



FROM THE EDITORS

## WAITING BETWEEN CERTITUDE AND HOPE

The problem of waiting rarely attracts philosophers' attention and, rather than in philosophical treatises, it is more frequently addressed in works of art and literature, poetry as much as prose. However, it is in the Bible that the crucial paradigm and the primary concept of waiting combined with expectation is unveiled. In fact, one might claim that both the frame of the Bible and its content are structured around the concept of waiting, which is decisive for its message. In other words, one might say that the entire Old Testament depicts a process of waiting which, in the New Testament, is concluded in the Grotto of the Manger in Bethlehem. A few decades after the events that took place there, the prospect of the Parousia opens, again starting a process of waiting and expectation. It is in this process that we participate to this day, whether or not we wish so. In his numerous addresses, many of them published already after his passing, Fr. Joachim Badeni, a candidate for the altars, stresses that a living memory of the expected Parousia is the fountainhead of life.

The Old Testament is a repository of motifs and images each of which can become, on its own terms, the basis for a vital hermeneutic interpretation. Let me select just some of them which address merely certain aspects of the problem of waiting (for a broader discussion of the topic and a different perspective of the analysis, see the article by Maciej Dżugan published in this volume<sup>1</sup>). Among the themes of waiting and expectation which have focused my attention is that of a mother-to-be (personified by Sarah, the mother of Isaac, Hannah, the mother of Samuel..., and, already in the New Testament, Elizabeth, the mother of John, but also the Blessed Virgin Mary herself). Thus, in the Bible, waiting becomes tantamount to being present and it remains inherent, as an inner principle, in the pronouncements made by the prophets, in particular by Isaiah and Ezekiel. A Biblical protagonist who does not stop waiting is also David; indeed, he is one in the long line of the Biblical person-

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<sup>1</sup> See Maciej D ż u g a n, “‘Oczekuj Pana, bądź mężny, nabierz odwagi i oczekuj Pana’ (Ps 27,14): Koncepcja oczekiwania w Starym Testamencie,” *Ethos. Kwartalnik Instytutu Jana Pawła II KUL* 38, no. 2 (150) (2025): 35–59.

alities whose actions are driven by their expectations. The Book of Psalms, the most substantial book of poetry we find in the Old Testament, emphatically describes the experience of those who “wait or expect”: those who are waiting with the certitude that their expectation is built upon the promise they received from the One in the heights above. Such an experience is expressed in the form of thanksgiving, supplication, joy, sadness or atonement, all of which can be found in the Psalms. Verses such as “Because the Lord knows the way of the just, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin” (Ps 1:6), “You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever” (Ps 16:11), and “May the Lord give might to his people; may the Lord bless his people with peace!” (Ps 29:11) are permeated by the belief that the future holds the awaited event, by the certitude which culminates in the command: “Wait for the Lord, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the Lord!” (Ps 27:14). Not insignificantly, all the above-quoted verses conclude the respective Psalms, which demonstrates that waiting is seen in them as embracing all the emotions, thoughts, and appeals expressed antecedently. Thus, in each case, it is the concluding verse of the given psalm that the Psalmist uses to make his point and, in this way, to emphasize what he has said before. The attitude that predominates in the Psalms is then that of unadulterated waiting.

Among the most beautiful Biblical characters who personify waiting is Simeon, a figure that appears in the Gospel according to Luke (see Lk 2:25–35). One might call Simeon the saint of the turn of the New Testament. He awaits the coming of the Messiah of the Lord, which will also be the fulfillment of what has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. It is precisely in Simeon that we witness the climax of the Biblical imagery of waiting. And, as is the case with all the forms and instances of waiting the Old Testament describes, also Simeon’s is triggered by a promise. Indeed, it is the fulfillment of the promise he once received that makes Simeon open his mouth and make a prophecy.<sup>2</sup> Promise and prophecy are inherent in the Biblical concept of waiting which becomes tantamount to certitude, provided that unambiguous closeness to God is retained. Indeed, closeness to God and certitude are among the most characteristic elements of the Biblical universe.

One might say, with due reservation, though, that Simeon embodies waiting or that he has become its archetype. From what we know based on the text of the Scripture, prior to the birth of Christ, Simeon had sought the fulfillment of his existence in the attitude of waiting. The moment he saw the Child, his

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<sup>2</sup> “Simeon’s words seem like a second Annunciation to Mary, for they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish his mission, namely, in misunderstanding and sorrow.” J o h n P a u l I I, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, Section 16, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031987\\_redemptoris-mater.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html).

life—including his waiting, fulfillment, and passing, all at once—was completed. It is as though Simeon symbolizes the entire universe of the ones who preceded him in waiting: of those who were certain that the promise they had received would be fulfilled.

A human existence is marked by the tension oriented towards the future. A condition like this involves immersion in the “expectation-informed” perseverance focused on what is to come. Waiting is a necessary component part of the time that the human being is in for. In the case of the Biblical characters, the time to come is permeated by a living memory of the promise which guides them. To them, their waiting is tantamount to the certitude that what has been promised shall be fulfilled. Rather than in God, they believe God, says Fr. Józef Sadzik, who authored the introduction to Czesław Miłosz’s Polish translation of the Book of Psalms. Sadzik writes: “One cannot find even a trace of uncertainty, mistrust, disguise, or the ‘just-in-case’ attitude, so characteristic of today’s faith. Let me make a paradoxical statement: In the Bible, there are no ‘believers,’ and the reason is that it is not *in God* that the Biblical characters believe, but that they believe *God*.”<sup>3</sup>

It was precisely such a stance that shaped the waiting of Simeon, who believed God. The paradox described by Sadzik sheds light also on the attitudes of our contemporaries which are certainly kaleidoscopes of little expectations. The insights into the problem of waiting characteristic of the culture in which we live, to which we contribute or which we sustain (and what I have in mind is the present moment as much as the twentieth century), are rather complex and fragmented. Contemporary literary works, poetry as much as prose, which manifest a multifaceted and versatile approach to the meaning of the essence of waiting, indeed reflect this fragmentation and complexity, and as such may be seen as a testimony to the spirit of our modern times. At the turn of the previous century, in 1910, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote an autobiographical novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*,<sup>4</sup> today described as the journal of the poet’s other self, in which (in particular in its conclusion) he opened new horizons regarding the problem of waiting. In approaching its most significant aspect, he reflected both on his personal entanglements and on those typical of his contemporary culture: issues difficult to morally evaluate, yet definitely calling for such an evaluation. The protagonist’s reflections on love, which continue for a long while, are followed by the confession: „Each day he realized more clearly that the love of which they were so vain and to which

<sup>3</sup> Józef Sadzik, “O psalmach,” in *Księga Psalmów*, trans. Czesław Miłosz (Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1981), 15–16.

<sup>4</sup> See Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Edward Snow (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2023), EPUB.

they tacitly encouraged one another, had nothing to do with him. He almost had to smile at the efforts they made, and it became obvious how little access they had to his thoughts and feelings. What could they know of him? He was fearfully difficult to love now, and he felt that only One was capable of it. But He was not yet willing.”<sup>5</sup>

The protagonist’s (or, rather, the author’s) confession opens up a space of waiting which evokes an anthropomorphized image of the “only One.” The protagonist does not doubt that “only One” is capable of loving him. Within the open narrative (note that the words “not yet willing” are a reference to a future possibility), a space for waiting and, above all, for the longing which clearly marks the present moment, is created. Is it not the case that, even if unmanifested, longing nevertheless permeates human actions and indicates looking to the future? Rilke’s protagonist gives a name to our deepest insights, or longings, perhaps even to those which are characteristic of our modern times in general and, as such, remain covert. It might be that the longings that inhere in our epoch provide the nexus that links it with the one the Biblical waiting describes. And yet the longings typical of, respectively, today and the Biblical times are by no means the same. While the Biblical waiting is deliberate and focused, its modern variety is fragmented, noncontinuous, predominantly and merely intuitive: it surfaces intermittently. In modern times, waiting also succumbs to civilizational pressures. Rather than certitude, it manifests hope. Yet one must be wary while making a statement like this, since, apparently, the numbers of those who believe God rather than believe in him (as Fr. Józef Sadzik would call them) are still growing.

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The current volume of *Ethos*, focused on the concept of waiting, is simultaneously the 150th issue of the journal, and this anniversary provides a good opportunity to return to and once again bring out the idea which guided the founder and the original Editor-in-Chief of *Ethos* Fr. Tadeusz Styczeń, who, in his first essay “From the Editors,” triggered the inception of the intellectual current which has been running through the subsequent volumes ever since. He wrote: “Is it not the case that going beyond ‘freedom guided by truth’ towards ‘freedom which guides truth’ will ultimately mark the end of both truth and freedom? Will such a reformulation of the bond between truth and freedom still make it possible to grasp the meaningfulness and moral rank of the testimonies of so many prisoners of conscience? Will the riddance of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

possibility of remorse, of conscience pointing out to one's unfaithfulness to the truth one has recognized, be tantamount to the healing of conscience, or rather to its destruction? The above questions are as grave as grave is the threat to our ethos, should we decide to reverse the relationship between freedom and truth. The seriousness of this threat ... guides us towards the one only formula which defines the identity of the human being, namely, that of self-transcendence in truth. A journal born in the milieu of the Catholic University of Lublin and intended to represent this milieu cannot but refer in this context to the motto of our (as much as any other Catholic) *Alma Mater*, which holds *Veritatem in caritate facere*, meaning 'To do the truth in love.' It is in this motto that we find an encouragement to follow the example of the One who confessed before Pilate: 'I was born and ... I came into the world ... to testify to the truth' (Jn 18:37). One might as well quote in this context the entire Prologue to the Gospel according to John, not infrequently described as the Hymn to the Word of God, which has called itself the Truth. Is it not the case then that the eternal Word's becoming flesh for the sake of the work of salvation and, in this way, its showing man the truth about himself is a confirmation, revealed to us, of the fact that it is only through obedience to the recognized and morally binding truth that man can aspire to self-fulfillment?"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Tadeusz S t y c z e ń, "Dlaczego 'Ethos'?" *Ethos. Kwartalnik Instytutu Jana Pawła II KUL*, no. 1 (1988): 5–6. The translation of the excerpt is by Dorota Chabrajaska.