel narrative in the parable of the great dinner (Luke 14:15–24), Robert Goss convincingly shows that 'these meals metaphorically express God's promiscuous invitation of grace, compassion for all, and inversion of hierarchy'.[62] There is a clear intention to invite those who are unwelcome, expandable, and unfitting, forced to live at the margins of society, outside of decent people's homes.[63] The usefulness of feast as an image thus consists in its potential to relate to different dimensions of life, connecting the human with the non-human, the physical with the spiritual, the personal with the communal, the decent with the indecent, the tame with the wild, all across time and space.[64] Moreover, feast as an image recalls three particular issues that also are of theological and anthropological importance. First, feast is inseparable from human experiences, both positive and negative, celebrating and lamenting. In this sense, it touches upon truth and authenticity. If a feast is to turn out well, those participating in it must speak and act truthfully. Only then it can provide space for the genuine sharing of

[59] See also Linn Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 87 and Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Queer God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 110.
[60] See Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 91.
[61] See Marcella Althaus-Reid, 'Queer I Stand: Lifting the Skirts of God,' in *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Linda Isherwood (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 99–109, 104–105.
[62] Robert E. Goss, 'Luke,' in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 526–547, 533.
[63] See also Goss, 'Luke,' 532.
[64] See also Bargár, *Embodied Existence*, 152.

stories and seeking transformation. Next, a feast has an eschatological thrust and potentiality. It does not shy away from 'dreaming of' and 'struggling toward' relationships and realities that are not yet part of creation today, no matter how strange they might seem. Finally, feast fosters and sustains a certain kind of utopianism, going in the footsteps of the praxis of Jesus Christ in order to subvert the relations and structures in service of the empire. The dynamic between these three factors nourishes hope – a hope that transformation is possible and that the whole creation can have a common superabundant life in God.[65]

In this perspective, the New Jerusalem, understood in the framework of both home and feast, does not stand for a human project but represents a product of hope, rooted in a cosmic web of relationships. The epitome of truth is something to be received, embodied, and dwelt in. It anticipates a full realization of the intimate communion between God, people, and creation. It involves the 'radical intimacy' of all creatures, a dream that is profoundly shaped by and shapes the Christian imagination.[66] In this paper, I have tried to show that the notion of truth exceeds the strictly linguistic level to include the whole of human being. From a Christian perspective, truth is something to be both embodied and dwelt in. Relationship is key here. In this understanding, truth also is of utmost relevance for theological anthropology as it mediates the core of what it means to be human, namely, to be in an intimate relationship with oneself, other people, creation, and God. And that is our hope.

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[65] See Bargár, *Embodied Existence*, 152.

[66] The notion of 'radical intimacy' is borrowed from Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 29.

FROM DANGEROUS MEMORY TO DANGEROUS HOPE: READING THE THEOLOGY OF JOHANN BAPTIST METZ*

PETR JANDEJSEK

ABSTRACT

From the perspective of theological anthropology, the article aims to explore the possibility of hope in the contemporary world. It draws on the work of the Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz and presents the struggle for hope in three areas that were central to Metz and his time. All relate to the question of suffering. Specifically, these are Metz's conversation with Marxism, in which he develops an eschatological concept of creative hope; the topic of post-Holocaust theology, which must speak out on behalf of the victims of violence and at the same time work with the silence that remains after the victims no more exist; and, finally, a post-idealist approach in theology that will be able to critically view its own Eurocentrism.

Contemporary contexts are in some ways different from Metz's. Still, one can benefit from his honest efforts, at least methodologically. The article concludes by relating Metz's ideas to some selected contemporary issues, such as the relationship between activism and spirituality. The article notes a certain affinity between Metz's thought and the pontificate of the current Pope Francis, especially with regard to a commitment to reality.

Keywords

Johann Baptist Metz; Hope; Theological anthropology; Theology and Marxism; Theology after Auschwitz; European theology

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The intention of this article is to explore the theme of hope from the perspective of theological anthropology in the work of Johann Baptist Metz. The life story of this seminal thinker of the German Catholic theology of the 20th century[1] frames the search for hope against the backdrop of the great philosophical themes of the twentieth century. For Metz, these themes are mainly the Enlightenment critique of religion and at the same time the crisis of modernity manifested in particular by enormous levels of violence, typically politically motivated and organized by the state. In response to these challenges and crises, Metz is not looking for hope in an idealised past. Rather, he seeks the possibility of rediscovering hope in dialogue with the project of modernity, assuming its transformation. Modern development need not be completely closed to God as its future. In openness to its victims, it surprisingly reveals hope again.

It is not the intention of this article to present systematically the theology of Metz. In what follows I would like first to outline some anthropological aspects of Metz's theology. Metz turns out to be quite fundamentally opposed to the prevailing anthropological orientations of his time; he draws attention to the limits of individualistic anthropology and brings a political dimension to it. In the second part, I will look at three key themes through which Metz relates to hope. It will be a dialogue with Marxism, an obligation to cultivate a post-Holocaust theology, and the promise of a 'world' theology that transcends the limitations of the European space. As fragile and uncertain as hope seems in Metz's theology, it is a project that appeals for its striving for authenticity. It seems to be in close proximity to one of the guiding principles of the current pontificate of Pope Francis, 'realities are greater than ideas'.[2]

1. Metz's Political-Eschatological Anthropology

The theology of Metz grew out of Karl Rahner and his interpretation of Martin Heidegger.[3] It continued Rahner's existential and transcenden-

[1] In the biographical note on the cover of the German edition of his collected writings, Metz is regarded as one of the 'most influential and authoritative theologians of our time'. The edition contains nine volumes, two of them being in two volumes (Herder 2015–2018).

[2] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation* Evangelii Gaudium *on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, 2013, 231.

[3] Calling Metz a disciple of Rahner is a little simplistic. Karl Heinz Neufeld points out that 'there is no "Rahner school". This is because almost all those who were

tal approach but extended it gradually thanks to the encounters Metz had with revisionary Marxists such as Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno.[4] Metz took 'an anthropological turn from the rational, universally understood subject to the suffering subject' in historical experience.[5] Thus, he seems to be somewhat distant from the dominant anthropologies of his time, which for him represented an individualized and privatized theology, a theology full of ideas but lacking a historical subject.[6] Metz fears that theology, by enclosing history and society, commits an anthropological reduction. By contrast, he understands his turn to suffering people politically. He says, 'Any existential and personal theology that claims to understand human existence, but not as a political problem in the widest sense, is an abstract theology with regard to the existential situation of the individual.'[7] J. Matthew Ashley argues that, for Metz, '"Political" denotes a basic dimension of human existence in which persons are constituted by historical traditions and social structures that connect them to the lives and experiences of other persons, both present and past.'[8]

Metz admits that theology can be understood as anthropology. 'But this anthropological theology, assuming it is not understood as eschatology, runs the risk of becoming unhistorical and of being out of this

considered to be his disciples followed their own paths.' Karl Heinz Neufeld, *Hugo a Karl Rahnerové* (Olomouc: Centrum Aletti/Velehrad: Refugium, 2004), 416. In Metz, there is both continuity with Rahner and criticism of him. In particular, Metz criticized Rahner's method for 'reducing salvation to a private individual concern and insufficiently exploring the social and political dimensions of salvation history'. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Method in theology,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65–82, 67.

4 A brief introduction to the sources of Metz's thought is Břetislav Horyna, 'Předmluva – Theologie oživlé paměti,' in *Úvahy o politické theologii*, Johann Baptist Metz (Praha: ISE, 1994), 7–11.

5 Petr Kratochvíl, '*Memoria passionis*. K roli paměti v politické teologii J. B. Metze,' *Teologická reflexe* 14, no. 2 (2008): 142–153, 143. Kratochvíl's statement about Metz's turn to the suffering subject is certainly correct, but it is appropriate to make it more concrete here by linking the subject to his/her historical experience. For the experience of the suffering person could also be reflected within a transcendental theology without reference to the social contradictions from which the experience of suffering arises. Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society. Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), 65.

6 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 62–65.

7 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 62–63.

8 J. Matthew Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 241–255, 247.

world. For only from an eschatological horizon does the world appear as an emergent reality whose development is entrusted to the freedom of human beings.'[9] Liberal or bourgeois society and the church influenced by its mentality avoid eschatology. They set aside the claim of eschatology, and thereby fundamentally reduce the understanding of the human being. Metz fears that they are falling into a mere spectator mentality. Referring to Kant, Metz calls it the second immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*), which is characterized by desensitization to human concerns and anxieties. But this is not only 'the end of the Enlightenment project, but a disaster for a Christianity, whose authentic sense can only be disclosed against the backdrop of those concerns and anxieties'.[10] In order to counteract the spectator mentality, Metz introduces an apocalyptic eschatology with the aim of restoring human hope and action on behalf of the victims of history. Ashley argues that 'Metz advocates apocalypticism for its capacity to energize a life full of hope in the God who can interrupt history, who sets bounds to history. Such an apocalyptic hope nourishes political hope and action on behalf of others.'[11]

Insensitivity to human fears and anxieties goes hand in hand with an evolutionist view that is prevalent in modernity. Metz's point is not to reject evolution as such, but to criticize the ideological conception of evolution as a blind historical process.[12] He considers it to be mortifying to the extent that it manifests itself in indifferentism and passéism. Over against this view, he places the apocalyptic as a rhetorical device to inspire hope and creative political action. In order to challenge what 'reasonable people' accept as rational and modern, he cultivates the 'adventure of religious noncontemporaneity', 'creative naivete', and 'aggressive fidelity' to the church's tradition.[13] Ashley believes that by this Metz appropriates the heritage of Rahner, who himself wrote

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[9] Johann B. Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' *Křesťanská revue* 35 (1968): 51–56, 52.
[10] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 250.
[11] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 251.
[12] See e.g. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 106–109. Pope Francis also returns to the critique of neo-Darwinism from a different perspective: 'Francis has continued to denounce the "neo-Darwinist ideology of the survival of the fittest, underpinned by an unfettered market obsessed with profit" as the hardening force at the heart of economic injustice, whose logic turns life "from gift into a product".' Kristin E. Heyer, 'Walls in the Heart: Social Sin in *Fratelli tutti*,' *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 19 (2022): 1, 25–40, 27. The author quotes from: Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 116.
[13] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 242.

essays on such 'outdated' topics as devotion to the Sacred Heart, purgatory, and the theology of indulgences. It is not so much about these themes themselves as it is about bringing attention to details that the grown-up modern consciousness has left aside.[14] But it is precisely these details that can help theologians expand their limited horizons. For Metz, the privileged place of this 'productive noncontemporaneity' is his apocalyptic sense of time.[15]

Metz's famous category of dangerous memory[16] stands only seemingly at the opposite end of the timeline. Metz is really concerned with the present and the future that emerges from it. He holds 'apocalyptic hope in a God for whom not even the past is fixed'.[17] Dangerous memory is dangerous because it undermines all self-confidence, especially the belief that one's future is secure and that one is morally superior.[18] There is a Christological basis of dangerous memory: 'In faith, Christians accomplish the *memoria passionis, mortis et recurrectionis Jesu Christi*.'[19] In faith, Christians return to the legacy of Jesus, who was recognized as one who took the side of the oppressed and rejected. In Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, they recognized the liberating power of love. It is this memory of Jesus that commits Christians to a risky engagement for the future. 'It is not a middle-class counter-figure to hope (…) it anticipates the future as a future of those who are oppressed, without hope and doomed to fail. It is therefore a dangerous and at the same time liberating memory.'[20] The Church, then, is the public form of the liberating hope that Jesus brought. But in no way does the Christological hope carry elements of historical triumphalism.

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[14] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 242–243.

[15] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 242.

[16] Metz discusses memory as a fundamental problem in Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 184–199. There he concludes in the following way, 'I shall deal with memory basically as the memory of freedom that, as a memory of suffering, acts as an orientation for action that is related to freedom. (…) Its narrative structure leads it to criticize historical technology that is dissociated from memory and to encounter the traditions of [platonic] *anamnesis* and the Christian *memoria*.' (195).

[17] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 250.

[18] Kratochvíl, '*Memoria passionis*,' 149.

[19] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 90. J. Matthew Ashley admits that Metz did not develop a Christology that fully justifies his project of political theology, though his Christological reflections cannot be ignored, e.g., in *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1998). He thinks that 'the Christology of Jon Sobrino both "fits" the underlying approach laid out by Metz's work and answers critiques of Metz's Christological lacunae'. Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 253.

[20] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 90.

Especially in the context of the Holocaust, to which I will return, Metz points out, 'Christology is not an ideology of historical victors!'[21] These unsettling narratives of the past lead to critical questions about the present. They 'open up perspectives on the present that escape the power of "technical rationality", with its ability to encompass human hope in a strangling net of facts and "scientific" accounts of the future in which alone "reasonable" persons can hope'.[22]

Metz opens his troubling questioning aimed at restoring hope in several directions. In the preface to *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity*, a book which he co-authored with Jürgen Moltmann, Metz identified three challenges or crises that his political theology sought above all to confront. He writes: 'All three centre on the question of suffering: they are in some manner "theodicy-intensive".'[23] His conversation with *Marxism* is the dramatization of the question of suffering in terms of social critique. With the theme of *Auschwitz*, the *Holocaust*, or better, the *Shoa*, Metz asks the uncomfortable question of whether theology has avoided suffering in history. And finally, reflection on the non-European world places the suffering of the (culturally, racially, ethnically) 'other' into the radius of theology's *logos*. In all three areas, Metz shows how the understanding of the human being (anthropology) is deeply related to the understanding of God (theology).

2. In Dialogue with Marxism

Jürgen Moltmann recalls how he became friends with Johann Metz in Tübingen in 1966 'on the occasion of the birthday of the atheist [Marxist] philosopher Ernst Bloch'.[24] It was the time when Metz together with Moltmann, Rahner, as well as, for example, the Czech philosopher Milan Machovec took part in the Christian-Marxist dialogue. From the West German side, the dialogues were organized by the *Paulus-Gesellschaft*.[25] The aim of dialogue with Marxism was, according to Metz,

[21] Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, Gesammelte Schriften, Band 4, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2017), 66.

[22] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 244.

[23] Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future. Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), viii.

[24] Metz, *Faith and the Future*, x.

[25] See, e.g., Ivan Landa, Jan Mervart, et. al., *Proměny marxisticko-křesťanského dialogu v Československu* (Praha: Filosofia – nakl. Filosofického ústavu AV ČR, 2017); Ladislav

a 'fruitful conflict'. While 'theology seeks to maintain its loyalty to the message with which it is charged', it shares 'with the utmost determination the problems and queries of the world around it'.[26] Metz believed that the dialogue would not be directed towards a hasty compromise but allow both sides to transform *themselves* in the dialogue.[27]

Metz shared with Marxists the concern that Christianity tends to mythicize history, this leading to alienation. 'But was not this danger', asks Metz, 'always recognized in Christianity, which always comprised some sort of "negative theology"?'[28] In the biblical tradition, God, the totally other, represents liberation for the historical initiatives of human beings, as well as a future and hope. 'For only a future which is *more* than the projection of our own open or latent possibilities can really call us out beyond ourselves.'[29] Metz recalls the Christian primacy of hope. It is a hope which contains trust and historical imagination. The hope grounded in God's promise works as an under-current of historical initiatives, as a transformative power. Metz claims that, ultimately, 'history is kept going (…) through what is not obvious, through the "impossible", through the object of our hope'.[30]

In the context of the dialogue with Marxism, and also after the publication of Moltmann's groundbreaking book *The Theology of Hope*,[31] Metz further develops his concept of hope in his writings in the second half of the 1960s. Drawing on the post-Bultmanian exegesis, which shows that the word of revelation in the Old Testament is primarily a word of promise, Metz argues how the word of promise points towards the future. 'It establishes a covenant that is the solidarity of those who look to the future with hope.'[32] Metz does not mean here a passive expectation of God's promises – quite the contrary. Existence as a historical process directed toward God's promise presupposes,

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Beneš ml., 'Československý křesťansko-marxistický dialog v šedesátých letech,' *Křesťanská revue* 90, no. 3 (2023), 4–7.

[26] J. B. Metz, '*Epilogue:* Christian Promise and Revolution,' in *From Anathema to Dialogue. The Challenge of Marxist-Christian Cooperation*, Roger Garaudy (London: Collins, 1967), 109–125, 109.

[27] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 110.

[28] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 110.

[29] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 111.

[30] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 113.

[31] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung: Untersuchungen zur Begründung und zu den Konsequenzen einer christlichen Eschatologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1964).

[32] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 52. A note to this article states that it is an abridged version of a lecture given by J. B. Metz at the *Paulusgesellschaft* conference in 1965 (51).

according to this biblical picture of the world, human responsibility. He goes so far as to state that those who look to the future with hope are responsible for fulfilling God's promise.

Even after the event of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, the future of the world is not settled once and for all. Metz believes that in preaching the cross and resurrection, Christians commit themselves to trying to transform the world toward that new world promised to them once and for all in Christ Jesus. From here, Metz reaches essentially the same conclusions as Moltmann (I quote the essential passage in its entirety):

> All this requires the development of theology as eschatology. Paul defines Christians simply as 'those who have hope' (cf. Eph. 2,22; 1 Thes. 4,13). Therefore, Christians must develop eschatology in all parts of their understanding of faith. It must not be reduced to a part of Christian theology, but must be understood radically: as the determining factor of all theological statements.[33]

Eschatology is projected in Christian hope as a creative expectation. When Metz shows where this eschatological hope is focused, he returns to the traditional images of the heavenly-earthly Jerusalem or the city of God. They do not stand before us already finished, completed as a distant goal. In words that breathe the optimism of the sixties, he claims, 'The eschatological city of God is still in the making. And as we move toward it in hope, we build it as collaborators in the future, not simply interpreters of a future whose driving force is God self.'[34] To be sure, Metz in no way limits human cooperation in God's future to some narrowly religious activity. Eschatological faith-hope implies an earthly commitment which Metz illustrates with the beautiful words of Ernst Bloch: 'Christian hope is a home at which we have not only something to drink, but also something to cook.'[35]

The image of hope as home turns Metz towards the *polis*, to political theology. If eschatology, as we saw above, is to be a part of all areas of theology, then political theology is not some special branch of theology, but a feature of all theology. It is impossible in theology to leave

[33] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 53 (reference to the Ephesians seems to lead to 2,12).
[34] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 54.
[35] Metz, '*Epilogue*,' 115; Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 55.

aside the big questions of politics, technology and justice (today we would add – economics and ecology). Metz makes it clear that 'the salvation involved in the Christian hope is not simply or primarily the salvation of the individual',[36] whether as salvation of the soul or individual resurrection. It is the salvation of a people, of many. Salvation in its original, not secondary, sense is directed towards the social dimension of human existence. This dimension, however, has been overlooked in modern Christianity. Metz sees two reasons for this. One is modern theology's emphasis on the subjectivity of the believer, on the need to say one's personal yes to salvation, which, however, puts universal salvation in the background. The second reason has already been mentioned above: it is the flowering of transcendental, personalist, and existentialist theologies in the second half of the twentieth century.[37]

Recognizing that this is a generalizing judgment, it may perhaps be added that the tendency to perceive salvation only on an individual level has not fundamentally changed in the practice of the Church even fifty years after Metz's contribution to the debate, for example, in the practice of confession. For Metz in his time, Marxism played the role of an eye-opening partner in the search for hope. Who could be such a partner for churches and theologians today? In addition to the denominationally and religiously other, perhaps it could be some contemporary movement seeking lifestyle change, such as an environmentalist or degrowth movement, whose goals, though not necessarily in all respects, align with the values of the Kingdom of God.

3. Theology after Auschwitz

It is remarkable that the book of dialogues which brought together Johann Baptist Metz, a German Catholic and once a Wehrmacht soldier, and Elie Wiesel, a Jew and a *Shoa* survivor, is called *Trotzdem hoffen*.[38] Where exactly does Metz see hope, given the violence perpetrated in the past and present?

[36] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 55.
[37] Metz, 'Tvořivá naděje,' 55.
[38] Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschert-Kimmig, *Trotzdem hoffen: Mit Johann Baptist Metz und Elie Wiesel im Gespräch* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1993). In English it was published under the title *Hope Against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999).

Against the backdrop of his own biography, Metz was increasingly troubled by the question: 'Why does theology pay so little or no attention to this catastrophe – like human suffering in general?'[39] The horror of Auschwitz taken seriously shakes any theological speech. Any situationally unconditional talk about God begins to seem empty and blind. In the wake of this catastrophe, can theology continue to speak unhindered about God and human beings, 'as if there were no need to first examine the guilt or innocence of our human words', asks Metz?[40]

He turned to the question of theodicy not in an existentialist but in a political sense: 'Speaking of God as a call to save others, the unjustly suffering, victims and losers in our history.'[41] Metz realized that without resolving this question, 'after Auschwitz' we cannot even ask about our own salvation. The question present in the speech about God is primarily a question about the salvation of the unjustly suffering. The memories of suffering and guilt are not to be easily integrated into the theological system; rather, a language must be found to convey them to our consciousness.[42]

In response to these questions, Metz came up with the metaphor of the 'landscape of screams'. It allowed him to link biblical sources to the experience of suffering in history. Metz understands biblical Israel as a landscape of theodicy. It does not comfort itself with mythicizing or idealizing the conditions of life as a kind of compensation.[43] In its fear, in the strangeness of exile, and in its ever-returning suffering, Israel remains 'poor in spirit'. As a landscape of screams, Israel – and with it early Christianity – remains a land of memory and expectation. Christian Christology has taken on this eschatological restlessness, this passionate questioning of God, or '*Leiden an Gott*' ('suffering unto God', in the translation of J. Matthew Ashley[44]).

Moreover, Metz refers to the enduring relation between *ratio* and *memoria*. Communicative reason is grounded in the anamnetic one.

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[39] Johann Baptist Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii* (Praha: ISE, 1994), 85.

[40] Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 85; see also Johann Baptist Metz, 'Nové paradigma teologie: politická teologie,' *Teologický sborník* 2, no. 2 (1996), 16–21, esp. 17 and 19.

[41] Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 85.

[42] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 245.

[43] Cf. Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 87; see also Johann Baptist Metz, 'Theodizee-empfindliche Gottesrede,' in *Landschaft aus Schreien: Zur Dramatik der Theodizeefrage*, ed. Johann Baptist Metz (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1995), 81–102, 85ff.

[44] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 252.

'Anamnetic reason resists forgetting. (…) It understands obedience to God in terms of listening to the silence of those who have disappeared in history.'[45] Many have come and gone in history and their forgotten heritage creates a kind of void. Knowledge (reason) here becomes a form of missing. Metz draws an analogy between this knowledge and the Old Testament faith, in which it was forbidden to create images of God. The Israelites were challenged to relate to the God whose image they did not have at their disposal and in their hands. Similarly, anamnetic reason refers to what is 'forgotten' and yet fundamentally important. Thus anamnetic reason confronts our 'progressive' consciousness and its certainties. 'It should also highlight the contours of the landscape of theodicy in our world.'[46] Contemporary projects that seek to preserve for the present and the future the evidence of past suffering can be seen as the concrete nourishment of anamnetic reason. In the Czech Republic, this includes the Malach Centre for Visual History, which provides access to video testimony archives, especially but not exclusively to Holocaust testimonies.[47] Another example is the Memory of Nations project. Its extensive collection of life stories provides a database of eyewitness accounts of twentieth-century events by survivors of two totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Communism.[48]

In his study on Metz, Petr Kratochvíl concludes that the landscape of screams is not only the landscape of the biblical tradition and of the Holocaust but in a sense also the landscape of our present. Its challenge is to 'constantly examine whether we are causing – even if only indirectly – more suffering in the here and now'.[49] The danger of fixing memory exclusively on one epoch has been pointed out by Gustavo Gutiérrez in the context of Latin America. Referring to Metz, Gutiérrez argues that for theologians in Latin America, the question is not precisely 'How are we to do theology after Auschwitz?' because they are still witnessing violation and death. In the face of suffering, God seems distant or completely absent. 'Our task here is to find the words with which to talk about God in the midst of the starvation of millions, the humiliation of races regarded as inferior, discrimination against

[45] Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 88.
[46] Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 88.
[47] Malach Centre for Visual History. Available at: https://ufal.mff.cuni.cz/malach/en.
[48] Memory of Nations. Available at: https://www.memoryofnations.eu/en/archive.
[49] Kratochvíl, '*Memoria passionis*,' 152.

women, especially women who are poor, systematic social injustice (…).'[50] From Metz, Gutiérrez adopts the conviction that in speaking of God we cannot but refer to our own time and context. Otherwise, even the memory of past suffering can become a figure obscuring sensitivity to the present.[51] Paradoxically, the memory of suffering can serve ideological interests.[52]

4. Europe and the Non-European World

In 1979, Karl Rahner published an essay in which he suggested that, at the Second Vatican Council, the Church actualized its essence as a world Church. Since then, it has gradually ceased to export European Christianity and has undergone a degree of radical de-Europeanisation.[53] Rahner's student and friend Metz took this idea and, like many other parts of Rahner's legacy, expanded it in line with his political theology.

During his lecture tour of Latin America in the 1980s,[54] Metz noticed that both the theology of liberation and political theology are characterized by a special sensitivity to the problem of theodicy. Both are post-idealist, by which he means that they have abandoned the idea of the social and political innocence of theology and have broken with

[50] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-talk and the suffering of the innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 102.

[51] The example of public debate in the post-communist Czech Republic has shown how issues of social responsibility and economic rights were, and sometimes still are, quickly pushed aside because they supposedly belong to the era of totalitarianism and central planning and threaten contemporary freedom and independence. The stories of past injustices and finally-won freedom thus become the subtext for the establishment of new injustices. A certain breakthrough in the mainstream debate was Daniel Prokop's publication *Slepé skvrny: O chudobě, vzdělávání, populismu a dalších výzvách české společnosti* (Brno: Host, 2019), which by its very title ('Blind spots: on poverty, education, populism and other challenges of Czech society') captures the weak point of the post-revolutionary narrative of freedom and happiness.

[52] At the time of writing this article, we are witnessing such misuse of the memories of victims of the Second World War in the speeches of Russian politicians who construct an anti-Ukrainian narrative in support of Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

[53] Karl Rahner, 'Theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils,' in *Schriften zur Theologie*, XIV, ed. Karl Rahner (Zürich/Einsiedeln/Köln: Benzinger Verlag, 1980), 287–302.

[54] Metz's studies on Latin America are summarized in Johann Baptist Metz, *Lerngemeinschaft Kirche*, Gesammelte Schriften, Band 6, 2. Teilband: Lernorte – Lernzeoten, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2017), VIII. Lateinamerika – eine theologische Erfahrung.

ethno-cultural innocence, specifically with Eurocentrism.[55] While Rahner laid out the programmatic thesis of an emergent world church, Metz is worried of a 'schism': a division caused by the fact that 'we Christians of the prosperous world have torn the cloth of the Eucharistic table between us and the poor churches'.[56] The division is caused by both an unwillingness to help the poor churches in their misery as well as by not listening to their words as a prophetic call. Metz's image of the torn altar cloth interestingly outlines yet other types of church division than those typically addressed by Western (or better today, Northern) ecumenism.

In both diagnosing and proposing solutions to these problems, Metz again turns his attention to the importance of memory. He talks about the loss of anamnetic culture: 'European thought was seized by the dream of a new innocence, hand in hand with a predilection for myths, turned back on that history in which one suffers and dies.'[57] There is a kind of everyday postmodernism of hearts.[58] According to Metz, we are tempted by a form of 'tactical provincialism' in which we first define our political and social identity independently of poverty, misery and oppression in the Third World.[59] A lack of awareness of interconnectedness has not yet led us to a radical conversion. The loss of anamnetic culture is manifested in what Metz calls Euro-Darwinism, which can be seen as a variant of his above-mentioned criticism of the evolutionist view. Metz means both the 'tendency of Europeans to see themselves as the pinnacle of human evolution and our inability to see ourselves through the eyes of our victims'.[60]

In spite of this temptation of 'tactical provincialism' confronting Europe and the Euro-centric Church, Metz expresses hope. He hopes that the Church will not make excuses for the circumstances in which it finds itself, that it will not let the tension between mysticism and

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55 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 78.

56 Johann B. Metz, 'Za hranice buržoazního náboženství,' in *Teologie 20. století: antologie*, ed. Karl-Josef Kuschel (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1995), 256–266, 264.

57 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 83.

58 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 82. Metz's words correspond well with a theological voice from the Third World. From El Salvador, Jon Sobrino writes: 'The current European debate about modernity and postmodernity becomes at this point absolutely unintelligible and scandalous: we can opt out of many things, but we cannot opt out of the deaths of the poor.' Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 32.

59 Metz, 'Za hranice buržoazního náboženství,' 263.

60 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 82.

politics be removed by retreating into non-historical mythical thinking, that it will not be primarily the bearer of ethics but of eschatology, that is of the hope.[61] He concludes: 'This is the root of its strength, that it cannot resign itself to the standards of responsibility and solidarity and cannot lose its courage.'[62]

Conclusions: Dangerous Hope

The chapter on hope in Metz's seminal work *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology* is structured as a series of thirty-five theses conceived as a 'special tribute to the late Ernst Bloch and his apocalyptic wisdom, a vision that he inherited from the Jewish traditions and that have for too long been closed to Christianity'.[63] The last thesis quotes a sadly ironic sigh of Teilhard de Chardin: 'We go on asserting that we are awake and are waiting for the master. But, if we were honest, we would have to admit that we expect nothing at all.'[64] In his theological work, Metz sought to revive the dangerous hope that the master would indeed come and was already coming. Through his works, this hope resounds even after he passed away in Advent 2019 and 'became one of "the dead" of whom he so lovingly and insistently spoke'.[65] How can Metz's theological justification of hope be built upon? Which of his themes are relevant to us today? I would like to suggest three which – especially in the pontificate of Pope Francis – seem to be receiving renewed attention in contemporary contexts.

Metz sees hope in solidarity as an inseparable part of the definition of Christian faith. He extends solidarity to the living and future generations as well as to the dead. 'In this hope, then, the Christian does not primarily hope for himself – he also has to hope for others and, in this hope, for himself.'[66] In the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, in the section on memory, Pope Francis specifies the areas of remembering. He recalls that neither the Shoah nor the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki must be forgotten. He continues,

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61 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 84.
62 Metz, *Úvahy o politické theologii*, 84.
63 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 169.
64 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 179.
65 Andrew Prevot, 'Apocalyptic Witness: Johann Baptist Metz (1928–2019),' *Political Theology* 21, no. 3 (2020), 274–277, 274.
66 Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 76.

> 'We cannot allow present and future generations to lose the memory of what happened. It is a memory that ensures and encourages the building of a more fair and fraternal future.' Neither must we forget the persecutions, the slave trade and the ethnic killings that continue in various countries.[67]

Remembering is important because it keeps us from accustoming ourselves to suffering. But it is healthy to remember not only the horrors and suffering, but also the people who 'amid such great inhumanity and corruption, retained their dignity and, with gestures small or large, chose the part of solidarity, forgiveness and fraternity'.[68] The Pope also works with the figure of memory in the context of responsibility towards future generations. In addition to the sustainability of the environment, solidarity also extends to the project of the common good, 'the earth "is lent to each generation, to be handed on to the generation that follows"'.[69]

Further, despite his critique of the Enlightenment, Metz does not escape into the realm of technology that could perhaps bring salvation. He still puts his hope in the human being. 'Political theology (…) opts for a historical anthropology and a practice of education based on the Enlightenment that do not too easily give way to the illusion that salvation in the future can be found by means of genetic manipulation and a computer ideology.'[70] On this point, Metz meets Pope Francis, who warns against the technocratic paradigm, whether it is related to technology or politics.[71] Both Metz and Francis would agree that human crises must again be resolved by the transformation and education of the human being. It is in the interest of all people of God, Francis believes, to cultivate especially, but not exclusively, in theological education 'a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform'.[72] The Pope's concrete initiative in this regard is the launching of a global education alliance, the Global Compact on Education in 2019. Its seven goals are aimed at supporting underdeveloped groups and areas, such

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[67] Francis, *Encyclical letter* Fratelli tutti *On the Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 2020, 248.
[68] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 249.
[69] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 178.
[70] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 103.
[71] Francis, *Encyclical letter* Laudato si' *On Care for our Common Home*, 2015, 109.
[72] Francis, *Apostolic Constitution* Veritatis gaudium *on ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties*, 2018, 3.

as listening to the voices of children, youth and women, as well as finding new ways to understand economics and politics.[73]

Finally, even though Metz's theology seems to swing towards activism, he postulated a kind of spirituality. Ashley claims that it is a spirituality 'that can endure the remembrance of suffering, and act out of that remembrance no matter how hopeless such action seems, because it hopes for God's promised response, and calls God to make good on that hope'.[74] Metz spoke of this spirituality as a form of open-eyed mysticism. With this deliberate verbal provocation, Metz wants to qualify the Christian, Jesus-like, character of mysticism. He also often speaks directly of political mystics.[75] Efforts to link the mystical and the political (or prophetic) currents of theology are highly relevant for our time. Pope Francis devotes a chapter to spirituality (along with education) in his encyclical *Laudato si'*. In words that are close to Metz's open-eyed mysticism, he says: 'More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us.'[76]

In order to take seriously Metz's warning against a subjectless theology, we must also link the language of hope found in intergenerational solidarity, education, and spirituality to the subjects who bear that hope. In the 1970s, Metz contributed to the document *Our Hope* for the Synod of the German Church. In it, he asserted that the bearer of hope is the Church, provided it develops as 'a living Church of the people, in which all of its kind know themselves to be responsibly involved in the destiny of this church and in its public witness to hope'.[77] Metz's ecclesiology of the Church as a subject is followed today by Pope Francis' ecclesiology of (God's) people. His view of the people is rooted in the so-called theology of the people. He writes:

> Yet becoming a people demands something more. It is an ongoing process in which every new generation must take part: a slow and arduous effort

[73] Global Compact of Education: Commitments. Available at: https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/en/commitments.
[74] Ashley, 'Johann Baptist Metz,' 250.
[75] Johann Baptist Metz, *Mystik der offenen Augen*, Gesammelte Schriften, Band 7, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2017).
[76] Francis, *Laudato si'*, 216.
[77] Metz, *Lerngemeinschaft Kirche*, 48.

calling for a desire for integration and a willingness to achieve this through the growth of a peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter.[78]

In conclusion, if Metz's theological appeal to a faith grounded in hope seems perhaps too challenging for our history, we may be encouraged by a remark found in one of his essays. It concerns the helplessness that comes with a bad conscience. Metz writes: 'Do not be afraid of the helplessness of your bad conscience. For with a bad conscience many things begin.'[79]

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[78] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 2013, 220. Presumably, a comparison of the conceptions of the Church in Metz and Francis could yield interesting results.

[79] Metz, 'Za hranice buržoazního náboženství,' 266.

VARIA

DISCOVERING THE LONGING FOR GOD AS A FRUIT OF SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD*

HANA BENEŠOVÁ

ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to explore the concept of spiritual motherhood from the perspective of helping the other to discover the desire for God within their life story. I will work with the hypothesis that the desire for God can be revealed through awareness and reflection on profane desires. To support this hypothesis, the article outlines a perceptual journey that enables the other to gain a deeper understanding of their desires by learning to perceive the objects of their longing as they are, using a phenomenological method. The goal of this journey is to place desires in their proper place within the order of love, known as *Ordo Amoris* and to discover their identity as a child of God.

Keywords

Desire; *Ordo Amoris*; Motherhood; the Common priesthood of the faithful; Attachment; Detachment; Restlessness; Favourable moment; The other; Care

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One cannot overlook the lively discussion about the active participation of women in the Church, 'in every sphere, not just within the family'.[1] Pope Francis emphasises women's unique abilities to transform the world into a more humane society through creative

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1 'Women's way: Pope opens path for more women at Vatican, in church,' USCCB, accessed May 13, 2023, https://www.usccb.org/news/2023/womens-way-pope-opens-path-more-women-vatican-church.

perspectives and tenderness.[2] Contributing significantly to this dialogue, the Synodal Church in Mission document highlights the shared spiritual potential of men and women, created in God's image and likeness. The emphasis on the equal baptismal dignity of women and the historical contribution of women in the church, including their roles as missionaries, saints, theologians and mystics,[3] reinforces the importance of spiritual motherhood in the wider context of church history.

Thanks to Baptism, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ, known as the common priesthood of the faithful.[4] I aim to demonstrate that spiritual motherhood realises this common priesthood and embodies its mission in a significant way by accompanying the other[5] on the perceptual journey to discover a desire for God in their lives.

Central to this exploration is the definition of spiritual motherhood as a ministry that transcends conventional gender concepts, essential for accompanying the other toward uncovering their desire for God. I will begin to define spiritual motherhood by presenting key aspects of maternal love as defined by Erich Fromm, expanding these into a spiritual aspect. Following this, I will explore the symbiotic relationship between caring for life and nurturing the Spirit, demonstrating how these two facets of motherhood are inseparably linked. Finally, a detailed presentation of the perceptual journey as an effective tool for uncovering the longing for God will be illustrated. At the heart of this journey is the role of the spiritual mother: a companion who, having walked this journey themselves and been filled with the joy and peace of God's gifts,[6] is prepared to accompany the other through each stage

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2 Cf. 'Women's way: Pope opens path for more women at Vatican, in church.'

3 Cf. 'A Synodal Church in Mission,' accessed November 17, 2023, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report_IMP.pdf

4 Cf. CCC 1591.

5 'The other must be seen in its (infinite) otherness, heterogeneity, in how it is determinative of ourselves.' Jiří Olšovský, *Slovník filozofických pojmů současnosti* (Vyšehrad, 2018), 74. Translated by Hana Benešová.

6 This experience was also familiar to the convert C. S. Lewis, who, as Barbora Šmejdová reflects, communicates the joy of God through his works. Lewis naturally invites readers of his literary works into the radiant picture of the fullness of the Christian Trinitarian life, which reveals an almost tangible sensory world brought to perfect splendour in the light of its supernatural source. C. S. Lewis, who wants to share his inner life with God with his readers, thus gives an irreplaceable witness to the Christian Joy that gives life. He does it through authenticity and persuasiveness to his apologetic arguments.' Translated by Hana Benešová.

of their quest to recognise God as Creator, Saviour, and ever-present Companion.

The hypothesis of this discourse is that the desire for God, which is 'written on the human heart, because man is created by God and for God',[7] can be revealed through awareness and reflection on profane desires and giving them a proper place in Augustine's *Ordo Amoris*.[8] It serves as a framework for understanding and forming one's desires so that they reflect the order of love. In this context, profane desires are not necessarily rejected but are instead put in their proper place beneath the desire for God. This theoretical framework is explored through a phenomenological lens, providing a methodological basis for the practical part, which is the realisation of the perceptual journey.

1. Definition of Spiritual Motherhood

To introduce spiritual motherhood[9] as it is perceived in this article, I shall refer to a description of motherly love mentioned by Erich

Barbora Šmejdová, 'Argument, nebo svědectví? Radost, potěšení a touha jako téma fundamentální teologie u C. S. Lewise,' *AUC Theologica* 6, no. 2 (2016), 187–200, doi:10.14712/23363398.2016.21.

7 CCC 27.

8 Augustine and Chadwick Henry, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 120.
Augustine's concept of *Ordo Amoris* is described in *The Confessions* as follows:
'"I roared from the groaning of my heart, and my desire was before you, and the light of my eyes was not with me" (Ps. 37: 9–11.). That was inward, while I was still in externals. It was not in a place; but I was fixing my attention on things contained in space, and there I found no place to rest in, nor did those external things receive me so that I could say "It is enough and it is well". Nor did they allow me to return where it was enough and well for me. I was superior to these external objects but inferior to you, and you are my true joy if I submit to you, and you have made subject to me what you created to be lower than me. This was the correct mean, the middle ground in which I would find health, that I should remain "in your image", and in serving you be master of my body.'

9 There are some examples of the contemporary research on the theme of spiritual motherhood: Noelia Molina, *Motherhood, spirituality and culture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019). This book explores spiritual skills that assist women during the transition to motherhood.
Kitty Bouwman, 'Spiritual Motherhood of Monnica,' *Studies in Spirituality* 29 (2019): 49–69, doi: 10.2143/SIS.29.0.3286937. The study is set within the context of spirituality, drawing from Augustine's Confessions to analyse Monnica's spiritual motherhood.
Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West*. Ithaca (NY: Cornell University Press, 2019). The book is a historical exploration of the complex roles, perceptions of motherhood within the Christian tradition, from ancient times through the Middle Ages and into the modern era.

Fromm in his book *The Art of Loving*. Fromm identifies two key aspects of maternal love. The first involves the basic care and responsibility that is essential for the child's survival and development. The second aspect goes beyond mere survival and fosters a positive attitude to life in the child. This approach helps the child to enjoy and value his or her existence, identity, and place in the world.[10]

Based on these thoughts, a third aspect arises that is integral to the perception of spiritual motherhood. This aspect involves caring for the Spirit, awakening in the other a longing for God and an understanding of the beauty of being a child of God. This care is not limited to physical care but extends to a spiritual mission, as emphasised in *Mulieris dignitatem*.

The motherhood of every woman, understood in the light of the Gospel, is similarly not only 'of flesh and blood': it expresses a profound 'listening to the word of the living God' and a readiness to 'safeguard' this Word, which is 'the word of eternal life' (cf. John 6:68). For it is precisely those born of earthly mothers, the sons and daughters of the human race, who receive from the Son of God the power to become 'children of God' (John 1:12).[11]

The deep connection between the care for the Spirit and the Word of God is illuminated in John's Gospel verse 6:63. 'The words I speak to you are Spirit, and they are life.' This verse reaffirms the third aspect of spiritual motherhood, as will be further shown. Roskovec, in his commentary, clarifies the significance of the Greek word used in this verse, ῥήματα, which is a synonym for Λόγος. He emphasises the fundamental truth that the 'incarnate' nature of Jesus is, in fact, the embodiment of the Word of God. Roskovec further argues that understanding the words of the incarnate Word is only possible through attentive listening to those words (John 6:60–63). Only through attentive listening, according to Roskovec, a person can encounter the work of the Spirit and understand Jesus' words.[12]

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[10] Cf. Erich Fromm, *The art of loving* (Centennial ed. New York: Continuum, 2000), 44–45.

[11] Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year*, 19, avaiable at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html.

[12] Cf. Jan Roskovec, *Evangelium podle Jana* (Praha: Centrum biblických studií AV ČR a UK v Praze ve spolupráci s Českou biblickou společností, 2020), 302.

This discussion leads us to a relevant question: Why is it important for a person to encounter the Spirit? The answer lies in the belief that 'the Spirit is the giver of life' (John 6:63). Therefore, spiritual motherhood is also exercised through sharing the Word of God. This theme of sharing personal experience of how the Word of God penetrated their lives is explored further.

Central to the role of a spiritual mother is the sharing of the Word of God, which becomes alive in the life of the other like a vine from which the life-giving sap flows to the branches (John 15:5). Sharing the personal testimony of how 'listening to the word of the living God' impacted her life is an effective way to mediate Christ. Having experienced God's presence significantly helps to glimpse God's interventions in the life story of the other. This assistance often occurs in dialogue, where shared experiences evoke recognition and understanding. And just as the disciples of Emmaus comprehended the pivotal event of their lives in a conversation with Jesus,[13] so can the other comprehend their own story through dialogue[14] with someone who has already embarked on the perceptional journey.

Spiritual motherhood refers to the mission of inspiring a desire for God in the other and making Jesus Christ identified as the source of life[15] available to them. This mission is not limited to women but pertains to anyone who accompanies the other on their journey towards a new life. Although the term traditionally used for this role is spiritual fatherhood,[16] I choose to use the term spiritual motherhood in this article due to its connection to specific intimate moment and its historical association with women. This preference is also rooted in understanding the Church as a mother[17] through which a person receives new life (Gal. 4:26). Spiritual motherhood is a gender-inclusive term that applies to both male and female companions. The essence of spiritual motherhood is nurturing the longing for God and accompanying the other on their perceptual journey.

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[13] Cf. Luke 24:13–33.

[14] Cf. Ivana Noble and Zdenko Širka, *Kdo je člověk? Teologická antropologie ekumenicky* (Praha: Karolinum, 2021), 76.

[15] Cf. John 14:6, Rom. 6:23, and 1 John 5:20.

[16] Stefano de Fiores, et al., *Slovník spirituality* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 1999), 614.

[17] Cf. CCC 169.

2. Opening to Maternal Love

Having explored the threefold nature of motherhood – encompassing care, promotion of a love for life, and care for the Spirit, I turn to foundational motivations that lead one to embrace motherhood. The dialogue between Michele M. Schumacher and Elizabeth Badinter[18] provides a critical background to this exploration. Badinter argues that maternal love is not a natural affection but rather a social construct influenced by biological impulses and cultural expectations.[19] Schumacher challenges this view by questioning who would choose to become a mother if not for love.[20] In answering this question, she first summarises Badinter's encouragement to women to prioritise their authentic desire for fulfilment (e.g., in society) over the merely biological desire for motherhood. Schumacher argues that maternal desire fulfils a woman and contributes to her happiness, even though the object of desire is not her but a child. Schumacher supports her argument by citing Franz Pieper's definition of love as 'something that comes over us and happens to us like an enchantment'.[21] Schumacher applies this definition to maternal love and explains that maternal love for a woman comes from a desire whose object is a child, who is also its cause.

Opening to motherhood therefore involves more than biological or social influences; it requires an encounter with a deep love that transcends the self. In the realm of spiritual motherhood, a woman must encounter the love of the heavenly Father (1 John 4,16). This is deepened by a sacramental bond with the Son of God[22] through baptism. In this relationship, women find the full expression of their femininity and are therefore inclined to give themselves sincerely to others.[23] In this selfless act of love, the woman discovers her true self. In this way, she opens herself to life and lovingly cares for that life. She also sees God, herself and others more clearly through selfless love, and acquires the vision to care for life in all its dimensions, both earthly and spiritual.

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[18] Cf. Michele M. Schumacher, 'Woman's Self-interest or Sacrificial Motherhood: Personal Desires, Natural Inclinations and the Meaning of Love,' *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 77, no. 1 (2013): 71–101, doi:10.1353/THO.2013.0038.

[19] Cf. ibid.

[20] Cf. ibid.

[21] Cf. ibid.

[22] Cf. LG 7.

[23] Cf. John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Mulieris* Dignitatem, 31.

3. Fostering the Longing for God and Life in the Spirit

As I have explored, maternal love, in both its physical and spiritual forms, is deeply intertwined with the act of caring – caring for life and especially caring for the spirit in the other. This care is ignited by the profound recognition of being loved by God, which in turn fosters a nurturing attitude towards others, helping to ignite the longing for God in them.

Maternal love is expressed in caring for others. The ability to care is awakened in a person by knowing they are loved. Similarly, as the desire to care for life is awakened through awareness of being loved, the desire to care for the Spirit is awakened through awareness of God's love for people. Just as a mother creates in her child a positive attitude toward life, a spiritual mother can convey to the other a positive attitude toward God and ignite a desire for a life in the Spirit. I want to show how the care for a life in the Spirit is deeply connected to the theme of life, which is central to John's Gospel.

Life in the Spirit entails an opening to the horizon of eternal life. The key to experiencing immortality lies in rooting one's life in Jesus Christ (John 5:24)[24] through baptism as '[b]aptism is linked with the gift of the Spirit, who enables this unveiling and understanding of the mystery of existence'.[25] One can distinguish God's presence in life stories by reflecting on the mystery of Jesus' life. As mentioned earlier, listening to the Word of the living God is a means of discovering divine intervention. Hence, listening to the living Word opens a conversation with God, traditionally called prayer. Through prayer, a person learns that people, relationships, and things are not stable and unchanging. However, the prayer, especially the Psalms, leads a person to the recognition that despite human frailty, they can anchor their lives through Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection in the eternal and good God. [26] Through this knowledge, a person discovers God's care and love in the events of their lives and experiences that Jesus, the Son of God,

[24] 'What Jesus brings into a person's life is eternal – whoever lives and believes in me will not die forever John 5:24.' Jan Roskovec, *Evangelium podle Jana* (Praha: Centrum biblických studií AV ČR a UK v Praze ve spolupráci s Českou biblickou společností, 2020), 468.

[25] Mireia Ryšková, 'Odcizený a vykoupený člověk,' in *Kdo je člověk*, ed. Ivana Noble and Zdenko Širka (Praha: Karolinum, 2021), 149. Translated by Tim Noble.

[26] Cf. *What Is Man? A Journey Through Biblical Anthropology: The Pontifical Biblical Commission* (Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2021), 44. 'In the biblical tradition, and

can satisfy the deepest desires and help us understand God's magnitude (John 6:58).

Grounded in the life of the Spirit and awakened by the recognition of God's love, our hearts are drawn to a longing for God. This longing is nourished through prayer in which we encounter God and the acknowledgement of His presence in our lives. Indeed, to truly know God and Jesus Christ is to possess eternal life, as stated in John: 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3). This intimate knowledge of God intertwines our desire for God with the quest for eternal life, revealing that our longing for God is in fact a journey towards eternal life.

So far, the article has explored the concept of spiritual motherhood as a ministry of helping the other to discover their desire for God. The essence of the ministry is defined as the care for the Spirit, which is manifested through dialogue and by highlighting favourable moments in the other's life story that reveal God's interventions. These actions lead the other to recognise that it is good to be a child of God. In the next section, I will explain the process of spiritual transformation, which I have termed the perceptual journey. This journey involves a movement through the secular desire to the desire for God. I will outline the various stages of this journey, including the initial recognition of the desire for a personal experience with God. By exploring these stages, I aim to show that the perceptual journey can be an effective means of rediscovering that a human being is created for God and for eternity.

4. The Perceptual Journey as a Way to Discover the Desire for God

Accompanying the other to help unveil the desire for God, I propose the transformative process I call the 'perceptual journey', which unfolds in three stages: first, the identification and acknowledgement of one's profane desires; second, the discernment of favourable moments that hint at the divine presence; and third, the recognition of oneself as a child of God. The initial stage involves the discernment and articulation of the profane desires that obscure the revelation of one's true identity

in particular, in the Psalter, the fragility of the human being is taken up in prayer that becomes a desire directed to the eternal and good God, attentive to human weakness.'

as a child of God. The second phase prepares the other to glimpse the favourable moment in personal events, which is essential for entering the third phase. This phase involves recognition of being a loved and desired God's child and the decision for constant striving toward the desire for eternity through reflection on and reordering one's desires according to Augustine's *Ordo Amoris*. Engaging in this journey, the other can better understand their desires and discover God as the source of eternal fulfilment.

The first phase involves the discernment and articulation of the profane desires. However, this process is not about eliminating them but placing them through distance and detachment in Augustine's Order of Love. Since cravings influence human perception[27], the journey of perception leads through reflection and transformation of perception to see objects of one's desire as they are; on the one hand, with their limitations, and on the other hand, with their potential to recognise the Creator in themselves (Rom. 1:20).

The transformation of desire happens through a perceptual journey that begins with awareness and reflection on desires. I suggest a phenomenological approach in this process. Barbaras writes 'that it is the "immanence" of what we "live" that we find a path toward transcendence; the phenomenological return to the things themselves signifies ipso facto a return to perception'.[28] He stresses here that understanding things as they appear to our perception, that is, our immediate experience of phenomena, is the key to understanding the world. Immediate experience of phenomena also suggests that it is a personal experience, without mediation and interpretations according to phenomenological slogans. It is therefore a return to unmediated experience, to seeing the world without the filters of our previous expectations.

The preceding paragraph refers to Husserl's slogan of phenomenology – a return to things themselves. To realise this pure experience without prejudice, Husserl uses the concept of *époché*, which is explained as a withdrawal (renunciation) from the supposed reality of the world to reality.[29] For our purpose, however, I will not analyse his definition, but the definition developed by Barbaras in his book *Desire*

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[27] Cf. Jakub Čapek, 'Fenomenologie života. K nejnovějším úvahám Renauda Barbarase,' *Reflexe* 48 (2015): 83–102.

[28] Renaud Barbaras, *Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 2.

[29] Cf. Jiří Olšovský, *Slovník filozofických pojmů současnosti* (Grada, 2011), 82.

and Distance. He understands by *époché* the method that allows access to the true being of the world through the removal of the obstacles that hinder this understanding.[30]

Since I want to explore the practical implications of desire on our perception of the world, I will follow the same path proposed by Barbaras and ask what obstacles may prevent the experience and perception of desire for God and recognition of being loved and desired God's child.

My concern, then, will be to recognise the obstacles that prevent us from glimpsing the constant and present action of God in the world. The goal is not to eliminate desires but, following the model of the phenomenological *époché* as defined by Barbaras, to rid them of the 'obstacles' through which one does not glimpse God's presence in the world, which is like the world, present but not perceived (not experienced) because of obstacle.

When Barbaras speaks of obstacles, he is referring to those that hinder a true understanding of being. These obstacles can be prejudices, assumptions, conceptual schemes, or any preoccupation that prevents a deeper and truer understanding of the world. The practice of *époché*, as Barbaras defines it, allows a person to see the world not as a set of objects for external examination, separate from the observer, but allows for a deeper understanding of phenomena as they are experienced directly by consciousness.[31] When discussing an obstacle that prevents a person from seeing God in created things and His loving interventions in their lives I suggest that it often manifests as a form of attachment to something that is not God. This clinging to what is not God prevents a person from seeing and perceiving God's desire for people and His constant presence in their life story. By practising *époché*, a person efforts to detach themselves from these obstacles, thereby creating the avenue to glimpse the favourable moment and perceive the desire for God.

Besides reflection of the profane desires, restlessness is an important component at the beginning of the perceptual journey. Through restlessness, a person can enter an unknown space where they discover their vulnerability, insecurity, and longing for an eschatological culmination of their life. The effort a person is willing to put into giving

[30] Cf. Barbaras, *Desire and Distance*, 62.
[31] Cf. Barbaras, *Desire and Distance*, 62.

a proper place to their desires within *Ordo Amoris* is triggered by the restlessness that often arises after experiencing the favourable moment. At this point, it is appropriate to cite the words of St. Augustine: 'Our heart is restless until it rests in you.'[32] These words are vital for this article as I want to show that the peace a person can find in anchoring their life in God is above all that can be found and experienced in this world (1 Cor. 2:9).

The second phase of the journey is characterised by glimpsing the favourable moment. The time in which God acts (Mark 1:15).[33] Nevertheless, the question of how a person can identify these favourable moments remains. The passage from *The Confessions*[34] in which Saint Augustine describes divine intervention may answer this question:

The tumult of my heart took me out into the garden where no one could interfere with the burning struggle with myself in which I was engaged, until the matter could be settled. You knew, but I did not, what the outcome would be. But my madness with myself was part of the process of recovering health, and in the agony of death I was coming to life. I was aware how ill I was, unaware how well I was soon to be. So I went out into the garden. Alypius[35] followed me step after step. Although he was present, I felt no intrusion on my solitude. How could he abandon me in such a state?[36]

The story begins with a rush out into the garden. We can recognise in this movement a symbol of the *époché* (detachment) from his familiar milieu and from which Augustine could discern God's presence in his life and the transience of his ambitions and desires. He mentions the searing struggle and death agony that precedes his healing and entry into a new life with Christ. St. Paul calls this new existence being

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[32] *Conf.* I. 1,1 (CCL 27, 1; tr. Chadwick, 3). *Inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.*

[33] 'Through the qualitative understanding of time the evanescent presence of human existence gained in importance and singularity in Christian thought because it is a favourable time, which should not be allowed to pass by.' Ondřej Kolář and Matin Vaňáč, 'Člověk v čase,' in *Kdo je člověk*, ed. Ivana Noble and Zdenko Širka (Praha: Karolinum, 2021), 269. The quotation translated by Tim Noble.

[34] This event happened after a meeting with his friend Nebridius, who had told him about two young men who, influenced by the life of St Anthony, had discerned the transience of their aspirations and ambitions and had decided to serve God. Augustine was deeply touched by their story and after this incident was no longer able to continue his way of life and thinking. Cf. *Conf.* VIII 8, 19 (CCL 27, 126).

[35] Alypius was baptised alongside with Augustine and Adeodatus. Cf. *Conf.* IX 3, 5 (CCL 27, 135).

[36] Chadwick, *Confession*, 146.

in Christ, a new creation and being clothed in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). This narrative of Augustine's profound personal crisis and subsequent revelation in the garden serves as an example for discerning key moments of spiritual awakening during the perceptual journey.

The final phase of the perceptual journey is the determination to move continuously towards the desire for eternity through reflection on profane desires. This pursuit cannot be realised without the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that a person grasps the mystery of being and discerns the favourable moments in which they perceive God's love and promise.[37] However, as Ivana Noble aptly defines, the gift of the Holy Spirit also obliges:

'Human beings oriented anew to the goal already know that they must cooperate with God so that not only they reach the goal but with them the whole of creation.'[38] Pilgrims continue their perceptional journey by accompanying the other to reveal their desire for God. They recognise Him as a loving parent who blesses His children on their way to Him. In doing so, they bear witness to the hope revealed (1 Pet. 3:15).[39]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the main argument presented in this paper revolves around the significance of a spiritual mother in discovering a longing for God. It asserts that helping the other to reflect on profane desires and glimpse favourable moments of divine intervention within one's life story leads to the unveiling of a desire for God. This transformative process, the perceptual journey, involves perceiving and comprehending one's profane desires. The aim is not to eliminate them but to integrate them into Augustine's *Ordo Amoris*. The perceptual journey consists of three phases which are described in detail. The paper also highlights the prerequisite for embracing spiritual motherhood: a spiritual mother who embarks on and passes through each phase of the perceptual journey desires God as she experiences His love and care; this enables her to be a valuable companion to the other on their perceptual journey.

[37] Cf. John 16:13; Rom. 8:14–16.
[38] Ivana Noble, 'Obraz a podoba Boží,' in *Kdo je člověk*, ed. Ivana Noble and Zdenko Širka (Praha: Karolinum, 2021), 142. The quotation translated by Tim Noble.
[39] Cf. LG 10.

This article does not mention any of the great spiritual mothers of the Church because I wanted to describe the ministry of spiritual motherhood more as the realization of the common priesthood of the faithful to which every baptised person is called. By being baptised, a person is joined to Christ and becomes a beloved child of God. This awareness ignites in them the same desire that determined the journey of the Son of God. His life was permeated with the desire for all to know the Father because in this knowledge is eternal life (John 17:3). The motherhood I have written about is a challenge to all believers, regardless of faith, gender, or other considerations. It involves a deep caring for the Spirit, which involves sharing the Word of God and helping to make Jesus Christ known as the source of a new life that a person receives through baptism. The role includes accompanying the other on their perceptional journey, often through shared experiences and dialogue. It is about helping to reveal a longing for God in the other that leads to recognition of being a beloved God's child.

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ANTONÍN CYRIL STOJAN (1851–1923) AND THE UNION CONGRESSES OF VELEHRAD: NEW DOCUMENTS FROM THE VATICAN ARCHIVES FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HIS LEGACY

MARIA CHIARA DOMMARCO

ABSTRACT

On the occasion of the first centenary of the death of Antonín Cyril Stojan, Archbishop of Olomouc from 1921 to 1923, the article provides an original interpretation of some relevant aspects of his spiritual legacy. In analysing a number of documents kept in the Vatican Apostolic Archives (Archivio Apostolico Vaticano) and in the Archive of the Congregation for Oriental Churches (Archivio della Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali), the author outlines the peculiarity of Stojan's contribution to the quest for unity among Christians. The organization of the seven Union Congresses of Velehrad, held from 1907 up to 1936, based on Stojan's intuition, took place in a very difficult political and social context, including the First World War. Stojan showed how hope for a future good is not only linked to the present external conditions: it can be concretely cultivated in the forms granted by the age in which one lives. For this reason, even after his death, during the pontificate of Pius XI, the cycles of Congresses and moments of prayer and study of the Eastern Churches of the Byzantine liturgical tradition that Stojan had begun, continued. Regarding this original way of approaching interconfessional relations, some significant documents kept in the aforementioned Archives can shed light on two relevant dimensions of these cycles of Congresses, which remain faithful to the Catholic Church and rejecting proselytism as a means of spreading Catholicism.

Keywords

Antonín Cyril Stojan; Union Congresses of Velehrad; Orthodox-Catholic Relations; Vatican Archives; conception of Cyril and Methodius; Czechoslovakia; Holy See

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The charismatic personality of Archbishop Antonín Cyril Stojan, whose first centenary of his death is marked this year, brought

an innovative way of living interfaith relationships and, at the same time, remaining within the current of the *magisterium* (that is, the teaching authority) of the Catholic Church. In order to better understand two characteristic aspects of this modality – the belonging to the Catholic Church and the rejection of proselytism as a means of spreading Catholicism – it is necessary to retrace briefly the stages of his life, paying particular attention to the social, political and cultural context in which he lived and developed his convictions in religious matters. Later, using some archival sources, it will be possible to trace the permanence of the aforementioned characteristics in the Union Congresses that took place at the Moravian shrine of Velehrad even after his death.

1. The Universal Church and its Czech People: Stojan's Religious, Social and Cultural Commitment During his Early Years

Antonín Stojan was born on 22 May 1851 into a peasant family in Beňov, a village about 30 km from Olomouc. After a two-year term in the principal school in Stará Voda learning German, an essential prerequisite for German secondary school, between 1864 and 1872 he attended the Piarist Grammar School in Příbor and Kroměříž, where he obtained the high school diploma, excelling in all his studies.[1] From 1860, when the Austrian Constitution was proclaimed, a strong sentiment of nationalism spread and the Catholic pilgrimages in Hostýn in 1861 and in Radhošť in 1862, followed by the Cyril and Methodius festivities of

[1] *Abbreviations:
AAV: Archivio Apostolico Vaticano;
ACO: Archivio della Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali;
Arch.: Archivio;
ARSI: *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu*;
b.: busta;
f.: foglio;
fasc.: fascicolo;
Nunz.: Nunziatura;
PCPR: Pontificia Commissione *Pro Russia*;
pos.: posizione.
Pavel Marek, Stojan Antonín Cyril (1851–1923). Erzbischof und Politiker, *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon*. URL: https://www.biographien.ac.at/oebl/oebl_S/Stojan_Antonin-Cyril_1851_1923.xml (Accessed: July 15, 2023); Ludvík Němec, *Antonin Cyril Stojan, Apostle of Church Unity: Human and Spiritual Profile* (New York: Don Bosco publication, 1983), 2.

Velehrad in 1863, contributed to a revival of Czech national consciousness and, more specifically, of the Moravian ethnic consciousness. The institute, in both locations, but especially in Kroměříž, also participated in this upsurge. Straight after graduating, Stojan applied for acceptance into the major seminary of Olomouc, where he completed his studies while attending from 1872 to 1876 the Faculty of Theology.[2]

The University of Olomouc suffered because of the restrictive legislation of Franz Joseph I and in 1860 was closed by the emperor, with the sole exception of the Faculty of Theology, which was independent and remained open until the German invasion of 1939.[3] Despite the fact that there were positive elements in fiscal and economic policy, the neo-absolutism of Franz Joseph I, who revoked the March Constitution of 1849 by means of the New Year's Eve Patent (the so-called Silvesterpatent) in 1851, attempted to stifle nationalist impulses within the empire.[4] Therefore, the two cultural associations that emerged among the academic community within the Faculty of Theology in Olomouc, promoting the cultivation of Slavonic studies and Czech language, i.e., the association of Slavonic Seminarians under the name of *Literatur-Verein* (Literature Association) and the *Vlastenecká Jednota* (the Patriotic Union) were banned. In 1868 through the joint efforts of the seminarists of Olomouc, Brno and Prague there was founded a new journal called *Cyril a Metod* (Cyril and Methodius) and in 1869 the *Velehrad Union* was established for the support of the sanctuary of Velehrad.[5] Due to the administrative centralism and anticlericalism which prevailed during the Adolf von Auersperg period of government as minister-president of Cisleithania (1871–1879),[6] these associations were about to disappear when Stojan began to revitalise them. Furthermore, as he was not sure he would become a priest because of the

[2] Němec, *Antonin Cyril Stojan*, 4–5.

[3] On the history of the Palacký University Olomouc see the University official website. URL: https://www.upol.cz/en/university/basic-information/university-history/#c3126 (Accessed: July 15, 2023).

[4] Giulia Lami, *Storia dell'Europa Orientale. Da Napoleone alla fine della Prima guerra mondiale* (Milano-Firenze: Le Monnier Università, 2019), 64–65. One of the major actors of this tendency was the new interior minister and police chief from 1849 to 1859, Alexander von Bach. See *ibid.*

[5] Němec, *Antonin Cyril Stojan*, 4; Anežka Kindlerová, 'L'eredità di Cirillo e Metodio e i Congressi di Velehrad,' in *I Santi Cirillo e Metodio e la loro eredità religiosa e culturale, ponte tra Oriente e Occidente*, ed. E. Hrabovec, P. Piatti, R. Tolomeo (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016), 256.

[6] Lami, *Storia dell'Europa Orientale*, 222–223.

anticlerical tendency of the government, at the same time he qualified as a public-school teacher. In this role, he promoted the revitalisation of the *Odbor pro Zakládání knihoven na venkově* (Association for the Foundation of Rural Libraries), which represented an efficient means of upgrading popular culture.[7]

After his ordination (July 5, 1876) he served as chaplain and parish priest in various Moravian parishes from 1876 to 1908.[8] On several occasions, he demonstrated his closeness to the ethnic Moravian population oppressed by the pro-German government as a part of his priestly vocation.[9] During his eleven years in Příbor, where he served as chaplain from 1876 to 1887, he organized two important movements: one for the renovation of Our Lady's shrine in Hostýn and the other for the restoration of the one in Velehrad.[10] This perfectly shows the two basic components of Stojan's spirituality that also characterised the years of his episcopacy (1921–1923): Marian devotion and the legacy of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, developed simultaneously and harmoniously with a civic and personal commitment to the poor and marginalised, as was ascertained during the 67 sessions of the diocesan phase of the process of canonization (1965–1985).[11]

What I have chosen to sketch of Stojan's biography certainly does not exhaust his human and cultural richness, but it does provide an insight into some of the essential aspects that he imprinted on the Velehrad Congresses, namely: the attention to the factor of ethnic and national belonging, conceived not as something divisive, but as an expression of the cultural richness of the social tissue; the central role of study for the correct understanding of religious, cultural and social phenomena; the active involvement of the laity in religious initiatives; and the consideration of the instances of the marginalised. These aspects were not only the result of the particular historical context in which they were formed and Stojan's inner convictions but also helped to shape the interconfessional dialogue of the early 1930s through the Congresses of

[7] Němec, *Antonin Cyril Stojan*, 4–5.
[8] Marek, Stojan Antonín Cyril; Archbishop Antonín Cyril Stojan, *Catholic Hierarchy*. URL: https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bstoja.html (Accessed: July 5, 2023).
[9] Němec, *Antonin Cyril Stojan*, 8–9.
[10] See *ibid.*, 5–8.
[11] Biographical profile of Antonín Cyril Stojan on the official website of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. URL: https://www.causesanti.va/it/venerabili/antonio-cirillo-stojan.html (Accessed: July 15, 2023).

Velehrad, one of the most important occasions for Catholic and Slavic Orthodox exchanges at the time.

The waves of migration immediately following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 increased significantly the number of Eastern Christians in Europe. Facing the phenomenon of Russian emigration, European Catholics – and in particular those in the Bohemian and Moravian lands, due significantly to geographical proximity – found themselves having to deal with individual or entire communities of Russian Orthodox Christians, who, voluntarily or compelled by the newly installed government, had left the territories of the former Tsarist Empire. The question of unity between the Churches and, within it, the role of the Oriental liturgical rite was at the centre of the intellectual debate of a large part of the Russian intelligentsia,[12] as well as of bishops, priests and lay Catholics involved in the reception of refugees.[13]

The Holy See, for its part, activated a series of charitable initiatives which, however, were influenced by the French Jesuit Michel d'Herbigny.[14] As the trusted man of Pius XI from 1922 onwards for relations with the Russian world, he was a promoter of proselytising initiatives in the interdenominational field. As I will discuss later, his influence also extended to the Fourth (1924), Fifth (1927) and Sixth (1932) Congresses of Velehrad,[15] but it was dampened and, in a sense, limited by Stojan's spiritual legacy.

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[12] On the idea of the union of the Christian Churches in the main Russian philosophers of the 19th and 20th centuries see: Елена Бессчетнова, Идея христианского единства в русской мысли XIX–XX веков (Москва: Канон-Плюс, 2023) [Elena Bessčetnova, *Ideja christianskogo edinstva v russkoj mysli XIX–XX vekov* (Moskva: Kanon-Pljus, 2023)].

[13] Among the many publications of the time dedicated to the topic of relations between Catholicism and Orthodoxy mention should be made of the one by the Catholic priest Ludwing Berg, who was actively involved in charitable activities among Russian emigrants in Germany. See: Людвиг Берг, Русско-Католическая Церковь и православная Россия (Берлин: Германия, 1926) [Ljudvig Berg, *Russko-Katoličeskaja Cerkov' i pravoslavnaja Rossija* (Berlin: Germanija, 1926)]. About L. Berg see: Laura Pettinaroli, *La politique russe du Saint-Siège (1905–1939)* (Paris: Ecole Française de Rome, 2015), 420.

[14] Michel d'Herbigny (1880–1957), dean of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, consecrated bishop in 1926, president of the Pontifical Pro-Russia Commission from 1930–1934. See: Antoine Wenger, *Rome et Moscou 1900–1950* (Paris 1987); Léon Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel d'Herbigny SJ and Russia: A Pre-Ecumenical Approach to Christian Unity* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1990); Fouilloux Étienne, Herbigny Michel d', in *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastique*, XXIII (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1990), 1375–1377.

[15] Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel d'Herbigny*, 183.

2. The Concept of the Veneration of Ss. Cyril and Methodius

The self-consciousness of the Catholic soul of the Moravian ethnic revival took shape well before the birth of Stojan. In fact, already in the 1830s, the Catholic poet and priest František Sušil[16] gave new impetus to the veneration of Cyril and Methodius in the seminaries of Brno and Olomouc. Thus it was that, among various initiatives in the academic field, the National Association of Saints Cyril and Methodius was founded in 1849 by Moravian literati. It was within it that the specificity of the Catholic orientation of the Czech revival emerged and broke away from the liberal one in 1850, when the Catholic clergymen founded the *Legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius* (Dědictví sv. Cyrilla a Methoda), under the leadership of father František Sušil. Raising awareness of the problem of unity among Christians and, in particular, unity with the Slavic Orthodox believers characterised much of the association's activity, which promoted hundreds of masses and prayer initiatives for the cause of unity every year.[17] Stojan inherited Sušil's legacy and carried it on until his death in 1923.

At Stojan's encouragement, starting in the late 1870s, several pilgrimages of Slavic Catholic seminarians to Velehrad, the historical centre of the veneration of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, were organised, during which not only times of personal reflection, but also cycles of meetings on Cyril and Methodius unionist themes were held. In this way, the participants experienced not only a personal spiritual dimension but also a community dimension, meeting young Slavic seminarians from other nations. When in 1891 Stojan founded the *Apostolate of Sts. Cyril and Methodius* in order to promote the idea of the reunion of the Eastern and Western Churches, the political circumstances were not favourable to the peaceful development of the work: the political tightrope of Eduard von Taaffe, who served as Minister-President of Cisleithania in those years, was not able to resolve the internal conflicts of the different nationalist currents, of which the confrontation between the Young

[16] František Sušil (1804–1868), professor of New Testament at the Catholic seminary of Brno, active promoter of the Pan-Slavic idea, based on the cult of Cyril and Methodius. See: Pavel Vychodil, *František Sušil: životopisný nástin* (Brno: Papežská knihtiskárna benediktinů rajhradských, 1898).

[17] Kindlerová, 'L'eredità di Cirillo e Metodio,' 252.

Czech and the Old Czech was one of the many that swept through the different party representations of the Habsburg Empire.[18]

However, since the 1840s,[19] the basis for future Union Congresses at Velehrad was thus created through pilgrimages, conferences, the *Apostolate* and activities involving Moravian laymen and laywomen. Stojan's main intention was to facilitate the rapprochement between Christians of the Eastern and Western traditions through the breaking down of mutual prejudices, with a special, if not exclusive focus on the Eastern Slavic Churches. However, the priest firmly believed that the union – which he considered achievable – would not only be the result of the joint efforts of willing individual men and women but would also require personal and communal prayer, combined with more strictly cultural and scientific activity. In 1904 and 1905, the Slovenian Slavist František Grivec,[20] together with the Prague theologian and editor of the journal of the Catholic clergy *Časopis pro katolické duchovenstvo*, Antonín Podlaha,[21] formulated the programme of the Cyril and Methodius concept as follows:

> Our work does not lie in the possibility or otherwise of union: we do not address such questions at all, for these alone are sterile. It is far more important to follow the specialists who declare that the study of the Christian East is useful, necessary, and hitherto much neglected. We rightly avoid the word 'union' and speak of rapprochement, lest someone misunderstand us. It is necessary to work for rapprochement, so that the East understands and understands us more, so that we can at least somewhat reduce the prejudices of the East against the West. National prejudices, ignorance and cultural division also weighed in the schism […]. The study of the Christian East is important and necessary for us because, due to our geographical location, our history, character and language, we are neighbours of the East. If we do not understand the East, we cannot fully

[18] Lami, *Storia dell'Europa Orientale*, 224–225.

[19] Kindlerová, 'L'eredità di Cirillo e Metodio,' 252. On the *Apostolate of Sts. Cyril and Methodius* also see: Němec, *Antonin Cyril Stojan*, 39–41.

[20] František Grivec (1878–1963), author, together with Antonín Podlaha, of the book *Idea cyrillo-methodějská* (Velehrad, 1905). A list of Grivec's major works can be found at the following link: https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=Grivec%2c%20Frantis%26%23x030c%3bek (Accessed: July 16, 2023).

[21] Antonín Podlaha (1865–1932), Church historian, archivist, publisher. See: Forst Vladimír, Opelík Jiří, Merhaut Luboš (edited by), Podlaha Antonín, *Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce 4, část 2. U–Ž. Dodatky A–Ř* (Praga: Academia, 2008), 1951.

understand our position among the educated nations and in the Catholic Church, we will not be able to continue successful, we will not be able to organise ourselves.[22]

3. An Approach That Was Ahead of Its Time Following the *Magisterium*: The Seven Union Congresses in Velehrad

The risk of being misunderstood and accused of pursuing a pan-Slavic political vision was high, and Stojan was aware of this from the very beginning of the Union Congresses in Velehrad, as he always sought the support and understanding of Rome.[23]

The first one was organised in 1907 and they continued even after his death until the Second world war. The seven Union Congresses in Velehrad were attended not only by intellectuals and experts on Eastern Christianity, but also by Catholic priests who in their pastoral work had to deal with Eastern-rite Christians and others who wished to meet with the leaders of Catholic unionist work. So that the work of the Congress would not be disparate and fruitless, it was decided not only to deal directly and extensively with the issues of relations between Catholics and Orthodox, but also, starting with the Second Congress (1909), to divide the work into a theoretical and a practical part. However, the most important of all the achievements of the cycle of Congresses was the theoretical part.[24]

Moreover, while the first three Congresses (1907, 1909 and 1911)[25] presented papers on a variety of topics, the next four ones revolved around a chosen theme: the Fourth (1924) and Fifth (1927) ones had

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[22] Kindlerová, 'L'eredità di Cirillo e Metodio,' 257–258, footnote 29. The same determined, yet mild and conciliatory approach characterised the Stojan's political commitment. When in 1897 he was elected as a deputy to the Vienna Imperial Council, within the Catholic People's Party, commitment was geared towards building the common good according to the spirit of the Gospel, being determined, but always meek and peaceful: 'Fortiter in re, suaviter in modo' ('Determined in action, mild in manner') was his motto. Němec, Antonin Cyril Stojan, 76. On Stojan's political commitment also see: ibidem, 76–79.

[23] Angelo Tamborra, *Chiesa cattolica e ortodossia russa: due secoli di confronto e dialogo: dalla Santa Alleanza ai nostri giorni* (Cinisello Balsamo: Paoline, 1992), 425. On the attempts to politicise places of worship, see also: Kindlerová, 'L'eredità di Cirillo e Metodio,' 254–255.

[24] Maurizio Gordillo SJ, 'Velehrad e i suoi congressi unionistici,' *La Civiltà Cattolica* 108, no. 2 (1957): 577.

[25] On the first three Congresses see: František Cinek, *Velehrad víry: duchovní dějiny Velehradu* (Olomouc: Lidové knihkupectví a nakladatelství, 1936), 443–448.

a purely juridical orientation, the Sixth (1932) a dogmatic one and the Seventh was dedicated to the history and theological and liturgical thought of Cyril and Methodius since 1935 (the year in which the Congress was to be held, then postponed to 1936) was the 1050th anniversary of Methodius' death. Numerous controversial topics in relation to the differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, such as the problem of the *Filioque*, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, etc., were touched upon at the Congresses. Therefore, while the atmosphere of the seven Congresses was characterised by a desire to find a common path to unity, which was deemed concretely possible to achieve, there was no desire to conceal the problems and propose falsely irenic visions to the participants.[26]

However, the Velehrad meetings were strongly affected by a rule imposed on them at the organisational level: from the Fourth Congress (1924), the Orthodox were not allowed to participate in the work in an active form, presenting their own papers during the public sessions, but only in a passive form, listening to the speeches presented by the Catholics, and in an active form only during the debates, almost always conducted in private.[27]

This condition imposed on the Congresses held after Stojan's death was due to the strong position of influence that Father Michel d'Herbigny SJ managed to gain with Pius XI from 1922 until 1933. A proponent of a model of relations with other Christian denominations that was still strongly influenced by proselytism, d'Herbigny first participated as an auditor in the 1911 meeting. Later, when in 1924 the Congresses resumed after a long pause due to the First World War and the death of Archbishop Stojan, the French Jesuit imposed his own vision on relations with the Russian world and thus also on the Velehrad Congresses, limiting the active expression of the Orthodox. When d'Herbigny was dismissed from Rome in 1933 at the behest of the pontiff himself, to whom the frequent abuse by the Jesuit of papal authority caused grave displeasure (ideas and decisions freely attributed to the Pope were often d'Herbigny's), the Velehrad Congresses had reached their last meeting, which was held in 1936,

[26] Gordillo SJ, 'Velehrad,'576–578.

[27] Pettinaroli, La politique russe, 512; Peter Esterka, 'Toward Union: the Congresses at Velehrad,' *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, no. 2 (1971): 40.

and could not experience a radical change from this organisational feature.[28]

However, the expressions of marked hostility on the Orthodox side towards the Velehrad Congresses was also a factor that negatively affected the Orthodox side's own willingness to actively participate in the meetings. For instance, the Orthodox priest Aleksej Mal'cev, chaplain of the Russian Embassy Church in Berlin, in the aftermath of his paper at the Second Congress in Velehrad (1909), was accused by many Orthodox newspapers of being too close to Catholicism, which is why the priest decided not to attend the Third Congress in 1911.[29]

Rather than analysing the handling of each of the seven Congresses held in Velehrad, highlighting their weaknesses and strengths,[30] I would like to focus on two aspects of the drive for rapprochement promoted by Stojan and those who later took up his spiritual legacy and held similar congresses: the strong sense of belonging to the Catholic Church – that went hand in hand with the rejection of the politicisation of the activities of the Congresses – and the inadmissibility of proselytism by their organisers. Indeed, paradoxically, despite the strong pressure exerted by d'Herbigny on the 1924, 1927 and 1932 Congresses, these two aspects continued to coexist in Velehrad.

These two peculiar characteristics of the Congresses emerge clearly through the analysis of the documentation on these initiatives preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Archive and the Archive of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. In particular, I noted the presence of important material on the Fourth Congress,[31] although these two characteristics were present in the other sessions too.

Let us now consider the first of the two aspects mentioned above. The charge of promoting pan-Slavism, levelled by the Catholic side at the First Congress, was tantamount to an accusation of alienation from

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[28] Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel d'Herbigny*, 237, 279. Due to the Second World War, the congress planned for 1939 was not held. Esterka, 'Toward Union,' 37.

[29] Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel d'Herbigny*, 43.

[30] For a detailed history of the seven Congresses and the Velehrad shrine: Cinek, *Velehrad víry*.

[31] See: AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 40, fasc. 247; AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 46, fasc. 340; on the Fifth and Sixth Congresses see: ACO, *PCPR*, pos. 397/28, b. 28. Although the research I have conducted has examined both the entire catalogue of the fonds of the Czechoslovak Nunciature at the Vatican Apostolic Archive and the Pontifical Commission *Pro Russia* at the Archive of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, I do not exclude – indeed, I hope – that further research in the future may lead to the analysis of new documentary sources.

the Catholic Church, understood as a Church with a universal character. Indeed, after the accusations from the Austrian Catholic press at the end of the First Union Congress in Velehrad in 1907 of promoting a political approach to the problem of the configuration of the different Slavic groups, metropolitan Andrej Šeptyc'kyj,[32] to whom Stojan left the direction of the work sessions of the Congresses, in the Second one, held in 1909, was quite emphatic:

> I am amazed by the opinion recently disclosed by the – unfortunately – Catholic press according to which our conferences were instituted not out of a spirit of charity and faith, but with the aim of promoting pan-Slavism […]. Far from us wanting to mix interests and political things with the most holy work of the universality of the faith, with the work of uniting the Churches![33]

A review of the volumes of the Congress records (the *Acta Academiae Velehradensis*) will confirm the absence of pan-Slavic themes from a political point of view.[34]

The Slavic element is always presented as a historical element of the legacy of Cyril and Methodius, but it is not used as a means of promoting a political vision. The assiduous dialogue on the subject with Rome, always sought by Stojan and by those who continued the work of the Congresses, shows how the nationalistic – not 'national' – element was certainly disapproved by both the representatives of the Holy See and the organisers themselves.

As a folder dedicated to the Fourth Union Congress (31 July – 1 August 1924) in the archival fonds of the Czechoslovak nunciature in the Vatican Apostolic Archives shows,[35] the weeks leading up to the organisation of the event, held in 1924 a few months after Stojan's death, revealed a certain concern in Rome that the event was

[32] Andrej Šeptyc'kyj (1865–1944), Ukrainian Catholic Archbishop, Metropolitan of Lviv (1900–1944) and founder of the Ukrainian Studite Monks (1901). See: Franz Adlgasser and Wolf-Dieter Bihl, Szeptycki (Šeptyc'kyj) Andrej (Andreas) von und zu Szeptyce, Metropolit, in *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon*. URL: https://www.biographien.ac.at/oebl/oebl_S/Szeptycki-Szeptyce_Andrej_1865_1944.xml (Accessed: July 16, 2023).

[33] Gordillo SJ, 'Velehrad,' 579. On the nationalistic tendences see also: Kindlerová, 'L'eredità di Cirillo e Metodio,' 254.

[34] Gordillo SJ, 'Velehrad,' 579.

[35] See: AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 40, fasc. 247.

aimed exclusively at seeking rapprochement with the Eastern Slavic Churches. A few weeks before the opening of the conference, the minutant of the Congregation for the Oriental Church, Enrico Benedetti,[36] assured the nuncio in Prague, monsignor Francesco Marmaggi,[37] that Pius XI's address of greeting with the apostolic blessing for the conference would arrive in time. Benedetti remarked: 'Speaking about the Congress, the excessive particularism of Slavism should be removed from it, so that it generally deals with the union of dissidents with the Roman Church.'[38]

As shown by Pius X's message to the participants at the first session and Pius XI's messages on the occasion of the following Congresses,[39] the approval and promotion of the Congresses themselves was in no way in question. It is more likely, however, that the organisers were reminded of the need to refer to a universal context, given that the initiator of the Congresses had died. This remark was fully accepted while preserving the purely Slavic character of the event. This is also proven by the report on the Fourth Congress by the nuncio in Prague, who reported to cardinal Pietro Gasparri, the Vatican Secretary of State, a diplomatic incident that occurred during the proceedings.[40] With regard to the nationalistic anti-Polish claims of the Galician bishops, nuncio Marmaggi described the political appeal as a 'jarring note' in the context of scientific work aimed at quite different issues.[41] The full reading of the detailed report for the Secretariat of State by the unbiased voice of monsignor Marmaggi, since he was unrelated by birth to Slavic ethnicity, strongly highlights the atmosphere and the proceedings of the moderators in order to lead the work sessions adhering to the

[36] Enrico Benedetti (1874–1941), doctor of Theology and Canon Law, minutant at the Oriental Congregation, chaplain at the 'provincial mental hospital' in Rome and then assistant at the Vatican Library. See: Cyrille Korolevskij, *Kniga bytija moego (Le livre de ma vie). Mémoires autobiographiques*, tome 1 (1878–1908), (Cité du Vatican: Archives Secrètes Vaticanes, 2007), 501, footnote 410.

[37] Francesco Marmaggi (1870–1949), nuncio in Prague from 1923 to 1927, was created cardinal by Pius XI in 1935. See: Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Indice 1229*; Marmaggi Francesco, in *Enciclopedia Treccani online*. URL: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-marmaggi/ (Accessed: July 16, 2023).

[38] 'Parlando del Congresso si dovrebbe togliere a questo l'eccessivo particolarismo dello slavismo, perché si occupi in genere della unione dei dissidenti alla Ch. [Chiesa] Romana.' AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 40, fasc. 247, f. 54v. 5 May 1924.

[39] Gordillo SJ, 'Velehrad,' 580–581.

[40] AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 40, fasc. 247, ff. 262–276. 7 August 1924.

[41] In the document: 'Nota stonata,' AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 40, fasc. 247, f. 274. 7 August 1924.

purpose for which they had come together, without engaging in political issues that were outside the efforts of Christian unity.[42]

Obedience to Rome did not fail even with the imposition of d'Herbigny's proselytising vision, which required the organisers to limit Orthodox participation to private discussions. In line with the formulation of Grivec and Podlaha, as well as with Stojan's heartfelt affiliation with the Catholic Church, the strong ecclesial (i.e. religious) dimension of the Velehrad Congresses, which emerges by contrast from the rejection of the politicisation of the works, can also be discerned in the preparatory documentation of the Fourth Congress for which the surviving papers seems to be far more complete than for the other Velehrad meetings. Stanislav Zela,[43] secretary to monsignor Leopold Prečan,[44] Archbishop of Olomouc who had succeeded Stojan, at the end of 1923 sent monsignor Arata, secretary to nuncio Marmaggi, a draft of the programme for the fourth Velehrad Congress. The text presents some handwritten notes, most presumably drafted by the nuncio, with suggestions of various kinds, such as the request to add the treatment of the point of view of Eastern Christians on the 'Ecumenical Council' (with reference to the First Vatican Council, which proclaimed the dogma of the infallibility of the pontiff's pronouncements *ex cathedra Petri*) and to treat the question of unity among Christians from the perspective of historical investigation.[45]

The Fourth Congress gathered almost 400 participants.[46] The Nuncio's report on this meeting immediately proved to be a document of great importance, which helped the Roman Curia to better understand the Velehrad phenomenon. In fact, in the aftermath of the Fourth Congress, there was no lack of criticism – unfounded, according to the archival and bibliographical sources of the time at our disposal– from

[42] This can be seen particularly at *ibid.*, ff. 268–269.

[43] Stanislav Zela (1893–1969), Secretary to three Archbishops of Olomouc (L. Skrbensko, AC Stojan, L. Prečan), persecuted by the Nazi regime, Archbishop of Olomouc from 1941. Sentenced in 1950 in a mock trial to 25 years in prison, he served one year and then was under house arrest until his death. See: Jiří Hanuš, *Malý slovník osobností českého katolicismu 20. století s antologií textů* (Brno: CDK, 2005), 175–176.

[44] Leopold Prečan (1866–1947), Archbishop of Olomouc from 1923 until his death, he gave a strong impulse to the cultural and religious life of the diocese. See his biographical profile on the website of the Archdiocese of Olomouc. URL: https://www.ado.cz/arcidieceze/historie/posloupnost-biskupu/leopold-precan/ (Accessed: July 17, 2023).

[45] In the document: 'Concilio Ecumenico'. The letter is dated 31 December 1923. AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 40, fasc. 247, f. 3.

[46] Pettinaroli, *La politique russe*, 510.

the Roman newspapers. On 12 September, Baron Constantin Wrangel,[47] a Russian Orthodox Christian who was living in Rome at the time, actively promoting unity between Catholics and Orthodox and taking part in the Velehrad Congresses, wrote to monsignor Marmaggi to ensure that the nuncio would not listen to the accusation made by a newspaper in the Italian capital that described the baron as an enemy of unity among Christians.[48]

The reply from the nuncio, who had attended the Fourth Congress together with the baron himself, was reassuring not only with regard to the single unfounded calumny directed at the baron but also concerning the information passed on to Rome about the progress of the Congress. He wrote: 'I have already done everything in my power to put the Velehrad Congress in its true light and to point out the merits of the distinguished personalities who took part in this solemn meeting of Religion and Charity to the Supreme Authority of the Catholic Church.'[49] The innovative approach promoted by Stojan on the problem of unity – or rather, rapprochement, as Grivec and Podlaha put it – through the indispensable combination of study and prayer, had quite a lot of detractors, even within the Catholic Church. Therefore, it can reasonably be assumed that Marmaggi's direct testimony helped the Vatican Secretariat of State and, therefore, the Roman Curia, to consider the phenomenon of the Velehrad Congresses objectively, ensuring that they never lacked the pontiff's benevolence.

Internal opponents let themselves be heard also during the same Congresses.[50] According to what was reported by the nuncio, the moment of maximum tension of the Fourth Velehrad meeting was on the second of the distinctive elements of the Union Congresses: the rejection of proselytism. Due to the massive presence in Europe of Russian emigrants in the years following the Bolshevik revolution, pastoral questions about the correct approach to be taken towards those who

[47] No further data could be found on the person in question.

[48] AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 46, fasc. 340, f. 2. The documentation kept in the archive does not allow the name of the newspaper to be identified.

[49] In the document: 'Du reste, j'ai fait déjà tout ce qui était en mon pouvoir pour mettre le Congrès de Velehrad dans son vrai jour et signaler les mérites des insignes personnalités, qui prirent part à ces assises solennelles de Religion et Charité, à l'Autorité suprême de l'Eglise Catholique.' AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 46, fasc. 340, f. 4. 2 October 1924.

[50] On the protest telegram sent to the Congress participants by Father S. Bulgakov, N. Berdjaev and other members of the Russian emigration intelligentsia see: Esterka, 'Toward Union,' 25–26.

wanted to move from Catholicism to Orthodoxy or towards those Orthodox who approached Catholic priests and faithful for the most varied issues were commonplace in major European cities and went hand in hand with a great charitable effort put in place by the Catholic Church to help those who were in a foreign country without the necessary means of subsistence.[51] The Polish bishops' opposition to the current of liturgical thought that saw the Latin and Byzantine liturgies as equal in dignity, dignity and value they accepted only theoretically but not pastorally, was evident at Velehrad. As reported by Marmaggi, the assembly that met in the Moravian shrine, with the exception of the Polish representatives, condemned the latinisation of the Eastern faithful, and the proselytism associated with this practice. The heated atmosphere that pitted Archbishop of Mohilëŭ Eduard von der Ropp[52] against Michel d'Herbigny and Father Gleb Verchovskij[53] was dampened by d'Herbigny himself as moderator and by the nuncio, who explicitly asked the Polish archbishop not to speak in order to avoid unpleasant diplomatic incidents with the Orthodox and Eastern-rite Catholics present in the room.[54] It should be remembered that the French Jesuit was against the latinisation of Eastern Rite Catholics and those who converted to Catholicism from Orthodoxy.[55]

The disagreements with the Polish representatives did not abate and, on the contrary, became more pronounced to the extent that their participation tuned out to be extremely reduced in the work of the Sixth Congress (13–17 July 1932).[56] In fact, according to a letter kept in the

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[51] On the subject see: Maria Chiara Dommarco, 'Modus operandi Святого Престола при рассмотрении некоторых запросов о помощи, направленных в Ватикан в 1920—1930-е гг.: на основе новых архивных документов,' ['Modus operandi Svjatogo Prestola pri rassmotrenii nekotorych zaprosov o pomošči, napravlennych v Vatikan v 1920–1930-e gg.: na osnove novych archivnych dokumentov'], Электронный научно-образовательный журнал «История» [*Elektronnyj naučno-obrazovatel'nyj žurnal Istorija*] 85, no. 11 (2019), doi: 10.18254/S207987840008073-9; Pettinaroli, *La politique russe*, 474–488.

[52] Eduard von der Ropp (1851–1939), Archbishop of Mohilëŭ from 1917. Arrested in Petrograd in April 1919, he was released in October of the same year through an exchange with Bolshevik prisoner Karl Radek. See his biographical profile on the website: 'Saint Petersburg encyclopaedia'. URL: http://www.encspb.ru/object/2860466686?lc=ru (Accessed: July 17, 2023).

[53] Gleb Verchovskij (1888–1935), Byzantine Catholic priest, leading exponent of the Russian diaspora. See his biographical profile on the website 'Internet Archive'. URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20060208032250/http://vselenstvo.narod.ru/library/verhovsky1.htm (Accessed: July 17, 2023).

[54] AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 40, fasc. 247, f. 269.

[55] Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel d'Herbigny*, 48.

[56] On the Sixth Congress of Velehrad see also: Pettinaroli, *La politique russe*, 690.

Archive of the Congregation of the Oriental Churches, sent a few days after the end of the Sixth Congress by Duke Georg von Mecklenburg,[57] a Catholic with a German father and Russian mother, to Father d'Herbigny, only a few Polish priests from the diocese of Mogilev were present at that session of the Congress.[58] On the other hand, according to Father Nikolaj Bratko,[59] a Russian Catholic priest of the Oriental rite, the Russian Orthodox present in Velehrad, who were clearly sensitive to any attempts at proselytising by the Catholics, were able to actively take part in several dialogues and discussions in private form, despite the fact that there was a significant lack of time for debate between Catholics and Orthodox.[60]

If, therefore, the presence of Orthodox priests and laity at the Velehrad Congresses persisted, despite difficulties on the Catholic and Orthodox sides, it must be reasonably assumed that the reception given to them by the organisers of the Congresses guaranteed, albeit in the forms granted to them by d'Herbigny, a real and fruitful space for discussion in private between Catholics and Orthodox, even though there was no lack of organisational problems in managing the timing of the various conference sessions, as Marmaggi also noted.[61]

Conclusion

The high risk of being largely misunderstood, as happened with a significant part of the Austrian and Polish Catholic believers and clergy, together with the difficulties of a political context imbued of tensions of a nationalistic type and of the First World War, did not prevent Stojan and his collaborators from committing themselves to promote rapprochement between Christians of the East and Christians of the West; their belief that unity was attainable was strong enough to deal with several problems and confrontations. Similarly, in the same years, in the interwar period, and also immediately after the Second World War,

[57] Georg Aleksander von Mecklenburg (1899–1963), count of Carlow, duke of Mecklenburg. For the genealogy of the House of Mecklenburg-Strelitz see: http://mecklenburg-strelitz.org/history/genealogy/ (Accessed: July 17, 20123).

[58] ACO, *PCPR*, pos. 397/28, b. 28, f. 5. 23 July 1932.

[59] Nikolaj Bratko (1896–1958), archpriest, converted to Catholicism in 1922. See his biographical profile on the website 'Biobibliografičeskij spravočnik'. URL: http://zarubezhje.narod.ru/av/b_053.htm (Accessed: July 17, 2023).

[60] ACO, *PCPR*, pos. 397/28, b. 28, f. 6. Bratko–d'Herbigny, 18 July 1932.

[61] See: AAV, *Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia*, b. 40, fasc. 247, f. 275.

in what could be considered the eighth and last Congress of Velehrad (11–13 September 1947),[62] the pairing 'study and prayer' strongly promoted by Stojan found a large following and generated several similar events that need further historical studies, such as the conferences in Ljubljana (1925), Vienna (1926), Prague (1929), Pinsk (1930), Palermo (1930) and Syracuse (1931).[63]

This phenomenon that I would define as the 'Velehrad current', although realised to varying degrees in the various similar initiatives, never lacked the support of Rome, albeit with some more or less considerable moments of friction. Pius XI's support for the Congress work of the Moravian shrine did not wane even after the promulgation of the encyclical *Mortalium Animos* (1928),[64] in which the pontiff condemned the attempts of some Catholics who, in pursuing unity with Christians of other confessions, were in fact espousing a non-Orthodox version of Catholicism, which was detrimental to the truths of faith recognised by the Catholic Church. The warm message of greetings addressed by Pius XI to the participants of the Sixth Velehrad Congress (1932) proves that the Velehrad Congresses never departed from the teachings on matters of faith of the Catholic Church.

The strong sense of belonging to the Catholic Church, which manifested itself in the principle of the universal – *Catholic* – Church, could not accommodate the combined problem of the search for unity among Christians and the political and nationalist demands of the time. This was reconciled in the figure Archbishop Stojan and in those who took their spiritual legacy with an approach that rejected proselytising as a means of spreading Catholicism. This way of understanding relations with Christians of other denominations, as the complete formulation of the decree on ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1965) had not yet been promulgated, can be defined as being ahead of its time.

Furthermore, the influence of Michel d'Herbigny did not prevent Velehrad from being a place of real dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, despite the limitations mentioned above. The atmosphere

[62] Gordillo SJ, 'Velehrad,' 576.

[63] See: Pettinaroli, *La politique russe*, 510–511; Presentation by Fr. Schweigl SJ: 'Pio XI e l'Oriente slavo'. ARSI, *Russia 2003*, IV, 32, f. 4.

[64] The full text of the encyclical can be read on the Holy See's website. URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos.html (Accessed: July 17, 2023).

of listening, the willingness of the participants to explore further the often very specialised themes, the rejection of the latinisation of Eastern-rite Catholics (and, therefore, Orthodox converts to Catholicism), the guided meditations and the moments of personal prayer that took place during the various Union Congresses at Velehrad, represented a moment of conviviality that was generally experienced in a very positive way by the participants as the archive documents examined in this paper prove.

Therefore, it can be assumed that, as Metropolitan Šeptyc'kyj stated not without reason at the Fifth Union Congress in Velehrad, '*Qui semel Velehradium visitaverit, libentissime huc revertetur*' ('Those who come to Velehrad once will want to return').[65] The phenomenon that I have defined as the 'Velehrad current' and how much the two characteristics (fidelity to the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church and rejection of proselytising) of the Velehrad Congresses still remains to be studied in full. All of this has been attested in the archival documents taken into analysis, and yet it is an interesting theme that requires further research.

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[65] Gordillo SJ, 'Velehrad,' 576.

ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE HOLY SEE AFTER THE CREATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE FALL OF 1918

MAREK ŠMÍD

ABSTRACT

The present study deals with the establishment and development of diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See immediately after the creation of Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1918 which underwent a dramatic and turbulent change. The most acute questions to discuss included the filling of Czech and Slovak bishopric thrones, the Church administration in Slovakia and the matters of Church education while the filling of the bishopric thrones in the Czech lands and Slovakia proved to be of crucial importance for the proper functioning of the Church administration in Czechoslovakia.

The study is based on source material, mainly of diplomatic nature, from the Archive of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague and the Vatican archives, the study reconstructs the character, form and transformation of diplomatic relations between the young Republic and the headquarters of the Catholic Church in Rome at the turn of the 1910s and 1920s. Extensive archival funds have been confronted with numerous literature sources, including contemporary history texts.

Keywords

Czechoslovakia; Holy See; Diplomatic relations; Catholic Church; Church history

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The present study deals with the establishment and development of diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See immediately after the creation of Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1918. Based on source material, mainly of diplomatic nature, from the Archive of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague and the Vatican archives, the study reconstructs the character, form and transformation of diplomatic relations between the young republic and the

headquarters of the Catholic Church in Rome at the turn of the 1910s and 1920s. Extensive archival funds have been confronted with numerous literature sources, including both old classical works and modern history texts.

Church representatives perceived with concern the atmosphere and religious situation in Czechoslovakia in connection with the events of the fall of 1918. They were especially disturbed by the leading ideas of the new state which were based on the political, religious and social beliefs of a trio of Czechoslovak politicians – Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, and Milan Rastislav Štefánik – who had during World War I tirelessly agitated within a foreign political movement for the Czechoslovak matter, trying to persuade the world's politicians about the need to break down Austria-Hungary. They called for republicanism against the obsolete monarchism and for social radicalism supporting the economic upswing of the poorest classes, delivering speeches about Catholicism as a religion connected with the Habsburg monarchy and promoting the idea of Czechoslovakism based on the existence of a compact majority Czechoslovak nation in the new republic.

Despite the declared and sometimes real claims of allegiance of the lower Catholic clergy to the national program, the creation of a new Czechoslovak republic in the fall of 1918 was in no way positive for Catholicism. The harsh, forced, and often unfair actions towards the Church and everything Catholic in the Czech lands, such as the tearing down of the Marian column in Prague's Old Town Square in November 1918, the pulling down of statues of saints, iconoclastic riots, plundering of churches and chapels, and the removal of crosses from schools and public spaces, filled Church representatives with fear of *progressivism* which could strongly turn against Catholicism.

The first steps to establish diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Czechoslovakia were taken in the first year of the republic's existence. Pope Benedict XV recognized the legitimacy of the successor states in Central Europe and called their leaders to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See, namely through the agency of the apostolic nuncio to Vienna Teodoro Valfrè di Bonzo.[1]

[1] *Acta Apostolicae Sedis. Commentarium officiale* X (Roma: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1918), X, 478–479; Jana Gajanová, 'On the Relation of the Vatican to the pre-Munich republic' [O poměru Vatikánu k předmnichovské republice], in *Churches in Our History* [Církve v našich dějinách], ed. Bohumil Černý (Prague: Orbis, 1960), 155.

By the end of February 1919, nuncio Valfrè di Bonzo arrived in the recently created Czechoslovakia to meet President Masaryk on 3 March in order to discuss both the establishment of mutual diplomatic relations and the current questions of religious nature. By the end of September 1919, the Holy See decided to send the former secretary of the apostolic nunciature in Vienna Clement Micara to Czechoslovakia where he was to represent the Holy See at the Czechoslovak episcopate for religious affairs.[2]

Official relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See were established on 24 October 1919 when nuncio Valfrè di Bonzo arrived for the second time in Prague, accompanied by the above-mentioned secretary Micara. On the same day, both men were received by the Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš and the next day by President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk to whom they submitted the official recognition of Czechoslovakia by the Holy See. On 26 October, both men attended the ceremonial consecration of the new Prague Archbishop František Kordač in St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague castle in which many important personages in the political and religious life of the country participated. Thereafter, the nuncio to Vienna introduced the new representative of the Holy See to the bishops present.[3]

Clement Micara, an Italian Catholic Church dignitary, was well prepared for the demanding mission in Czechoslovakia. He had both curial and diplomatic experience from his wartime stay in Western and Central Europe which allowed him to maintain an objective distance from the events in Central Europe. A native of Frascati near Rome, he studied theology at the Roman institution of Collegio Capranica where he was awarded a doctorate in philosophy, theology and law. He was ordained as a priest in September 1902. After graduating from the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy (Accademia dei Nobili Ecclesiastici), he entered the service of the Roman Curia and became a professional diplomat. He gained his first diplomatic experience in the nunciature in Argentina. Later he was transferred from Buenos Aires to Brussels

[2] Marek Šmíd, *The Apostolic Nuncio in Prague. An Important Factor in Czechoslovak-Vatican Relations Between 1930 and 1950* [*Apoštolský nuncius v Praze. Významný faktor v československo-vatikánských vztazích v letech 1920–1950*] (Brno: CDK, 2015), 41; Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (hereafter AAV), Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 12, fascicolo 44.

[3] Šmíd, *The Apostolic Nuncio in Prague*, 42; AAV, Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 5, fascicolo 16, f. 6, Beneš to Valfrè di Bonzo 24. 10. 1919; *National Politics* [*Národní politika*], 25. 10. 1919.

where he witnessed the invasion by German troops and subsequently experienced months of hardship during World War I.

In 1916, Clemente Micara was transferred to Vienna where he became secretary to the new apostolic nuncio Teodoro Valfrè di Bonzo. It was there, in the capital of the Habsburg monarchy, that he became acquainted with the Czech and Slovak agendas and gradually penetrated into the religious situation of the country of his future activities. After September 1919, he did not return to Vienna but remained in Prague where he as a representative of the Holy See at the Czechoslovak episcopate became a mediator for establishing proper diplomatic relations.[4]

Regarding the size of the diplomatic mission, in June 1921 the apostolic nuncio was joined by the secretary of Piacenza, the alumnus of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy in Rome Antonino Arata, who thus became the first secretary of the apostolic nunciature in Prague.[5]

The Vatican regarded the agreement of the Czechoslovak government with Micara's official mission as so formal that they counted on his announcement as archbishop of Apamea in the consistory on the same day (21 April 1920). When, however, the response from Prague had not come, the Pope decided to postpone this act ordaining Micara the titular archbishop of Apamea in Syria on 7 May 1920. On the same day, the Holy See also charged him as the first apostolic nuncio to Prague with leading the diplomatic mission in Czechoslovakia. On 8 August 1920, Micara was ordained as bishop and a month later, on 9 September, he submitted his credentials to President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk during his inaugural audience at Hluboš castle near Příbram.[6]

From the establishment of diplomatic relations, both the Czechoslovak and the Vatican sides focused mainly on topical questions of

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[4] Emília Hrabovec, 'Die Nuntien in der Tschechoslowakei. Clemente Micara, Francesco Marmaggi, Pietro Ciriaci und Saverio Ritter,' in *Eugenio Pacelli als Nuntius in Deutschland. Forschungsperspektiven und Ansätze zu einem internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Hubert Wolf and Frank Kleinehagenbrock (München – Wien: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 177–196.

[5] The Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague (hereinafter AMFA), fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 3. 7. 1921; AAV, Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 6, fascicolo 21, ff. 41–42.

[6] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 17. 8. 1920 or Krofta 10. 5. 1920; Josef Pejška, *The Church Law with Respect to the Particular Czechoslovak Law. The Hierarchical Code of the Church* [*Církevní právo se zřetelem k partikulárnímu právu československému. Hierarchický řád církevní*] (Prague: Československá akciová tiskárna, 1937), II, 172–173.

Church life in Czechoslovakia which had been previously attended to by nuncio to Vienna Teodoro Valfrè di Bonzo and his secretary Clemente Micara or by leaders of the spiritual life in the country (archbishops, bishops, abbots, etc.) who had directly communicated with the Holy See and its offices. The apostolic nunciature in Prague informed the secretariat of state – the supreme policy-making body of the Roman Curia to which apostolic nuncios were subordinated – about the most notable events via letter, report, telegram, or telephone, although at first Vatican diplomats did not place much trust in the latter.[7]

The first Czechoslovak envoy to the Holy See was Kamil Krofta who submitted his credentials to Pope Benedict XV on 22 March 1920. Having studied documents in the Vatican archives as a young historian in the early 20th century, Krofta was familiar with the Roman environment. Prior to his diplomatic mission, he had become a full professor of Czechoslovak history with a special focus on Slovakia at the newly founded University of Bratislava. The choice of Krofta was to ensure that the relations between the republic and the Holy See would be maintained in the spirit of the intentions of Czechoslovakia's founders. Krofta himself had repeatedly declared his allegiance to the foreign resistance movement led by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk from the summer of 1918.[8]

Krofta's secretary at the Czechoslovak embassy which was located in Rome at 15 Virginio Orsini Street was lawyer Vladimír Rubeška who served there as legation secretary until June 1921 when he was replaced by Miroslav Niederle, an active member of the anti-Austrian resistance movement in the ranks of the Czechoslovak Legions during World War I. After Krofta's departure in late 1921, Niederle alone

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[7] The Secretariat of state was divided into three sections. Section I – *the Section for Relations with States* (Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari), headed by a Secretary. Section II – *the Section for General Affairs* (Ufficio degli affari ordinari), the former Secretariat of State, headed by an Under-Secretary or or a Substitute, and Section III – *the Chancery of Apostolic Briefs* (Segreteria dei Brevi apostolici). Nevertheless, the Pope still had the final say in all matters.

[8] Archivio Storico. Sezione per i rapporti con gli stati (Segreteria di Stato), fondo Aff ari Ecclesiastici Straordinari Austria-Ungheria (hereinafter AA. EE. SS.), Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 527, ff. 69–72, Micara to Gasparri, 12. 11. 1919 or 18. 11. 1919; Marek Šmíd, 'Kamil Krofta's Mission to Rome in the 1920s' [Římské mise Kamila Krofty ve dvacátých letech 20. století], in *Science, Culture, and Politics in the Czechoslovak-Italian Relations 1918–1951* [*Věda, kultura a politika v československo-italských vztazích 1918–1951*], ed. Jitka Rauchová and Bohumil Jiroušek (České Budějovice: Jihočeské muzeum v Českých Budějovicích, 2012), 94.

headed the Czechoslovak embassy to the Holy See as chargé d'affaires. The early days of the embassy were extremely modest – the envoy had no typewriter, moved around the city without a car, etc., as evidenced by Krofta's political reports and his *Diplomatic Diary*.[9]

The issue of the reform clergy which resulted in the creation of the Czechoslovak Church in January 1920 was very painful to deal with for the Holy See. Some Church dignitaries, such as Secretary of State Gasparri, regarded it mainly as a failure of the priests in the disciplinary sphere and thus saw the remedy for the situation in the firm and determined personage of the archbishop of Prague František Kordač as well as in the strengthening of the formation of priests. They believed that the existing schism was the result of the social stratification of priests, with significant differences between bishops and priests, assuming that the schism would not spread, but, on the contrary, would soon end with the collapse of the new Church. They perceived the principle of religious freedom in the republic as the government's sympathizing with the reformed Catholic block which only kept escalating its demands. The recognition of the newly formed Czechoslovak Church, independent of Rome, by the Czechoslovak state in September 1920 was considered as a confirmation of this course.[10]

The Church dignitaries of the Holy See strongly protested against the simultaneous use and confiscation of Catholic churches which they perceived as a serious violation of the rights of the Catholic Church. They sharply objected to these practices in their diplomatic note of 7 July 1920. The subject of Krofta's negotiations with Roman dignitaries was the question of the nature of Church property and ownership.

However, it was not only the matter of the Czech lands but mainly the Church-religious situation in Slovakia that significantly interfered in

[9] Kamil Krofta, *Diplomatic Diary 1919–1922* [*Diplomatický deník 1919–1922*], ed. Jindřich Dejmek (Prague: Historický ústav AV ČR, 2009); AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 31. 3. 1920; Jindřich Dejmek et al., *Diplomacy of Czechoslovakia, Part II. A Biographical Dictionary of Czechoslovak Diplomats (1918–1992)* [*Diplomacie Československa*, II. *Biografický slovník československých diplomatů (1918–1992)*] (Prague: Academie, 2013), 171; Jindřich Dejmek, 'The Beginning of Diplomatic Relations Between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican (1920–1921). Krofta's Diplomatic Mission to Rome' [Počátky diplomatických vztahů mezi Československem a Vatikánem (1920–1921). Kroftova vyslanecká mise v Římě], *Czech Historical Review* [*Český časopis historický*] 91, no. 2 (1993): 226.

[10] Marek Šmíd, 'Thursday 8 January 1920. Rubicon of the Reform Catholicism?' [Čtvrtek 8. ledna 1920. Rubikon reformního katolicizmu?], *Theological Review* [*Theologická revue*] 88, no. 2 (2017): 137–153.

Czechoslovak-Vatican negotiations. The post-war hardships in Slovakia where the difficulties of coexistence with an economically stronger partner were fully manifested, the broken trade ties with Hungary, penetration of Czech capital into Slovakia, poor transport infrastructure, higher taxes and lower wages, poorer competitiveness, lack of goods, decline in industrial production, higher unemployment and inconsistent unification – all these issues were politicized and thus interfered in the negotiations with the Vatican. In any case, Slovakia felt it as discrimination.[11]

Regarding the Church administration, the Bohemian Church province consisted of the Prague archdiocese and the dioceses of České Budějovice, Litoměřice, and Hradec Králové. The Moravian province included the Archdiocese of Olomouc and the Diocese of Brno. In Slovakia, there were five dioceses: Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Rožňava, Spiš, and Košice. Trnava still did not have the status of a separate diocese but that of apostolic administration. The religious life in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was influenced by two Greek Catholic eparchies – the diocese of Mukachevo with the seat in Užhorod and the diocese of Prešov with the seat in Prešov.[12] The filling of Slovak dioceses where the government sought to replace the former Hungarian ordinaries with Slovak ones proved to be an especially challenging task. The situation developed in favour of replacement as the former administrators had either died shortly after the creation of Czechoslovakia (the bishop of Spiš Alexander Párvy died in March 1919, the bishop of Rožňava Ľudovít Balás died in September 1920) or had been expelled from the country (the bishop of Nitra Vilmos Batthyány and the bishop of Banská Bystrica Farkas Radnai both left in March 1919). Therefore, after 1920, the majority of bishopric thrones in Slovakia needed to be filled, namely in Spiš, Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Rožňava, and Trnava, the latter being the seat of the Slovak part of the archdiocese of Esztergom.[13]

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[11] Roman Holec, 'The Economic Development of Slovakia Immediately after the Creation of Czechoslovakia in the Context of Czech-Slovak Relations' [Hospodársky vývoj Slovenska bezprostredne po vzniku ČSR v kontexte česko-slovenských vzťahov], in *Czechoslovakia 1918–1938. The Fates of Democracy in Central Europe* [*Československo 1918–1938. Osudy demokracie ve střední Evropě*], I, ed. Jaroslav Valenta, Emil Voráček and Josef Harna (Prague: Historický ústav AV ČR, 1999), 276–277; Dušan Kováč, *History of Slovakia* [*Dějiny Slovenska*] (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1999), 76.

[12] Róbert Letz, *History of Slovakia* [*Slovenské dejiny*] IV. *1914–1938* (Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum), 276.

[13] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 31. 3. 1920; AAV, Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 12, fascicolo 44, Šrobár to Valfrè di Bonzo 28. 2. 1919. Trnava was the seat of a vicariate of the archdiocese of Esztergom from 1886.

Only one of the former Hungarian bishops, Augustín Fischer-Colbrie, was not unseated after the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. The Czechoslovak government initially perceived him positively. However, when influential personages from his circle of acquaintances started to be hostile towards the Republic, the government changed its opinion and sought to remove and transfer the bishop to Hungary. Despite the interventions of the Holy See, Fischer-Colbrie's compliant attitude did not last for long so the Church-religious situation in the east of the country remained unstabilized. Subsequently, the government strived to unseat Fischer-Colbrie but the Holy See refused to do this and instead exerted pressure on the bishop through nuncio Micara, hoping to improve the situation. Eventually, the Czechoslovak government did not remove Fischer-Colbrie from his post after 1918, apparently knowing that their political reasons would not convince the Holy See. The government also did not want to irritate the Hungarian Catholic community as well as the vast majority of the faithful in Slovakia who perceived Fischer-Colbrie as an important spiritual leader – for example, Andrej Hlinka stood on his side.[14]

As already indicated, the dispute between the Czechoslovak government and the Church hierarchy concerned the appointment of bishops, often referred to as 'the fight for nomination law'. While the Holy See disagreed with the decision of the Czechoslovak government to use the rights of the Habsburg monarchy, in particular the exclusive right to appoint bishops and fill the posts of high Church dignitaries, the government, by contrast, sought to maintain control over newly appointed bishops and their loyalty. The government held the view that based on the Reception Law No. 11/1918 or Article 64 of the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic of 29 February 1920 they had the rights of the former Austro-Hungarian rulers that were enshrined in Act 50/1874 on the Law of Patronage (§ 38), and that had been passed on to the Czechoslovak government which now could decide about the election of high Church dignitaries, mainly archbishops, bishops, and canons.[15]

[14] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 21. 4. 1920; AA. EE. SS., Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 589, f. 7; Marek Šmíd, 'Contribution on the Relationship between the Czechs and Slovaks after the Creation of the Czechoslovak State in 1918' [Příspěvek ke vztahu Čechů a Slováků po vzniku společného československého státu v roce 1918], *Cultural History* [*Kultúrne dejiny*] 4, no. 2 (2013): 179.

[15] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 28. 2. 1921; AA. EE. SS., Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 13, ff. 58–65, Micara to Gasparri 1. 1. 1923, resp. ff. 71–74,

The Czechoslovak government sought to pass on to them the right of the former Austro-Hungarian rulers to appoint bishops which the curia had granted them for their service to the Catholic Church. The Holy See refused to grant the right to Czechoslovakia as a successor state to the Austrian government, as it was a purely personal right which had ceased to exist with the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. However, having taken over all the obligations of the former monarchy towards the Church, the Czechoslovak government refused to relinquish this right. They wanted to have influence in Church matters also through nomination and not to be presented with a fait accompli – for example, in order to prevent the unilateral promotion of a political party's candidates. The Holy See, too, disapproved of the linking of politics and religion, so they were willing to admit the objections of the Czechoslovak side on this point.[16]

For example, the negotiations on the filling of the three Slovak dioceses – Nitra, Spiš, and Banská Bystrica – were eventually resolved by a compromise, although it was mainly the Holy See that receded from its demands for selecting individual ordinaries, showing its good will towards the young Republic. Both sides were well aware that delaying the settlement of the dispute only damaged Catholicism in Slovakia and led to more tension, nervousness, and uncertainty of the faithful without a shepherd. Thus, by the end of 1920, an agreement was reached that Marián Blaha would not be appointed bishop of Spiš but the bishop of Banská Bystrica and Karol Kmeťko would not become ordinary of Spiš but ordinary of Nitra. Eventually, the rector of the seminary Ján Vojtaššák, who had headed the diocese of Spiš as capitular vicar already from the summer of 1919, was pushed for the post of bishop of Spiš.[17]

Besides the aforementioned bishopric thrones, it was also necessary to fill the Greek Catholic (Uniate) bishopric posts in the Diocese of Prešov and the Diocese of Mukachevo with the seat in Užhorod. The slow progress of the Catholic Church in the east of the country was

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Beneš to Micara 22. 10. 1921; AAV, Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 12, fascicolo 45, ff. 101–102.

[16] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 28. 2. 1921; AAV, Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 12, fascicolo 48, f. 36, Gasparri to Marmaggi 19. 9. 1923.

[17] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 18. 12. 1920; AA. EE. SS., Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 591, f. 43, Gasparri to Micara 19. 10. 1920, resp. ff. 45–48, Micara to Gasparri, 20. 11. 1920.

taken advantage of by the Orthodox, who attempted to alienate Greek Catholics from Rome, and also by infidels – often zealous communists.[18]

At the time of the creation of Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1918, the post of bishop of Prešov was held by Štefan Novák, a Slovak Church leader, who administered the diocese in a rather inert manner, often staying in Vienna and Budapest. Given his Hungarianization policy in the spheres of education and religion, he resigned from his post and left for Hungary shortly after the establishment of Czechoslovakia. The Holy See considered his resignation as necessary. The search for a suitable successor for his post took a long time – only in June 1922 was the vacant seat of apostolic administrator of Prešov filled by Serbian Dionýz Njaradi, bishop of Križevac.[19]

As for the Mukačevo diocese, it had been administrated by Antal Papp, a Ruthenian Greek Catholic priest of Hungarian origin from 1912. After 1918, Papp also proved himself as a decisive and militant Hungarian who was, moreover, ignorant of the Slovak language. With respect to his spiritual qualities and integrity, the Czechoslovak government did not proceed to deport him from his diocese as had been the case with the bishops of Nitra and Banská Bystrica. Instead, they waited for his future political and religious responses which could now be expressed loyalty. When this did not happen and Papp refused to take the oath of loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic, he was expelled from the country in 1924. He left for Hungary where he became apostolic administrator in Miskolc.[20]

The task of filling the Olomouc archbishopric throne in Moravia went relatively smoothly. In November 1919, Lev Skrbenský of Hříště, an aristocrat of Czech origin, whose health was deteriorating and who had not become accustomed to the new conditions, resigned from his post. Pope Benedict XV accepted his resignation in February of the

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[18] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 28. 2. 1921; AA. EE. SS., Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 586, ff. 39–46, Micara to Gasparri 2. 4. 1921.

[19] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 28. 2. 1921, resp. 16. 3. 1921; AA. EE. SS., Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 21, f. 45, Gasparri to Micara 2. 3. 1922; AA. EE. SS., Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 619, ff. 56–64, Valfrè di Bonzo to Gasparri 11. 2. 1921; Jaroslav Coranič, *From the History of the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia* [*Z dejín gréckokatolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku*] (České Budějovice: Sdružení sv. Jana Nepomuckého při Biskupství českobudějovickém a Centrum církevních dějin a dějin teologie Teologické fakulty Jihočeské univerzity v Českých Budějovicích, 2014): 175–195, 222–231.

[20] AA. EE. SS., Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 31, f. 29, Micara to Gasparri 20. 1. 1923, resp. ff. 30–56, Micara to Tacci 20. 1. 1923.

following year but the archbishopric throne was not officially vacant until August 1920. In January 1921, the post of archbishop of Olomouc was assumed by the provost and canon, Antonín Cyril Stojan, a popular member of the Revolutionary National Assembly who was agreed upon without any objections by both Czechoslovakia and the Holy See. It is interesting to note that among the candidates of the government for the Olomouc archbishopric throne were also Jan Šrámek and Andrej Hlinka but the Vatican disagreed, allegedly claiming that, as high-profile personalities of political Catholicism they were unacceptable to the Czechoslovak government.[21]

At the time of the creation of Czechoslovakia, the post of bishop of Hradec Králové was held by Josef Doubrava who served briefly as apostolic administrator of the Prague Archdiocese between 1918 and 1919. Several months after his death in February 1921, the canon of the Metropolitan Chapter by St. Vitus in Prague Karel Kašpar, who had served as auxiliary bishop already from March of the previous year, was appointed as Doubrava's successor. The ceremonial consecration was carried out on 11 April 1920. It should be noted, that Karel Kašpar, a close confidant of Nuncio Micara and an important informant of Roman circles, was among the most suitable candidates of the Holy See for the post of Prague archbishop after the establishment of Czechoslovakia.[22]

Two Czech dioceses, or rather a Bohemian and a Moravian one, were headed by German ordinaries after 1918. In the diocese of Litoměřice, with two-thirds of the German population, German bishop Josef Gross remained in his post and Antonín Čech became his auxiliary bishop in the 1920s. Although the Holy See was ready to replace the bishop of Litoměřice, Gross eventually kept his post until his death in 1931.

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[21] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 24. 7. 1920; AA. EE. SS., Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 613, ff. 51–54, Micara to Gasparri 7. 7. 1920, resp. fascicolo 614, ff. 21–25, Micara to Gasparri 30. 9. 1920; Jitka Jonová, 'Negotiations on the Appointment of Archbishop of Olomouc after the Resignation of Archbishop Leo Cardinal Skrbenský of Hříště as Seen Through the Eyes of the Holy See' [Jednání o obsazení arcibiskupského stolce v Olomouci po rezignaci arcibiskupa Lva kardinála Skrbenského z Hříště z pohledu Svatého stolce], *Studia Theologica* 15, no. 3 (2013): 149.

[22] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 28. 2. 1921; AA. EE. SS., Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 576, ff. 53–54, Micara to Gasparri 28. 2. 1921, resp. f. 55, Gasparri to Micara 17. 4. 1921; Pavel Marek and Marek Šmíd, *Archbishop František Kordač* [*Arcibiskup František Kordač*] (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2013): 28, 66.

Similarly, Norbert Klein, a nationally moderate German, remained in his office in the diocese of Brno which was mostly Czech until the mid-1920s.[23]

An exceedingly difficult debate in Czechoslovak-Vatican negotiations concerned the new demarcation of dioceses which was necessary to implement especially in the east of the country in order for the diocesan boundaries to correspond with the state borders. In this respect, both sides – the Holy See and the Czechoslovak government – were in agreement as they considered the situation after 1918 as a completely new experience of unprecedented significance. Especially in the east of the country, the adjustment of diocesan borders became of crucial importance. In Bohemia and Moravia, parts of dioceses with their residences were in neighbouring countries, namely the parishes of Archdioceses of Wrocław and Vienna and the Dioceses of Regensburg and St. Pölten although these were not large territories. After 1918, the Prague Archdiocese was given the region of Kladsko which had been separated from the Czech lands and annexed to Prussia together with most of Silesia in the middle of the 18th century. In 1919, the Diocese of České Budějovice was enlarged by the addition of Vitoraz and the Diocese of Brno was granted the region of Valtice. A year later, the region of Hlučín was included into the Archdiocese of Olomouc which only prolonged the difficult process of legal settlement of the property of the (arch)dioceses.[24]

Regarding Slovakia, which represented the main focus of negotiations on the demarcation of diocesan borders, it was necessary to wait for the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, which was to set the borders of the new Hungarian state as a successor state to Austria-Hungary. The

[23] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 11. 11. 1920; AA. EE. SS., Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 36.

[24] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920–1921, Krofta 31. 3. 1920, resp. 30. 9. 1921; Damián Němec, 'Modus vivendi of 1928 from the Point of View of the Canon Law' [Modus vivendi z roku 1928 z pohledu kanonického práva], *Dialogue Europe* [*Dialog Evropa*] 14, no. 1–4 (2004): p. 29; Miloš Trapl, 'The Changes in the Church Administration in Moravia and Silesia as a Result of Modus Vivendi of 1928' [Změny církevní správy na Moravě a ve Slezsku v důsledku Modu vivendi z roku 1928], in *The Development of Church Administration in Moravia. The 27th Mikulov Symposium, October 9–10, 2002* [*Vývoj církevní správy na Moravě. XXVII. mikulovské sympozium 9.–10. října 2002*], ed. Emil Kordiovský and Libor Jan (Brno: Státní okresní archiv Břeclav, 2003), 151.

treaty was signed in June 1920.[25] The most difficult issue of removing the Slovak parts of the Esztergom Archdiocese from the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the archbishop of Esztergom and the primate of Hungary János Csernoch was only resolved in the late 1930s.

Another acute problem was the matter of separation of Church and state which had already been raised during World War I when Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, leader of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance movement, had discussed the matter with American Catholics of Czech origin at the Catholic congress in Washington in June 1918.[26] In the post-1918 situation, the Holy See was naturally concerned about a radical form of separation which could endanger the interests of the Catholic Church.

Therefore, the Holy See refused the radical proposal for separation from the pen of left-wing politician and lawyer Theodor Bartošek which was also not supported by the Czechoslovak government but they were willing to consider foreign minister Beneš's plan of separation which promised the Catholics to maintain Church property. The Brazilian and French separation laws became a subject of consideration in the Czechoslovak-Vatican negotiations although both sides were in favour of an amicable settlement of Church-state relations. The Catholic Church was thus reluctantly preparing for the separation as it was promoted by political authorities in the country, namely by the president, foreign minister and the government, but the separation should take place in the French manner, not the Brazilian one.[27]

The Czechoslovak government wanted to prepare a draft of the separation law and submit it to the Holy See which would unwillingly accept it as state secretary Pietro Gasparri had suggested during the negotiations. In the post-war atmosphere and with a strong left-wing representation in the government, it was impossible to plan for concluding a concordat with Czechoslovakia. In addition to the separation law, the government also wanted to prepare a special treaty that would

[25] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 28. 2. 1921; AA. EE. SS., Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 588, f. 1, Micara to Gasparri 15. 11. 1920, resp. f. 13, Gasparri to Micara 19. 12. 1920.

[26] Marek Šmíd, *The Vatican and the Czech Lands 1914–1918* [*Vatikán a české země v letech 1914–1918*] (Brno: CDK, 2020), 138.

[27] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 18. 12. 1920; AA. EE. SS., Cecoslovacchia, III periodo, fascicolo 3, ff. 11–14, Micara to Gasparri 1. 10. 1920, resp. AAV, Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 10, fascicolo 40, ff. 150–159; Dejmek, The Beginning of Diplomatic Relations Between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican, 235–236.

grant Czechoslovakia the same rights as other states enjoyed while regulating practical Church matters, such as the appointment of bishops. The Czechoslovak side found inspiration in the Portuguese separation, which, although relatively radical, allowed Lisbon to maintain the Portuguese embassy to the Holy See.[28]

The matter of separation of Church and state was closely related to the question of Church property. The Holy See was afraid that the removal of the financial base would make it impossible for priests and monks to continue their service, although the idea of limiting the property of some monasteries was not completely strange to them. They were willing to agree to the sale of vast Church estates but demanded that the proceeds from the sale should remain with the Catholic Church. In any case, the Czechoslovak government did not seek to confiscate Church property without compensation but considered the option of establishing a Church fund in which the financial means from the sale of Church estates would be gathered. The Church would manage the funds under state supervision which even Prague Nuncio Micara approved of. State Secretary Gasparri, by contrast, was not in favour of this solution as he had a terrible experience with the Church fund in Italy.[29]

It may be surprising that Church dignitaries did not protest against the sale of Church property but demanded that the estates should be sold for an adequate sum and the money kept for the administration and benefit of the Church. The estates of foreign (arch)bishops, whose parishes were situated in Czechoslovakia as well as Czech parishes abroad brought about many complications. These complex issues required time so that a comprehensive solution could be reached not just a temporary fix. These estates included, for example, the estates of the Wrocław Diocese situated in Czechoslovakia. They could not be recognized as the property of the Czechoslovak Catholics of the Wrocław Diocese, as they belonged to the diocese as a whole, not only to the faithful in Czechoslovakia. The government suggested either

[28] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1920, Krofta 18. 12. 1920; Marek Šmíd, 'Negotiations of Jan Šrámek in the Vatican in the 1920s' [Jednání Jana Šrámka ve Vatikánu ve dvacátých letech 20. století], *Journal of the Moravian Foundation* [*Časopis Matice moravské*] 131, no. 1 (2012): 65–88.

[29] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 16. 3. 1921, resp. 31. 10. 1921; AA. EE. SS., Austria-Ungheria, III periodo, fascicolo 28, resp. Austria, IV periodo, fascicolo 20.

selling the estates and paying the proceeds to the Wrocław diocese or placing the money under the administration of a joint commission of representatives of the state and the Church and subsequently dividing it. Regarding the estates of the German diocese in Wrocław, it was in any case necessary to wait for the final recognition of the borders of Czechoslovakia which delayed the issue even further.[30]

During his negotiations with the Vatican, Kamil Krofta also dealt with the dramatic political-religious situation that the post-war development in Europe brought about. It is logical that he paid more attention to the events in Central Europe as they directly influenced the situation in Czechoslovakia. The monitoring of the situation in neighbouring countries well demonstrates the interest of the Holy See in the welfare of the Church, particularly in Austria and Hungary, reflecting their nostalgia for the fall of Austria-Hungary. It was no secret that, already from the Great War, State Secretary Pietro Gasparri along with many other Cardinals had sympathized with the Habsburg monarchy and Pope Benedict XV had sought to preserve it until the last days of the world conflict.[31]

Czechoslovak-Vatican relations were also temporarily exacerbated by the incident in Hungary when the former Austrian Emperor Charles I returned to Budapest incognito during Easter 1921 and attempted to restore the monarchy. However, after a week's stay in Szombathely in western Hungary, he realized the futility of his efforts and returned to Switzerland. State Secretary Gasparri was sceptical about Charles I's attempt at a coup d'état – he believed that his risky endeavour was doomed to failure as he had no support among Hungary's political elite. Kamil Krofta was informed that the archbishop of Esztergom János Csernoch who was not trusted in Czechoslovakia was Charles I's confidant. Charles I's downfall would make Csernoch's position in Hungary even more difficult. After the failure of Charles I's coup d'état, the state secretary was pleased that there had been no bloodshed.[32]

Although the Vatican took no part in the ex-emperor's attempt, they would not object to the return of the Habsburgs to the Hungarian throne. When Charles I of Habsburg repeated his attempt to regain the

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[30] AAV, Nunziatura Cecoslovacchia, busta 12, fascicolo 46.

[31] Marek Šmíd, *The Vatican and the First World War. Transformation of the Foreign Policy of the Holy See in 1914–1918* [*Vatikán a první světová válka. Proměny zahraniční politiky Svatého stolce v letech 1914–1918*] (Brno: CDK, 2016), 26.

[32] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 12. 4. 1921.

throne in October 1921, the Holy See was again very reserved about his *adventure*. The Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* ran only agency reports on the affair, refraining from making any comments and expressions of sympathy for the ex-emperor. The secretary of state considered his endeavour as a naïve, ill-conceived action of a young risk-taker, and thus did not understand the overreaction of Czechoslovakia who feared a Hungarian military invasion of Slovakia.[33]

Diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See underwent a dramatic and turbulent change at the turn of the 1910s and 1920s. The most acute questions to discuss included the filling of Czech and Slovak bishopric thrones, the Church administration in Slovakia and the matters of Church education while the filling of the bishopric thrones in the Czech lands and Slovakia proved to be of crucial importance for the proper functioning of the Church administration in Czechoslovakia.

The posts of residential bishops in Czechoslovakia were mostly held by Church leaders of aristocratic origin, conservative mindset and pro-Habsburg orientation. Therefore, these dignitaries often regarded the fall of the pro-Catholic Habsburg monarchy as the loss of a firmly established confessional society and the end of state support for religion which they perceived as a tragedy and personal defeat. Prague Archbishop Pavel Huyn and Olomouc Archbishop Lev Skrbenský of Hříště embodied these concerns. It is thus understandable that they acted with considerable hostility towards Czechoslovakia. They perceived the democratic modernization processes that were set in motion as an extremely dangerous and harmful turning point. Therefore, they often called for rigidity and for the strengthening of a retarded approach that would preserve the doctrine of the Church and prevent the dangerous seductions of the liberal-democratic First Czechoslovak Republic.

Only after 1918, the appointment of new bishops, who came from 'the humble strata of Czech and Slovak society', such as Šimon Bárta in České Budějovice, Ján Vojtaššák in Spiš, and Marián Blaha in Banská Bystrica, transformed the static Church community into a dynamically journeying people. Since the bishops who were reserved and disloyal to the republic either died or resigned until the mid-1920s, as time progressed and after the dramatic upheavals in society and within the

[33] AMFA, fund Political reports – Vatican, 1921, Krofta 31. 10. 1921; AA. EE. SS., Cecoslovacchia, IV periodo, fascicolo 44, ff. 17–25, Micara to Gasparri, sine dato,

Church, the Catholic clergy gradually became reconciled to the republic and accepted it as its own.

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REVIEWS & NEWS

Elias Kifon Bongmba, *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, London, New York: Routledge, 2022, 535 pages, ISBN 978-1-03-233613-8.

ONDŘEJ HAVELKA

This comprehensive monograph – devoted to African theology from many inspiring perspectives – is the work of thirty-three authors specializing in various disciplines related to theology on the African continent. The editor is Elias Kifon Bongmba, based at Rice University in the USA. The book is structured into four major thematic sections in over five hundred pages. The first part deals with the method in African theology. The introductory chapter, from the pen of the monograph's editor, reviews the basic ideas and message of the entire work, reveals the structure and logic of the parts, and introduces the issues under investigation. Central to contemporary African theology, according to Bongmba, is the debate on the continent's 'postcoloniality'; postcolonial discourse is not only about critiquing and rejecting colonial crimes against African culture, religion, human rights, and society in general, but also about redefining and re-establishing specifically black thinking in theology, black life, and black approaches to the world.

In the second chapter, Odomaro Mubangizi reflects on the relationship between theology and traditional African philosophy. He also seeks to bridge Western philosophy with African philosophy, emphasizing methodological pluralism as the starting point of his approach. He uses a holistic approach to knowledge, building on local philosophical systems, mythology and rituals, and argues that there is a trinitarian cosmic system in traditional African religion compatible with Christian concepts. According to Mubangizi, African theology must necessarily be rooted in traditional African symbolism and be truly African, as Pope Paul VI also said in Uganda in 1969. Mubangizi engagingly introduces African philosophy and theology of the time, which is very different from Western concepts, and goes on to point out such realities as ritual drumming, which is now – after a long period of rejection, of course – part of African Christian liturgy as an integral element of African philosophy and worldview. In the following chapter, Laurenti Magesa follows up with a reflection on the history, meaning and implications of the theology of inculturation, emphasizing that the invitation to accept Christ has been given to all peoples and cultures of the world. Magesa views evangelization in relation to indigenous cultures in light of the Vatican II document Gaudium et Spes, which explicitly links evangelization to local culture. According to the author, the Gospel does not privilege any world culture over others but is an incarnation of the Christian message in

a local cultural context that always has its own original richness, which should not be stifled – as unfortunately happened in Africa for centuries during the colonial era – but developed.

In chapter four, Chammah J. Kaunda focuses on the sources of African theology and emphasizes contextuality as the basis for a diversity of theological reflection that avoids grand all-encompassing narratives. According to the author, African philosophical systems and indigenous African religions are legitimate sources of contemporary African theology. The denial of indigenous religions as diabolical by earlier missionaries and the unification of different African cultures were huge transgressions against Africans and their approach to theology; the African context builds on the immense diversity of cultures as a necessary source of theology. Kaunda analyses some definitions of African theology arguing that most theologians hold that African theology should be made up of African life, realities, cultures, philosophies and beliefs, in an African historical context. Such a theology should reflect the gospel in the light of African cultures and indigenous religions. According to Kaunda, theological thinking is to grow out of the Bible, African religious culture, African philosophy (or rather philosophies), Christian history in Africa, which is rich and rooted in the very beginning of Christianity, and the ideas of great African thinkers. The author cites the Bible as the first source of theology but recalls how it was used in the deplorable domination of blacks by whites during the colonial occupation, and adds that it is legitimate to read the Bible through a pre-understanding of African philosophy and traditional African religions, since the African is not bound to think theologically through Greek philosophy, which is distant to him. He regards indigenous African religions as the legitimate and essential source of African theology. Kaunda criticizes Mbiti's well-known view that traditional African religions were merely a preparation for the coming of the gospel and emphasizes that Christianity can draw significant inspiration from African indigenous religions for their salvific dimension.

The chapters of the second comprehensive part deal with selected theological movements in Africa. Part Two opens with one of the strongest chapters in the entire monograph, by James N. Amanze, on the relationship between theology and African religions. Amanze argues that dialogue between Christian theology and traditional African religions is essential for the survival and development of the church in Africa. The Europeans, colonial missionaries not excluded, restricted traditional African religions in an attempt to eliminate them, but the religions survived. A breakthrough to the openness of Europeans to African thought was the famous book Bantu Philosophy by missionary Placid Tempels, which helped missionaries begin to understand African religions and worldviews more clearly, although it was also later criticized for categorizing black thought in Western terms. There is no place in African theology for the destruction of diverse indigenous cultures. African theology does not use the apparatus of Greek philosophy, does not favour unifying catch-all solutions, and certainly does not dismiss Africa's pre-Christian past as something mistaken

or merely preparatory. In this chapter, the reader will learn the most about traditional African religions and their unifying key elements.

African theologian Alice Yafeh-Deigh follows Amanze with a chapter on feminist theology in Africa. She looks at some of the major women's theological movements such as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, raising the issue of gender in theology and the legacy of traditional African patriarchy and colonial hierarchy, which she critically analyses. The author calls for gender equality in Africa, especially in the field of academic institutions, where she believes it is failing miserably. In chapter six, James R. Cochrane discusses public theology, stressing that theology has always been linked to the public and political spheres. The author divides public theology into two levels: symbiotic and antagonistic. Timothy van Aaarde completes the section on African theological movements with his contribution to so-called black theology in South Africa in the context of political struggles. The most important work of South African liberation theology – black theology – is considered to be The Cry of the African Man. In the context of liberation, a distinction is made between African theology (ethnographic approach) and black theology (anthropological approach) with different methodological approaches. The author presents four elementary waves of black theology and their starting points. Then in the second part comes James R. Cochrane on African theology in relation to politics, Galia Sabar on political theology in Kenya, Jesse N. K. Mugabi on African theology in peacetime, Jacquineau Azétsop on the relationship between African theology and public health in sub-Saharan Africa, Julius Gathogo on theology and the rebuilding of Africa, Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa on ecumenical African theology, Stan Chu Ilo and Idara Otu on theology in relation to development in Africa, and Peter Kanyandago on African theology after Vatican II.

The third comprehensive part of the book deals with contemporary pressing regional issues in African theology. In chapter sixteen, Eshete Tibebe and Tadesse W. Giorgis examine the theology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Jewish character of the approach to theology strongly related to Tanakh has influenced both the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the Christian community there. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has developed a distinctive theology of salvation emphasizing the importance of the Ten Commandments, almsgiving and fasting (I can confirm from repeated personal experience that fasts are faithfully observed throughout the year in Ethiopia today and fast days are indeed numerous compared to the Catholic tradition) and a monophysite line of theology. The centre of Christianity there, with an exceptionally long and rich tradition, is the beautiful Lalibela. Perhaps the greatest divergence from Catholic doctrine was born in the 15th century, when the links with the local monarchy reached their peak. The chapter authors recall the successful 1961 translation of the Bible into Amharic and the subsequent mission to the world, particularly successful in the Caribbean. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church boasts an extraordinary monastic tradition, and its monks are vocal and respected moral critics of contemporary society.

In the following chapter, James Nkansah-Obrempong reflects on the roots of evangelical theology in Africa in the missions of the seventeenth century. He follows Ernst M. Conradie with a hermeneutical reflection on eco-theology in South Africa. Holistic soteriology in the African context is further explored by Martina Prosén. Other regional contemporary themes in African theology are addressed in the third part of the monograph by authors Joseph G. Healey, Tinyiko Malukele, Ezdra Chitando, Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, Quentin Wodon, Masiiwa Ragies Gubda, and Namakula Evelyn B. Mayanja. Arguably the strongest chapter is Maluleke's text on postcolonial African theology, in which he views theology after liberation from colonial occupation by looking back at the period of unfreedom and dictatorship by Europeans not only in politics but also in religion, and then looking forward to a future in which African theology should emancipate itself and leave behind the atmosphere of subordination and dictated white supremacy (not only) in theology. Maluleke argues that while some contemporary African theologians hold the view that traditional African religions must give way to Christian doctrine in order for the church to grow in Africa, most elite contemporary African theologians, on the contrary, argue that indigenous religions are an essential element of African theology and an integral part of it. Indigenous religions are inscribed in the identity of the African theologian and Africa must no longer be bullied by Europe and its earlier labeling of indigenous religions as diabolical.

The fourth comprehensive part of the monograph is entitled Biblical and Doctrinal Theology. In chapter twenty-six, Lovemore Togaresei reflects on the position of the Bible in African theology. According to the author, the authority of the Bible varies widely in different African churches: some newer Christian movements take the Bible as the ultimate authority and understand its texts literally and unquestioningly, including the legislative texts of the Old Testament; other movements see the Bible as the instrument by which colonizers conquered Africa and subjugated (and enslaved) its inhabitants, and thus take the Bible with due reserve; others read the Bible in a more traditional way, while various biblical movements offer a reading through the filter of ancestral cult, traditional religions, the dignity of the human person, or political liberation. Contemporary African biblical theology is extremely diverse. I see in this chapter the greatest inspiration for readers shaped by Western theology, for it offers unexpected perspectives and extremely inspiring insights into the Bible, and allows us to read the texts of the Old and New Testaments in a new, different, fresh way. Reading familiar texts through African glasses can bring much that is new, much that is good, to Western theology as well.

Martin Munyao follows up African Biblical Theology in the next chapter with another very inspiring work on African Christology, in which he also adds unexpected perspectives, such as a Christology built on the cult of ancestors or a comparison of Christian soteriology and the redemptive level of indigenous African religions that is essential to them. This theme is further developed by David Tonghou Ngong in chapter twenty-eight. This is followed by Mary-Anne

Plaatjies-Van Huffel's treatment of the patristic period in North Africa. The latter is well known to our readers and thus a new portion of unexpected inspiration is found rather in the next chapter, where Namakula Evelyn B. Mayanja works with a theological understanding of the human person with elements of African philosophy. After a brief summary of the Western conception of the human person, the author adds in the philosophically strongest chapter of the monograph the purely African elements constituting the person according to the traditional African conception, which are okra (the essence of the person containing the spark of the supreme God), sunsum (the individual, unmistakable character and identity of the person), and nipadua (corresponding to the body). From the realm of theology and philosophy, the author takes up the burning issues of recent genocides, especially in Rwanda, where human dignity has suffered tremendous blows.

Of great interest to our readers is another chapter from the pen of Elechukwi Eugene Uzukwe on African liturgical theology, where he emphasizes the centrality of religious festivals to the identity of Africans. The last chapter of this comprehensive monograph by Elias Kifon Bongmba discusses eschatology in Africa, thus symbolically concluding a very rich topic. Taken as a whole, the book will be of particular use to theologians on every continent of the world. It reveals unexpected inspirations and fresh new perspectives on traditional theological themes. The contributions show that the four leading currents of theology in Africa in the 21st century include: 1. African theology, whose main emphasis is on inculturation, 2. South African black theology, whose emphasis is on liberation, 3. African feminist theology, whose emphasis is on gender liberation, and 4. African reconstruction theology, whose emphasis is on the postcolonial reconstruction of Africa from a religio-social perspective. The monograph is indeed comprehensive and some of the themes revealing the grievous wounds inflicted by colonizing Europeans and European missionaries are not easy for our readers to read. This makes it all the more valuable for us. The relatively high price of the book is outweighed by the extremely inspiring and rich content from leading African theologians.

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